



OBJECTIONS: Belfast Harbour Estate is objecting to a proposed £40m biogas plant in Giant's Park on the north foreshore, saying it is "incompatible" with plans to expand a film studio

University policy needs regraded after A-level fiasco

IN THE wake of the A-level grading fiasco, SDLP leader Colum Eastwood says now is the time to end the "crazy economic policy" of capping places for local students at Northern Ireland's universities.

The cap exists because Stormont subsidises lower student fees, so Eastwood was effectively calling for higher fees, as the DUP's Sammy Wilson gleefully pointed out.

A more realistic approach has been hinted at by Alliance MP Stephen Farry, who introduced Northern Ireland's current system as a Stormont minister in 2011: places and fees could both increase a bit.

Universities would settle for the subsidy increasing a bit – they say Stormont's £3,500 top up per student still leaves them £1,500 short compared to institutions in Britain. Students in turn might want to know how much it really costs to provide undergraduate courses.

Whatever the answer, or mix of answers, it is certainly time to have this debate. Blocking university expansion to help people into university is the sort of thing even an algorithm would not come up with.

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THIS week's GCSE results in Northern Ireland came from teacher assessments, as eventually did last week's A-levels, producing a record-breaking 10 per cent improvement.

Much criticism of schools and teachers for over-generous predictions misses the point that GCSE and A-level students are not so much graded as ranked, across Northern Ireland or even the whole UK in certain subjects.

A teacher might be able to rank their own students but they can only guess where this fits into a regional or national table, so they will naturally fall back to simply assessing how good a raw score each child might attain.

There is a case this is a fairer measure of individual performance. However, a 10 per cent improvement in GCSEs can be explained entirely through rounding.

If teachers assess each class as getting the same spread of grades as last year, then round up each pupil falling between each of the nine grades, guess what happens.

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"A FOOLISH consistency is the

**Newton
EMERSON**



hobgoblin of little minds," wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson (no relation).

Now Stormont has resumed coronavirus briefings it ought to put this on a sign on the wall, especially with Health Minister Robin Swann renewing lockdown measures. The purpose of lockdown is to slow the spread of the virus by any practical means, not to form a set of measures with some higher abstract consistency. Nevertheless, apparent inconsistency annoys people, confuses the message and reduces compliance. The reopening of schools is going to increase this dramatically, unless better explanations are given or changes made.

For example, the Department of Education's guidance to schools says use of books "should be restricted", presumably with increased use of IT. Yet all Northern Ireland's libraries are opening from the end of this month "for book browsing and limited access to IT".

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AN UNCOMPROMISING court verdict against Arlene Foster and Michelle O'Neill over Troubles pensions is a reminder of the difference between law and politics – topics frequently conflated in this part of the world.

Westminster legislated for a pension, Stormont is required to implement it and that is the legal end of the matter. DUP objections

Next year's centenary of Northern Ireland is provoking complaints from people who refuse to 'celebrate'. They should put their minds at rest, as no such expectation exists

over funding and Sinn Féin objections over the honour of the IRA are beside the point.

The same was true over DUP objections to same-sex marriage and abortion, also legislated for in Westminster last year; and DUP objections to funding Troubles inquests, the subject of another withering court verdict against Foster in 2018.

In this week's case, it is notable that judge Mr Justice McAlinden is a former personal injury specialist. The pension provisions to which Sinn Féin objects so vociferously are merely the minimum standard qualifications for every similar public and private pension and compensation scheme, including 'conflict-related' schemes, here and around the world.

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NEXT year's centenary of Northern Ireland is provoking complaints from people who refuse to 'celebrate'.

They should put their minds at rest, as no such expectation exists. Since the decade of centenaries became executive policy in 2013, under the Together: Building A United Community agreement, the official term has been "remembrance". This was reiterated in January's New Decade, New Approach deal, despite the centenary being recast as a gift to the DUP to 'balance' an Irish language act.

Celebration is not mentioned, with remembrance only to be "marked" by "recognition", "awareness" and "an opportunity to reflect".

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THE Belfast Harbour Estate is objecting to a proposed £40 million biogas plant in Giant's Park on the North Foreshore, saying it is "incompatible" with plans to expand a nearby film studio.

One objection is noise, although the Harbour Estate's other film studio at Titanic Quarter is one of the most successful in the world despite being at the end of Belfast City Airport's runway.

There also appears to be concern that an energy from waste plant is hardly conducive to the glamour of showbiz. Yet Giant's Park is built on an enormous, rotting pile of landfilled rubbish, already emitting enough 'biogas' to run a small power plant near the studio. As this has not stopped Hollywood filming there, will a few bin lorries really make any difference?

ON THIS DAY

AUGUST 22 1970

New party launched

A NEW political party – with an initial membership of six MPs – was formed in NI yesterday with the principal aim of starting a united opposition against the unionist government. Led by Mr Gerry Fitt, Stormont and Westminster MP, the new Social Democratic and Labour Party will be based on radical left-of-centre principles.

The formation of the new party will erase local political labels such as Republican Labour, Northern Ireland Labour, Nationalist and Independent which its members have held up to now. Six MPs attended yesterday's conference: Mr Gerry Fitt (Dock), Mr Austin Currie (East Tyrone), Mr Paddy Devlin (Falls), Mr Ivan Cooper (Mid-Derry), Mr Paddy O'Hanlon (South Armagh) and Mr John Hume (Foyle). Senator Paddy Wilson (Belfast) was also present. It is not yet known how many other Opposition MPs intend to join.

The Nationalist Party may now cease to be an effective political force. The SDLP's aims include to secure equal rights for all citizens, irrespective of race, creed or political outlook; to support the reintroduction of Proportional Representation ...; to promote the fullest cooperation between North and South ... The new party regards itself as a potential government. The SDLP quickly supplanted the old rural-based Nationalist Party, securing 22 per cent of the vote in the 1973 assembly elections.

Du Pont man on 'silly troubles'

IT WAS about time the people of the north stopped having 'these damned silly troubles' because of the adverse effects they were having on industry. So said Mr Jeffrey Agate, works director at the Du Pont plant at Maydown [Derry].

Mr Agate, a member of the Derry Development Commission, was speaking at a ceremony at which nine apprentices were indentured by the company. **Jeffrey Agate, then head of Du Pont in Derry, was shot dead by the IRA in 1977 as part of its assassination campaign against businessmen.**

'98 monument to be replaced

THE Celtic Cross erected to the memory of Roddy McCorley at Toome which was severely damaged by an explosion last year is to be replaced by a suitable memorial to the young 1798 patriot who was hanged on the Bridge of Toome and who is immortalised in song by 'Ethna Carbery' [the Ballymena-born poetess Anna Johnston].

Applause in court

THERE was loud applause in court at the Special Riots Court in Belfast when charges against 39 people, including ten juveniles, of possessing explosive substances were withdrawn. The explosive substances had been found in a school in Raglan Street (west Belfast) during the riots last July.

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