



CARRY THAT FREIGHT: Trucks leave Larne port having crossed the Irish Sea border unionists are demanding be removed

Alliance shows how to engage with the protocol

WHILE unionists run around demanding the abolition of the sea border by fair means or foul, Alliance has written to the EU and UK with proposals to address the most controversial and difficult cross-channel frictions. Based on a veterinary agreement and food safety alignment, the detail has impressed trade professionals. This is how Northern Ireland is meant to engage with the protocol – but of course it is fantastically dull and nobody in charge has to heed a word of it. How can this kind of technocratic plodding be meaningfully encouraged above fear-mongering and flag-waving? It will need to be if inevitable sea border problems are not to tear our politics apart.

In this instance, London, Brussels and Dublin would have to praise Alliance for its input, even while arguing amongst themselves about sea border implementation. Unhelpful Stormont parties would need to be sidelined or criticised, without provoking more trouble or undermining peace process institutions. This would have to be repeated as each new problem arose, with varying combinations of parties. It all looks like an impossible, endless tightrope to walk.

THE DUP sidelined itself by boycotting a North-South Ministerial Council meeting on Brexit, under the party's five-point plan to pretend it can have the sea border abolished. The clearest sign this plan is not sincere is the fuss the DUP leadership made over its online petition to have Parliament debate triggering Article 16, the sea border's emergency brake.

Governments regard e-petitions in much the way newspaper editors regard letters in green ink or emails in comic sans. For a party at Westminster to raise one is pathetic, especially when that party was propping up a government just 14 months ago.

It was quite impressive for the DUP to get the requisite 100,000 signatures in under 36 hours and it was cheap of opponents to jeer that a handful of names came from places like North Korea – Westminster gets spammed like everyone else.

But it is hard to avoid a comparison with the 400,000 signatures the DUP and UUP collected in 1985 to petition Downing Street against the Anglo-Irish Agreement, to no effect whatsoever.

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THE DUP copied its five-point plan wholesale from Jim Allister, who issued it as a challenge to all unionists. The TUV leader has since moved on from Article 16, telling the BBC's Sunday Politics the sea border can be permanently removed under Article 13 of the Brexit withdrawal agreement.

So it can, in whole or in part, but only to the extent it is superseded by a new UK-EU agreement that achieves the same goals, such as by the UK rejoining the EU customs union and single market. Although Allister has not said he is challenging all unionists to back a soft Brexit, an Article 13 campaign can hardly mean anything else.

GREGORY Campbell earned universal opprobrium – except from his own party – after complaining that everyone on screen during a BBC Gospel Singer of the Year contest was black.

Perhaps the most bizarre aspect of this incident is how at odds the DUP MP looks with Northern Ireland's Protestant churchgoers. Evangelical congregations in particular hold black gospel choirs in high regard, or at least patronising regard. Gospel choirs from Africa, the United States and Britain, with exclusively black performers,

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tour Northern Ireland regularly. In the year before Covid, two such choirs packed out the Ulster Hall.

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ARLENE Foster enjoyed a moment of levity in the assembly on Monday, noting the Irish government set up its shared island unit without consulting the Northern Ireland executive. So potent is this irony, Foster was able to cite it to bat away separate Sinn Féin and TUV questions for and against island-sharing.

"Working with the Northern Ireland executive" is the first point on the Department of the Taoiseach's shared island unit website.

THERE was some head-scratching over a report from Dublin's Economic and Social Research Institute claiming disposable income is far higher in the Republic than in Northern Ireland. The report's authors found it "somewhat surprising" that housing costs in the south are around the same share of disposable income as in the north. Their own methodology was the reason. Almost half of adults under 30 in the Republic live with their parents – one of the highest figures in Europe – because housing is too expensive. However, this showed up as reduced costs in the report, because it averaged them across all adults in a household. Only the science of economics can make housing look more affordable due to people who cannot afford it.

THE atmosphere of Sinn Féin's 2019 deputy leadership contest has been painfully recreated by the candidates' choice of Zoom backgrounds.

Michelle O'Neill is regularly appearing on television from a tastefully understated spare bedroom, while John O'Dowd is broadcasting from a chipboard-walled garden shed. The shed is presumably in Lurgan, only adding to the sense of isolation.

ON THIS DAY

FEBRUARY 13 1971

Five Die in Mountain Blast

A BOOBY-TRAP explosive blew up a BBC maintenance unit Landrover on a track leading to a TV transmitter station in County Tyrone, killing all five occupants.

Two of the dead were BBC technicians, Mr Bill Thomas (35), married with a family of two of Glengoland Avenue, Belfast and Mr Malcolm Henson (24) of Morecambe, Lancs. The three others who were killed were employees of a Kilkeel firm of contractors who were repairing the transmitter building which was badly damaged by a bomb a month ago. They were Mr John Aiken (52), Mr Henry Edgar (26) and Mr Thomas Beck (43).

The explosion on Brougher Mountain, near Trillick, occurred as the men were going up to start their day's work at the mast. The BBC's NI Controller, Mr W Maguire expressed his horror at 'this senseless act of barbarity'.

Quiet Funeral for Little Denise

THE funeral of Denise Dickson, aged five, who was killed when struck by an Army scout car in the New Lodge area of Belfast on Monday night, passed off quietly yesterday. The cortege at one time numbered 300 as it journeyed from Denise's home in Lepper Street to Milltown Cemetery. Denise's six brothers and sisters walked behind the hearse. Several women wept as they saw the tiny coffin in the hearse.

Only a handful of mourners attended the funeral of Albert Edward Bell to the City Cemetery yesterday. Bell, a labourer of Olympia Street, was found dead in a ditch near Aldergrove Airport.

Commons Gas Attack Recalled

The day two CS gas bombs were hurled from the Strangers' Gallery of the House of Commons was described by prosecuting counsel to an Old Bailey jury yesterday. Bowes Egan (28), publisher, West Kensington, London and James Anthony Roche (26), a labourer of no fixed address, had pleaded not guilty to conspiring to effect a public mischief by disrupting proceedings of one of the Houses of Parliament while in session between July 1 and 24. In a written statement, Roche said he had seen the British Army using CS gas in Ballymurphy and had seen people suffering from the effects of it. 'I decided that it would be better if the Government experienced it first hand', he said. Counsel said that the Crown alleged that Roche was not alone in planning the disturbance and that one of those who helped him was Egan.

(The Brougher Mountain atrocity was strongly condemned by the Taoiseach, Jack Lynch. It signalled the widening of the IRA campaign from urban centres. Bowes Egan, a Fermanagh-born academic, had been a People's Democracy candidate in the 1969 NI election.)

EDITED BY ÉAMON PHOENIX
e.phoenix@irishnews.com