

Boyle family cite health fears in battle to prevent ESB project

THE group opposed to the location of a very high powered electricity line from Flagford in North Roscommon along a route close to Croghan and Boyle and over the Sligo border to Srananagh have told the Champion they believe they can thwart the plans of the ESB. By Seán Ó Domhnaill The massive semi-state body, soon to be privatised by all accounts, has expended an enormous amount of effort and money in endeavouring to get agreement from landowners along the proposed route to the line, and have received the backing of the IFA since an Bord Pleanála gave the OK to the project. However, for one family living in Grange in Boyle, the issue has led to a situation where they could now possibly face jail, as they have denied access to the company onto their property. However Michael and Martina Roddy vehemently oppose the project, based on a number of grounds but primarily on health and safety concerns. The company plan two pylons near their idyllic rustic house at Grange, carrying a 220,000 volt line. The pylons are 123 feet high, approximately six times the height of an average bungalow, as the concerned residents group point out. One pylon is within 100 metres of their two-storey home, the other 200 metres away. For them it is a totally unacceptable health risk for themselves, their child and their neighbours, a belief which leaves them firmly opposed to the line. On Thursday night I met Michael and Martina, along with other members of the concerned residents grouping, Frank Mulligan and Mags Cryan, and they outlined their concerns. They were among a larger group from Roscommon who attended a national protest at the ESB head office in Dublin recently. They point out that this issue of health, and those of visual intrusion and the devaluation of land and property are the big problems they have with the project. They said that those who have agreed to the proposal have signed a deed of easement/access to the land near the pylon and what is

termed as a "sterile corridor" 200 feet wide of the line; all rights the landowners have to that now is grazing and the issue is a burden on their deeds for their property. They say they are aware of one property that was to be sold recently but when the purchaser heard there would be pylons nearby they pulled out. They believe that the strip of property to which the ESB will have rights will be very valuable to the company in the future. They say that a much more acceptable way to do the work nowadays would be to underground the lines, and that faults could now be identified with modern technology without having to rip up a lot of the line. They emphasised that their effort wasn't an "anti-ESB thing" but they did resent what they considered to be bullying by the semi-state company at this stage. They feel the crucial point is that they cannot be forced to sign the deed of access/easement and say that a good number of people along the line, particularly on the Roscommon side, have refused to sign it. As long as they don't sign this, the ESB cannot build the pylons on land to which they have no rights. As part of all this, it is clear that the Roddys have come into the line of fire for the company. Their lawyers have sent five strong letters to the family, threatening High Court injunctions at this stage. On 21 June representatives of the company arrived at their front door to gain access. There were up to 60 people there to "greet" them on the occasion and the representatives were denied access to the land. As it happened, it was just a week before five men were jailed in relation to the issue in Rosspoint in Mayo and the gas pipeline. Michael points out that the IFA recommends FBD insurance and he has noted on his new insurance renewal the new lines "indemnity in this policy shall not apply to or include any loss or liability that arises out of or is contributed to directly or indirectly by exposure to magnetic electric or electromagnetic fields or radiation however caused or generated." While it has been claimed that the level of radiation involved is something similar to a microwave, they point out that a microwave isn't on 24/7 at a level of 220,000 volts; and point to the fact that, where such lines have been put underground, there is very strong insulation as well as many feet of soil involved. They add that 40 percent of Ireland's megalithic heritage is in the North Roscommon/South Sligo area; and that the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) report drawn up by the company was heavily criticised by an An Bord Pleanála inspector. They point out that a detailed survey wasn't done at the time of the EIS because the foot-and-mouth disease was being fought at the

time. The Aarhus Convention, due to come into effect here later this year, insists on strong levels of public consultation on such matters. There will be

five cables on the system, including a fibreoptic cable, with the possibility of more being added. An enormous amount of money is being spent on public relations, delays, and inducements, money that could be better used. They point to a similar effort made by the ESB with regard to a line on Great Island in Cobh: after 14 years of effort they had eventually to back down and to underground the line. On the health side of it the group point to the work of Professor Henshaw of Bristol University, who has pointed out that the issue of radiation and electricity pylons is being taken very seriously in the UK. He has spoken of a link between childhood leukaemia and such overhead lines, as well as other risks such as brain tumours, depression, miscarriage and headaches. Other countries are looking at such information now and are working on the basis of the precautionary principle, of avoiding the possibility of health problems. They said they originally understood that any energy generated via this line was for use in Sligo and locally, but they now believe this is not the case but rather that it will be used in the national grid in the East of the country.