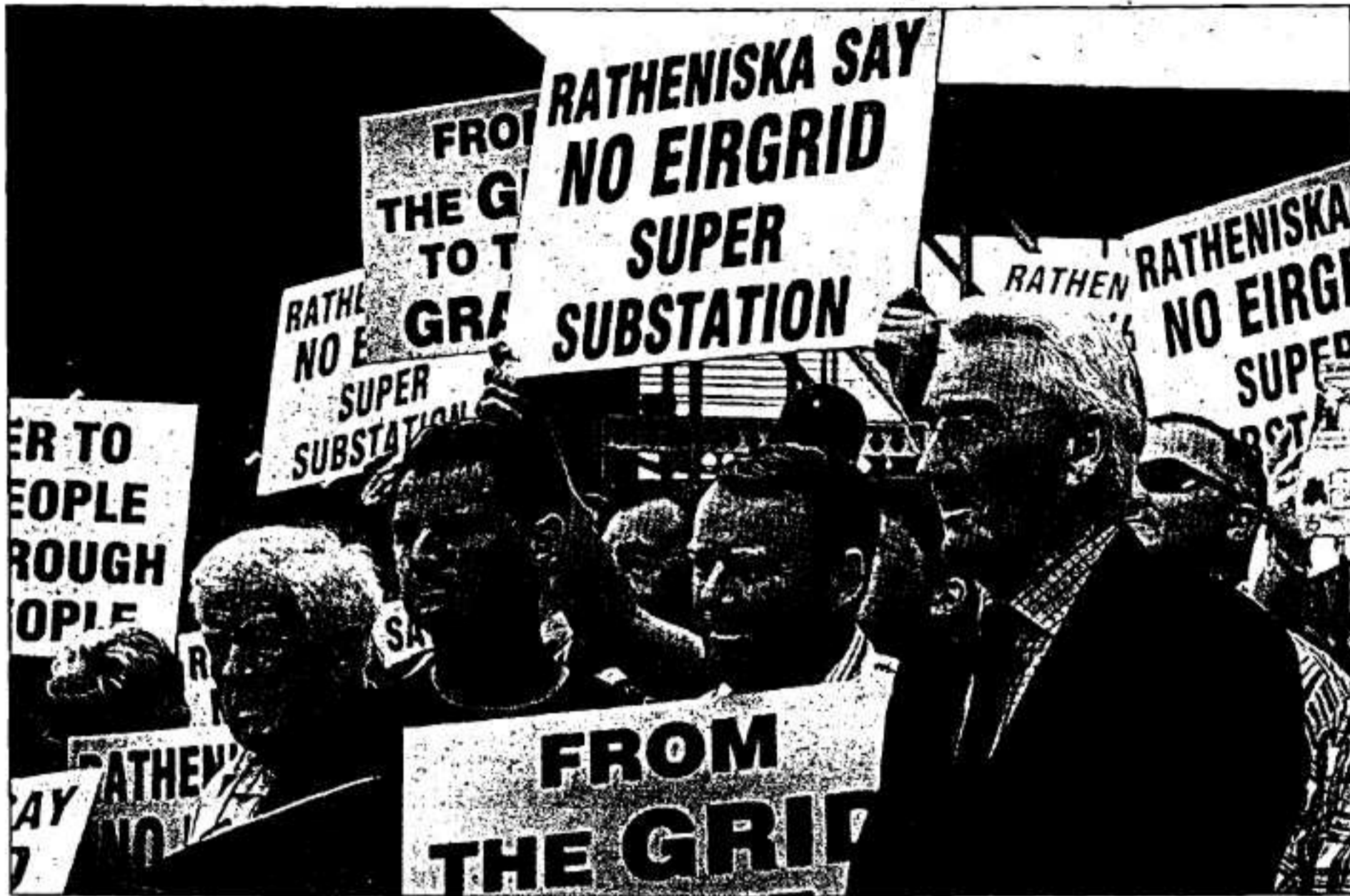


# Ratheniska raises its voice



Ratheniska protest committee members Pat Drennan and Colm Fingleton (left), are joined by Councillors Brian Stanley and James Deegan outside The Portlaoise Heritage Hotel, where they held a meeting against the proposed new Eirgrid substation in their local area.

