

TIME IS TICKING: With less than six weeks to go before the Brexit sea border is due to come into operation, the lack of preparation has become too urgent to deny



Lack of Brexit sea border preparation undeniable

THE lack of preparation for the sea border, 40 days before it is meant to come into operation, has become too urgent to deny.

Business groups have pleaded with the UK and the EU for an extended implementation period and it appears this request will be granted, with UK environment secretary George Eustice letting slip there will be a six-month "phasing-in" from January 1.

However, the EU sees even this as a bargaining chip, demanding extra time be used to implement a tight border, rather than to figure out the exemptions businesses here require and have been led to expect.

This is no bargain for Northern Ireland: the choice is between a short, painful implementation; a protracted implementation of something that ends up hurting even more; or of the UK giving up, breaching the Withdrawal Agreement and causing a huge political crisis.

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IN THE finest Northern Ireland tradition of declaring both sides as bad as each other, business groups here have started complaining about UK and EU Brexit brinkmanship.

Manufacturing Northern Ireland has told a Westminster committee its members are "the rope in a tug of war", with a "disconnect" in London and Brussels over the consequences.

Maybe so, but Westminster retains its unique fault of not paying attention to detail.

In a Commons debate after the committee, a Conservative MP asked Northern Ireland Office minister Robin Walker for an assurance that everyone working on the sea border will be "actually British".

Walker praised this question as "incredibly important" and confirmed all internal checks will be "the responsibility of the UK Government and their employees".

He did not consider it important to clarify that employees on this side of the sea can also be Irish.

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STORMONT health minister Robin Swann has asked London for four million fast turnaround Covid tests, leading to reports he might be planning a 'project moonshot' test of Northern Ireland's entire population.

It is unlikely officials and advisers would recommend something so untargeted.

One per cent of the population might

Newton EMERSON



have Covid at any given peak so testing everyone with even a 98 per cent accurate test would produce twice as many wrong results as cases.

This is why the NHS has few mass screening programmes.

In a mass Covid screening, at least the problem would be large amounts of unnecessary self-isolation rather than large amounts of unnecessary surgery.

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SINN Féin president Mary Lou McDonald has told RTE that the DUP's use of the cross-community executive veto over covid restrictions was a "shameful" move to turn the epidemic into a "green versus orange" issue.

A southern radio audience probably missed that the DUP used the veto against the UUP, making it an orange versus orange issue.

One day after McDonald's interview, Sinn Féin issued a video citing the Covid-19 emergency "as an argument for a united Ireland."

That was not shameful, of course, as Sinn Féin has no shame whatsoever.

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THERE was an unfortunate choice of words during a High Court appeal into the Troubles victims pension, still being held up by DUP haggling over its cost and Sinn Féin haggling

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over paramilitary eligibility.

The Executive Office's barrister said: "The idea that there's some general purposes slush fund available to any department, whether the Executive Office or another, to make payments in respect of a scheme of this nature, is simply nonsense."

The Executive Office's unrelated, scandal-prone Social Investment Fund was infamously referred to by the SDLP as "the paramilitary slush fund".

Sinn Féin and the DUP are so keen to agree on it, they even managed to get it extra funding during the collapse of devolution.

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BELFAST'S cycling lobby has long held the view that infrastructure ministers are sympathetic to their cause but meet obstruction from car-crazed civil servants.

This might be due to having to dodge cars crossing the bike lane behind the Department for Infrastructure's headquarters.

It might also be a little too sympathetic to ministers. Support for the theory has been unwittingly offered by Liz Loughran, a senior official at the department, recently made its "walking and cycling champion".

Asked by a Stormont committee why spending per head is a fraction of levels everywhere else in the UK and Ireland, she said: "Political priorities over the last 40 to 50 years were towards spending other than active travel".

Walking and cycling have been the stated priorities of every infrastructure minister, Sinn Féin, UUP and SDLP, for the past nine years.

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IT COULD scarcely be clearer that June's IRA funeral scandal has been kicked into the long grass, not that this was ever in doubt.

There is no sign of Belfast City Council's six-week investigation 10 weeks after it began.

The PSNI has still not interviewed people a month before the six-month statute of limitations runs out, in contrast to its instant, aggressive pursuit of anti-racism protestors.

In any case, no investigation is asking the key question.

When thousands of 'black and whites' appeared on the streets in June, not for a funeral but for a rally, was it proof of a lurking fascist threat or just a historical re-enactment event for middle-aged losers? Much depends on the answer.

ON THIS DAY

NOVEMBER 21 1920

Newry Policeman Shot

LAST night Head Constable John James Kearney, while returning from devotions in the Dominican Church, Queen Street, Newry, was fired at and seriously wounded.

The officer had got to the corner of Needham Street when some men, who were evidently lying in wait, fired at him. Several shots were fired and two of them took effect, one lodging in the abdomen and the other in the left shoulder. It is stated that while he was lying on the ground, Head Constable Kearney shouted, 'Mercy, mercy.' The wounded man's condition is very critical. [He died later.]

The Sinn Féin Hall in William Street was subsequently raided by military and police. The windows of the hall were broken. Later a sensation was caused at the residence of Mr John Curran, Home Avenue, a former sergeant in the RIC who served in the Great War. Several men threw a vessel containing petrol through the parlour window. Mrs Curran and some of the children were in bed at the time but a couple of older members of the family and neighbours succeeded in preventing the fire from spreading.

Priest's Body in Bog

THE Press Association's Galway correspondent telegraphs: The dead body of the Rev Michael Griffin, the young Catholic priest who had been missing for several days, was last night found buried in boggy land near the roadside at Cloughshella, near Lough Inch, four miles from Galway. There was a bullet wound in the right temple.

'The Future Ulster Police'

Editorial
Sir Hamar Greenwood told Mr Samuel McGuffin [Unionist, Shankill] at Westminster that 'the Belfast police force at present consists of 542 Roman Catholics and 562 Protestants'.

'This matter of police' is a subject of grave concern to all citizens; it is first and foremost in the opinion of the Ascendancy nowadays. Sir Edward Carson 'plumped' for the disbandment of the RIC at an early state of the debates on the Partition Bill and the Government favoured his suggestion.

Mr McGuffin wanted to know how many Catholics were to be 'taken over' in Belfast [by the new Parliament]. But in the meantime the process of enrolling 'Special Constables' proceeds... Those 'Special Constables' will ultimately replace the Catholic members of the RIC. A Mr William Grant [a loyalist speaker and future Stormont Health Minister] said: 'The UVF was going to be the future RIC of the Ulster province'. (As IRA attacks and British reprisals intensified across Ireland, unionism was determined to neutralise the influence of the 'unreliable' RIC - largely southern Catholics - in favour of their new Special Constabulary who would soon patrol Belfast and the nationalist-controlled border counties.)

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