

ESB STRIKE FEAR

Christmas concerns after staff vote yes

BY EAMON DONOGHUE

ESB staff yesterday voted for industrial action in a move which could mean electricity cuts for customers over Christmas.

An overwhelming 87% of workers voted in favour of possible strikes in the ballot.

No dates have yet been set but concerns are being raised over a Christmas strike.

The ESB Group of Unions are furious at cuts of more than €1.7billion to previously agreed Pension Benefit Schemes.

Unite official Richie Browne said: "Over 89% of Unite ESB members have voted in favour of industrial action in the ballot.

"The result was 89.1% in favour and 10.9 per cent against. The aggregate results of all union ballots was 87.5% in favour and 12.5% against.

"The overwhelming result indicates the strength of feeling over unilateral changes to the staff pension scheme."

A spokesman for the Group of Unions representing workers added: "ESB have completely exposed existing workers to an almost complete eradication of their pensions in a wind-up situation.

"The vast majority of ESB employees have no State pension entitlements."

The group now plans to meet on Friday to discuss "how to give effect to this strong mandate".

The ESB Pension Scheme has existed since 1942. Union members claim it was changed from a defined benefit system to a defined contribution scheme without any consultation or agreement.

The Group of Unions spokesman said: "In 2011, ESB unilaterally breached the agreement and began describing and treating the scheme as a defined contribution scheme."

The new scheme transfers risk onto company members. Yet ESB maintains that the 1942 act never considered the new contribution scheme being set up.

The union is frustrated at the firm's commitment to payments such as an annual dividend to the Exchequer of €74.4million going ahead while the retirement scheme is still in such deficit.

ESB added it was disappointed at the outcome of the ballot. It said: "We acknowledge the potentially serious impact of this situation for customers and we will continue to work to resolve the issues directly with the Group of Unions through the established procedures."

ESB has exposed workers to a complete eradication of pensions

ESB GROUP OF UNIONS SPOKESMAN YESTERDAY



Shop challenge is a real cracker

SANTA'S helper Sophie Shannon launches a Santa Dash shopping frenzy yesterday.

Three lucky winners have two minutes to dash around Supervalu in Dun Laoghaire Shopping Centre on December 7 and grab as many grocery items as possible so their family can feast for free. To enter visit www.dunlaoghaire.ie.



ACCUSED Karl Nugent

Man in court charged with pub robbery

BY ELAINE KEOGH

A MAN appeared in court yesterday accused of robbing a pubican.

Karl Nugent, 21, faces a single charge that he stole €420 in cash from Liam Hodson.

The offence is alleged to have occurred at the Marsh House on Marsh Road in Drogheda, Co Louth, on Saturday night.

Evidence of arrest, charge and caution was given to Dundalk district court.

Insp Brendan Cadden said there was no objection to bail, subject to a number of conditions including that the accused lives at his address at Brickfield in Trinity Gardens in the town and signs on daily at Drogheda Garda station.

But the judge was told Nugent was not in a position to take up the bail so he was remanded in custody with consent to appear at Cloverhill District Court in Dublin on Thursday.

Get switched on for Xmas

DUBLIN Lord Mayor Oisín Quinn is preparing to turn on the Christmas tree lights in O'Connell Street.

The Army Band, gospel choirs and the Monica Loughman ballet group have all been enlisted for the ceremony on Sunday.

There will be also be an attempt to break Dublin's 2011 record for the most Christmas jumpers worn in one place.

Lord Mayor Quinn said: "It's always a wonderful day in the city and it will be a great event."

Calling carers on dementia

TRINITY College researchers want to recruit 300 participants for a study on the well-being of partners who care for dementia sufferers.

The three-year project will study the stress levels and cognitive function of Irish dementia caregivers.

Prof Brian Lawlor said: "We want to improve the quality of life of the person with dementia and their caregiver, allowing the person with dementia to be able to stay at home with a good quality of life for as long as possible."

€51m Garda shortfall bid

ALAN Shatter is to seek a €51million cheque tomorrow to cover a shortfall in the Garda budget.

The Justice Minister needs to fill a hole in funding in the original 2013 estimate.

Fianna Fail's Niall Collins claimed Mr Shatter "has been forced to admit at the eleventh hour he does not have the money to pay working gardai to the end of the year".

Warning on teacher pay

TEACHERS yesterday warned they will shut schools if the Government attempts to touch their pay.

The Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland is on a collision course with Education Minister Ruairi Quinn over the Haddington Road deal.

It's urging members to reject a revised deal and warned Mr Quinn not to touch their pay without their agreement.