



MAN CHILD: Prime Minister Boris Johnson

PICTURE: Stefan Rousseau/PA

America elected an adult so why can't Westminster have one as well?

WELCOME then to new US president Joe Biden. After what felt like an election campaign lasting longer than the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, Donald Trump will leave the White House, various desperate legal challenges pending, and a man who at least appears to be an adult will take power in January.

Mr Biden's win will have little effect on our own politics, although with family roots in counties Mayo and Louth, we can expect at least one stage-managed trip to the 'oul' sod. Surely some enterprising person is already planning to give Mr Biden the highest honour Ireland can bestow – having his name immortalised on a massive motorway service station.

The Democrat's election has served to highlight, again, the deep divisions in the US. But it also means that the UK now leads the industrialised world in embarrassing heads of government. Boris Johnson's ineptitude has been exposed too many times to count, most recently by Manchester United star Marcus Rashford. The 23-year-old's sincere and articulate campaign against child food poverty only served to highlight Mr Johnson's relative lack of leadership on what should have been a very easy win for the government.

While the world was watching millions of US votes being

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painstakingly counted, the British government's incompetence over its Brexit preparations was laid bare once again.

Regardless of whether the EU and UK agree a free trade deal, the Northern Ireland protocol will kick in at 11pm on December 31, meaning that fresh food coming to the north from Britain will be subjected to checks including customs declarations.

Unfortunately, the department in charge of agri-food checks won't be ready by January.

The National Audit Office said last week that the north's Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) had been "severely hampered" by seemingly endless trade talks with Brussels and a "lack of clarity" over what it actually needs to do.

With just weeks left to alter its systems, DAERA is now looking at "contingency options" – so far, so reassuring.

The ongoing mess prompted the chief executive of Sainsbury's to warn that the supply of some fish, dairy and meat products to the chain's 13 stores in Northern Ireland

could be badly affected from January.

The same problems are also likely to affect other major supermarkets, including Tesco and Asda.

The new trader support service, which will help businesses moving goods between Britain and the north, is also unlikely to be set up in time, the NAO found.

The service has just weeks to perform massive amounts of work, including recruiting and training its own staff, signing up Northern Ireland traders and educating them, and developing much-needed software so traders can connect to HMRC's systems.

Boris's tiresome bluster about getting the UK out of the EU by January glossed over the fact that the eventual exit will be one long mess.

The Brexit vote was over four-and-a-half years ago, so it's not as if the government didn't have any warning. Posturing over UK sovereignty was irritating enough when we weren't in the midst of a global pandemic. Now it looks even more irresponsible.

Never one for details, two and a half years after the Brexit vote Mr Johnson was still struggling with the issue of the border. A similar failure meant he did not grasp the severity of coronavirus in February. According to him, the UK is "very well prepared" in the event no free trade deal is agreed. Is his ignorance a pose to appeal to voters, or does he just not care? It amounts to the same thing in the end.

This week will see arguably the most important Brexit negotiations so far.

Mr Johnson has just days to agree a deal with the EU before the end of the Brexit transition period. If he doesn't, UK businesses who sell their goods to the EU will be hit by trade tariffs and extra paperwork at the same time as attempting to stay afloat during the pandemic.

It would be nice for the UK to have an adult in charge but unfortunately we have the opposite. The next three years of Boris's leadership, provided he isn't forced to leave before then, are going to be long ones indeed.

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ON THIS DAY

NOVEMBER 11 1970

Captured Northerners in Court

FIFTEEN men from the Six Counties, most of them from Belfast, dressed in military uniform, were surrounded and captured by a force of 30 Gardai and Special Branch detectives in a sloop on an isolated farmhouse in Mullacrew, County Louth last night. Some arms and ammunition were also found.

It is believed that the men were at a 'training camp'.

Dublin Anger over Naval Incident

THE Department of External Affairs in Dublin yesterday made known to the British Ambassador, Mr John Peck, the Government's feelings on the boarding of the Dublin-registered Owen Roe by the British Navy. The Irish Government view is that the boarding of the vessel was a serious infringement of Irish rights, particularly as the vessel is Irish-registered and was heading for a Southern port.

The British Ministry of Defence said yesterday that the Owen Roe was in 'Northern Ireland territorial waters' and the minesweeper Kellington was within her rights in carrying out a search for arms. Captain John McCann, skipper of the Owen Roe, said that two British Navy ratings had trained loaded sten-guns on the crew. 'They told me they were carrying out the search under the North's Special Powers Act,' he said.

Ireland and Britain under an agreement share the territorial waters of Carlingford Lough and both have rights on the navigation channel in the middle of the Lough.

RUC Chief 'Forced to Resign' – Fitt

'TREMENDOUS political pressure' had been exerted on Sir Arthur Young, Chief Constable of the RUC, to get his resignation. This was claimed by Mr Gerry Fitt, SDLP leader, at Stormont yesterday when he paid tribute to Sir Arthur for the 'Herculean task' he had undertaken in NI.

Lady to the Rescue

SIR ARTHUR Young, the Chief Constable of the RUC, will say farewell to the North on Friday when he and his wife leave for London. Lady Young, who arrived in Belfast at the weekend, said: 'I have come to take Sir Arthur back home. I have been very worried about all the ghastly things that have been going on here and I will be glad to get him home.'

Sir Arthur said he cooked his own meals 'except when I'm invited out which is not very often'.

As tensions and violence increased, it was clear that the IRA were operating training camps in the Republic. Meanwhile, the reforming English-born RUC Chief Constable, Sir Arthur Young resigned alleging 'a conspiracy of silence' in the force. To cap matters, the Irish Government protested about the boarding of an Irish boat in Carlingford Lough. Inexplicably, the 1921 Treaty – unlike Boris Johnston – failed to define the sea border.

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