**Mary Kavanagh**

RATHENISKA residents were angry and vocal about the "spider's web" which they claim will blanket their area if Eirgrid's proposed substation gets the go-ahead. More than 300 residents gathered outside the Portlaoise Heritage Hotel last Friday to protest against the proposed substation. While their opinions were voiced outside the hotel, inside

Eirgrid representatives held public consultations by appointment for the day. Residents have launched their 'Tie a Yellow Ribbon' campaign to stop the substation from being built and are gaining support from parishes surrounding their own. They are opposed to the substation which they claim will have the capacity for up to eleven power lines if built. Over 300 people gathered in front of the hotel armed with banners, photos and

dressed in yellow. Chairman John Lowry spoke to the crowd and told them that "this is where this project ends". Mr Lowry along with Colm Fingleton and Har Ramsbottom delivered a letter to Eirgrid representatives stating that the people of Ratheniska "reject outright" the proposal. Mr Lowry's speech on Friday was met with applause from the enthusiastic crowd, which also included Laois County Council

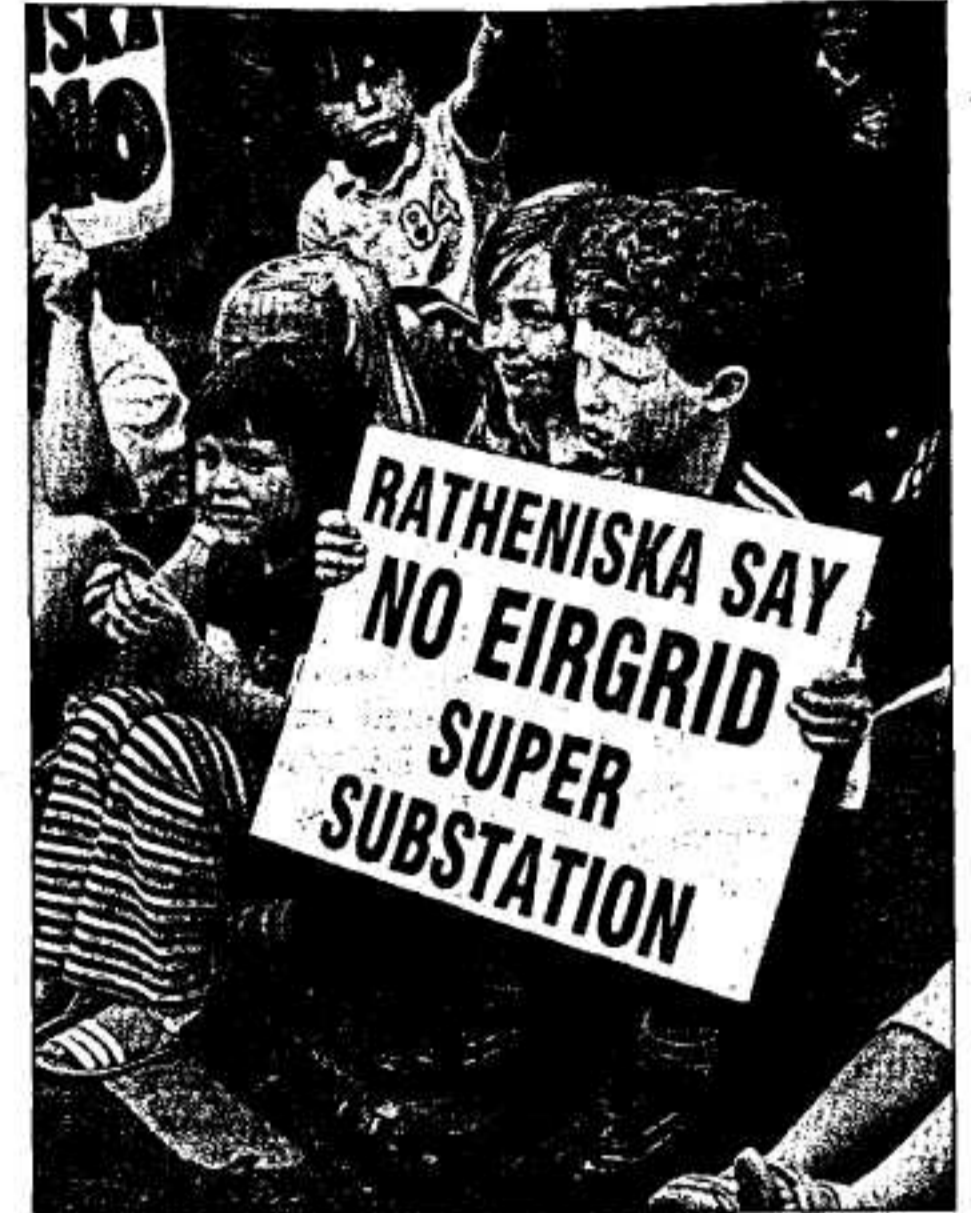
caothaoirleach James Daly as well as county councillors from all political divides. Cllr Brian Stanley was present as were Cllr James Deegan, Cllr Pdraig Fleming, and Cllr Tom Mulhall. The councillors were unified in their opinion that the substation should not be built in Ratheniska, with the council voting unanimously against it. James Daly told the *Leinster Express* that he "does not believe Eirgrid

are listening to the people". He added that the impact of such a station would be "devastating" for the rural community and would affect "prime agricultural land and an attractive area for tourism".

