



**GRANDSTANDING:** DUP leader Arlene Foster and deputy leader Nigel Dodds outside Westminster in 2018. Foster has decided to grandstand on the margins after being unable to square its Brexit circles

# Foster will struggle to maintain her obviously desperate Brexit position

**S**O MUCH for Brexit's "gateway of opportunity". Arlene Foster has given up the fight with her party's hardliners and moved the DUP from a best of both worlds stance on the sea border to a 'five point plan' to abolish it – or specifically, to achieve "freedom from" it. Closer inspection of the points reveals similar semantics. There will be a boycott of the North South Ministerial Council, for example, but only when it is discussing Brexit. Meanwhile, Foster still wants to "work with the Irish government" on Brexit.

This is no Paisleyite 'Never, Never, Never'. The model is more Peter Robinson's pan-unionist forums or graduated responses, which never amounted to anything but did keep allies and rivals distracted until events moved on.

Even for Robinson, this tactic wore thin. Foster will struggle to maintain a position so obviously cynical, desperate and provoked by poor polling and loyalist rumblings. In reality, unable to square its Brexit circles, the DUP is opting out to grandstand on the margins.

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THERE is no doubt Brussels has been chastened by its Article 16 disaster, while Dublin has had its naive Europhilia shattered. This has opened a gateway of opportunity to rebalance the UK-EU relationship, already seized on by London. Unionism could have significant influence in this process if it chose to engage constructively. Instead, every unionist party is demanding sea border abolition – in effect, absconding themselves while others clear up a mess most of the electorate blames on unionism in the first place. This dereliction could end up doing unionism more damage than whatever barriers to trade survive across the Irish Sea.

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MUCH of the unionist and particularly loyalist anger of the past week has been driven by the previous Friday's story about military equipment requiring sea border customs forms.

This Tuesday, the Ministry of Defence admitted it had failed to spot military functions are exempt. This is a classic tale of British officials zealously over-interpreting EU instructions – ironically, a driving force of Brexit. It also reveals staggering incompetence and indifference to Northern Ireland. London

**Newton  
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should have raised its erroneous belief with Brussels instead of blithely applying the rubber stamp. How many more sea border frictions are like this? When Maros Sefcovic, the EU's chief diplomat on the Northern Ireland protocol, pleads with the UK to use "the flexibilities we agreed", is that a hint for less rigorous implementation?

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AN Article 16 suspension of the sea border can be triggered by "serious economic, societal or environmental difficulties".

With so many warnings and threats of this flying around, it was only a matter of time before people misinterpreted Article 16's other trigger of causing "diversion of trade".

Former Conservative leader Iain Duncan is the latest to do so, telling the Commons: "we are seeing also diversion where some of the supermarkets and others are talking about depots in southern Ireland rather than in mainland GB."

Unionists have noted EU comments and nationalist boasts that firms here must switch to suppliers in the Republic.

However, this is alone is not 'diversion of trade' – a technical term requiring tariff distortions and the new supplier to be more expensive. The sea border could be doing this but proving it is not as simple as noting

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tricolours on packets of cheese in Lidl.

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DUP economy minister Diane Dodds has raised "concern" with Ulster University after it announced medical courses will be moving from Belfast to Derry.

Dodds said she welcomed the Derry expansion but had expected Coleraine to receive some of the courses. She asked the vice chancellor to move other courses there and ensure "balance" across all campuses.

Last June, the university restated its commitment – first made in 2015 – to open a veterinary school in Coleraine, always understood as a quid pro quo for a medical school in Derry. Brexit made it look like a particularly good deal for Coleraine, as so many vets will be needed to run the sea border.

Of course, it is awkward for the DUP to mention this balance while claiming it will abolish the sea border.

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PEOPLE Before Profit was the only party on Belfast City Council to oppose a 1.9 per cent rates increase, leaving everyone else in the bizarre position of arguing against Trotskyists for a wealth tax. The comrades wanted spending cuts instead. People Before Profit has always had a revisionist relationship with bourgeois property in Belfast. It won its first seat in the city at the 2014 council elections, when it defended home owners against the expansion of Casement Park.

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NORTHERN Ireland seemed primed for a classic culture war episode after the Queen's University debating society invited loyalist blogger Jamie Bryson and Brexiteer peer Claire Fox to discuss the motion "this house believes in no-platforming".

There were immediate irony-free demands for both, especially Bryson, to be no-platformed. Such rows traditionally culminate in set-piece scenes of protests outside and inside the debating chamber and offendees storming the stage. But because the event was online due to Covid, it all fizzled out in a series of social media posts. Is this progress? It must be.

## ON THIS DAY

FEBRUARY 6 1971

### Four Shot Dead in Belfast

THREE civilians and a soldier were shot dead and many more injured when Belfast erupted in violent rioting again early today. The deaths followed a night of mounting tension and clashes in the New Lodge Road and in the Springfield, Crumlin, Oldpark and Falls Road areas. This morning massive military reinforcements were centred mainly around Ardoyne and the New Lodge Road. The soldier was one of five troops shot in Ardoyne.

The dead civilians were 21 year old Jim Saunders of Ardilea Street in the Oldpark area; 28 year old Bernard Watt, a father of two of Hooker Street and a man named John McGuinness, shot in the throat in Ballymurphy. Watt was shot in the chest after a military personnel carrier was hit by nail and petrol bombs and burst into flames at Butler Street.

Saunders was shot in the back as he stood at the corner of Mayfair Street by a sniper operating from Louisa Street. About sixty shots were fired during the night in the Oldpark district and seven bombs were exchanged between Louisa Street and Glenview Street. Most of the shooting came from Louisa Street. Military patrols were reported to have come under fire in many parts of the city. The Falls Road had remained comparatively quiet as peace priest, Fr Padraig Murphy toured the area appealing to crowds to disperse.

### Ban Civilian Arms – Cooper

MID Derry, is to ask the Minister of Home Affairs at Stormont next week to introduce legislation immediately to make the holding of any arms by civilians in the North illegal. Mr Cooper said yesterday that there were 70,000 licensed guns in the North.

### No Bus Services in Riot Areas

THE Belfast Corporation Transport Committee, at an emergency meeting yesterday, decided to withdraw bus services to troubled areas of the city

### Happy Moon Landing

ASTRONAUTS Alan Shepard and Edgar Mitchell spent more than four hours exploring the rough, rock-strewn slopes of Ra Mauro yesterday after a spot-on moon landing which was touch and go until the last three minutes. The mission ended with both crew members clambering into the cramped cabin of the spidery spacecraft, Antares. (Shot dead by an Army sniper, Jim Saunders was one of the first IRA members shot dead in the Troubles. His IRA funeral would be attacked by loyalists. On the same night the British army sustained its first casualty when Gunner Robert Curtis (20) of the Royal Artillery was killed during a gun-battle on the New Lodge Road. These events were overshadowed in the media by the latest Moon Landing by US astronauts.)

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