

# Bus strikes threat over NTA's outsourcing plan

BUS commuters face the prospect of disruption nationwide – as drivers are threatening to strike over outsourcing plans.

The strikes threat was made after it emerged that the National Transport Authority plans to put 10% of Bus Éireann routes up for private tender.

Furious National Bus & Rail Union general secretary Dermot O'Leary said last night: 'A public consultation will take place over the next six weeks.'

'It is at the end of that that the NTA are expected to announce that 10% of routes will be put out to tender, or – as we would call it – privatised.'

'If that announcement takes place, we will ballot our mem-

By Neil Michael

bers and there could be industrial action, including up to strike action, from around the end of January and the start of February.'

Last year there were several strikes by bus drivers which affected thousands of commuters countrywide. Eventually a resolution was brokered on the impasse between operators and unions on cost cuts.

Siptu also condemned the proposal by the NTA to offer 10% of Bus Éireann services to private operators from 2021.

Siptu organiser John Murphy said the decision was 'ideologically driven' and warned it

would result in further privatisation of public bus services.

The NTA said the routes proposed to be tendered are largely in the Dublin commuter belt.

Privately, bus chiefs see the decision as a blow as they have driven through cost efficiencies, improved services and increased passenger numbers. Bus Éireann said it has 'noted' the NTA's new proposals. 'The company will participate positively in the consultation process and will determinedly focus on retaining any routes currently operated, and which may be subject to further tender,' Bus Éireann spokeswoman Nicola Cooke said last night.

# Dr Mark Dooley



## MORAL MATTERS

# Revelling in its mortality, autumn is a magic season

**T**O mourn for summer is to miss the magic of autumn. We look back to the long bright nights, the early sunrise and lush growth of a garden in full bloom. But to gaze back is to pine for what has gone, to lament the loss of something whose time is no more.

Remember the psalm: 'There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.'

This is what it means to be mindful of the present moment. Nature is always in the here and now, always doing what it should when it should. But we are no longer content to live by the seasons, to order our days according to the poetry of creation.

The result is trouble, not only for us, but for our world and the natural environment. We want everything now – no waiting, dreaming, hoping. No enjoying what we have for the short time that we possess it.

'A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot.'

Summer will return, but, for now, we have autumn. We have that season of conkers and chestnuts, of wild storms and fallen leaves. It is the season of ghosts and ghouls, of short evenings and murky mornings.

Autumn: a reminder of mortality and the beauty of age. It is my favourite season because here is nature telling us that there is a time to decline, to uproot, to sleep. Our time to be born and to plant will return, but not just yet.

Life demands it, whether we like it or not. The autumn sun can be warm, but this does not stop the leaves from falling. From green to brown, to red and yellow, they dazzle the eye before gliding to their grave.

It is a time to die and yet there is no resistance. The leaves do not skip a season but fall so that others may be born in due time. This, however, is not death that calls for mourning: its beauty invites wonder, awe and joy.

Art has often sought to emulate an autumn scene. But nothing compares to the sound of autumn leaves crunching underfoot. Noth-

ing rivals the kaleidoscope of colour that dangles from the trees or the low sun that can't vanquish the chill.

Life is decaying, but all we see are the miracles of a season in which nature takes a bow. 'I have given you the fullness of life in summer. Now it is time to grow old, to unveil the grandeur of the golden days. Enjoy me now, for soon I shall be gone.'

Time takes its toll on everything – even those who think they can outwit it. We will all grow old – if we are lucky. They call this the 'autumn of life', the final phase of the earthly journey.

Like the leaves, we, too, radiate colour, vibrancy and joy when autumn arrives. We sparkle in the low sun and, even when we are close to falling, we cling on for dear life. For that is what autumn is all about: taking one final bow in a blaze of colour.

There is a time for everything, and we should give everything its time. We should neither lament the passing of summer, nor regret the onset of winter.

Instead, we should embrace this spectacular season of light and shade, of rustic charm and cosy comfort.

For this is also the season of fire-side fun, a time when life takes an inward turn. We draw the drapes and shut out the night. We gather and eat in the candlelight.

**B**UT what happens when we don't give autumn its time, when we bypass its beauty for the distant light of spring? What happens when we forget that there is a season for every activity beneath the heavens – even growing old?

We live in ignorance of our fate, in denial of the wonder that is old age and the treasures it will transmit to all who take the time to listen, look and learn.

There is a 'time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance'. But this is no time to weep and mourn – to pine for what was but has long since gone. It is our time to laugh and dance, to sing in the spirit of a season that delights the senses and soothes the soul.

Now, it is our time to come home to life.

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