This sentiment was echoed by local farmers James Brennan and John Brennan who are very concerned about the implications of such a structure in Ratheniska. "Its all about saving money, there is nothing about health."

Many locals believe that the proposed structure would destroy the vibrant community, and said that they would be boycotting Eirgrid's public consultations last Friday. However Eirgrid claimed that they were busy all day with a steady stream of appointments.

Vice chairman of Ratheniska's action-group, Colm Fingleton was delighted with the turnout. "It showed strong community spirit, every family was out, and people had to take time off work and at short notice". The late notice of the public consultation further angered residents who believed this was a strategic move. Eirgrid did admit that ads had gone into the paper at late notice but that they had written to residents listed on their database.



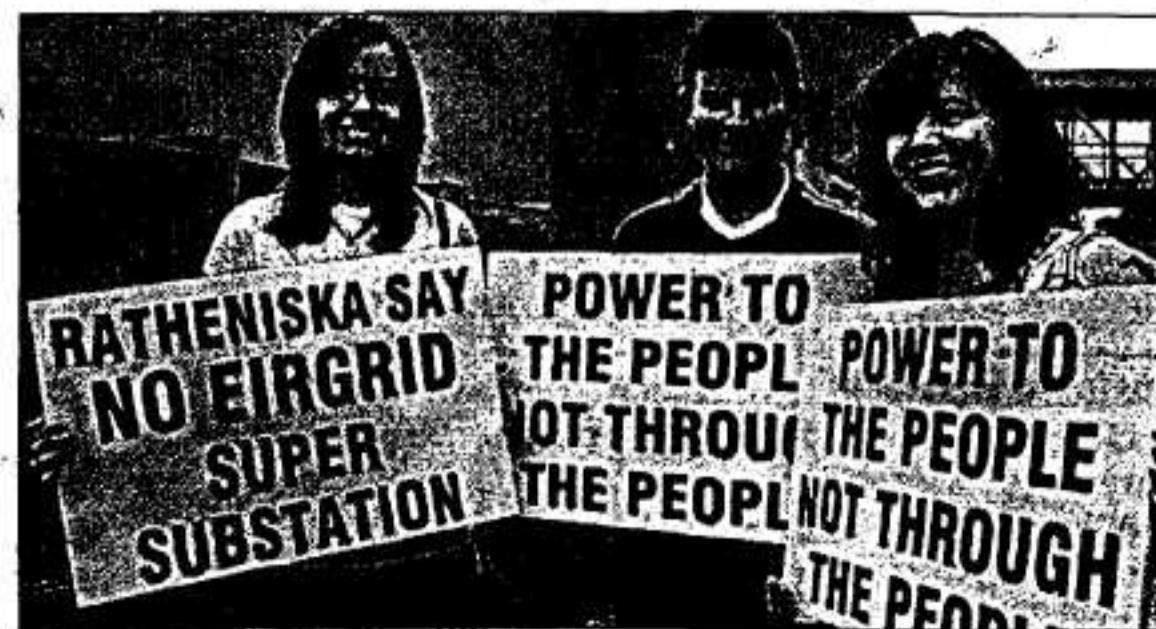
Some of the children who joined their parents in the protest meeting.

## Eirgrid 'futureproof' for century

**Mary Kavanagh**

EIRGRID has not decided on the scale of their proposed substation in Ratheniska but they want to build a facility that will operate for up to a century. The State company's staff appeared unfazed by the public protest taking place outside their window at the Portlaoise Heritage Hotel last week, stating only that the "anger is understandable when change happens". Speaking at the only appointed public consultation, senior project manager Deborah Meaghen told the *Leinster Express* that the two types of substation being considered will need either 12 acres for an outdoor structure, or two acres for an indoor structure. Ms Meaghen said that an indoor structure could look like a factory or an industrial unit, adding that

the company would be very sympathetic to the landscape. Ray Niland, project manager told the *Leinster Express* that the company have studied alternative areas as suggested by the local community. "We have taken on board everything that was offered. The further away from the intersecting lines you move, there would be an increased visual, environmental, and financial impact," he said. The two power lines in question intersect over Ratheniska and this is the "optimum area" for the substation according to Eirgrid. The company says the region needs major re-enforcement in terms of supply. It argues that it will work hard to ensure minimum impact on the area. Although Ratheniska residents were adamant that they would all be boycotting the



Amanda, James and Michelle Lowry who were among the Ratheniska group protesting against the erection of an Eirgrid substation in their area.

consultations, a company spokesperson said that Eirgrid had a steady stream of people making appointments all day and there was "definite interest" in the project from locals. When residents' concerns regarding the number of possible power lines was put to them, Mr Niland said that the company

were "futureproofing" and it would not be acceptable not to do this. "The substation will be there for the next 80 to 100 years," he said. Eirgrid are still inviting people to make submissions to them, either via post, email or telephone until Friday July 23.

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