

ANNOUNCEMENT: Secretary of State Brandon Lewis has announced a six-month extension to the Northern Ireland Protocol grace period



London protocol move may benefit all the people of this island

I'M NOT sure if there is an officially-recognised condition called Ideological Trauma: a search on Google yielded no immediate answer. But this is what your humble scribe is facing because, as a lifelong nationalist and non-militarist republican, he finds himself disposed to agree with a position taken by the colonial oppressor of 800 years standing.

The issue at stake is the implementation process for the Northern Ireland Protocol. The greener side of my family tree (I even have a link with Michael Larkin, one of the Manchester Martyrs hanged by the British in 1867) would be turning in their graves if they heard me say it, but London recently took a decision on the matter which wasn't done in a very graceful manner but may actually work to the advantage of all the people of this island.

As part of the Brexit withdrawal agreement, the customs rules and standards of the European Union are meant to be applied to goods entering Northern Ireland from Britain if they might be intended for transfer across the land border into the Republic, which is of course part of the European single market.

The intention, at least in part, was to avoid a "hard border" between the two parts of the island where customs posts had been subject to violent attack by republicans in the past. The "grace period" for implementing the protocol was due to end on April 1 but it was clear for some time that it needed to be extended, not least in order to ease tensions in unionist and loyalist circles.

It would have been preferable if the matter was agreed between the UK and the European Union but it wasn't and, as the issue dragged on, concerns were

Deaglán DE BRÉADÚN



growing about a return to violence by loyalist paramilitaries. Eventually, Secretary of State Brandon Lewis announced a six-month extension to October 1 but the British side maintains that this is "strictly temporary". We'll be watching them.

Brussels and Dublin are very annoyed that the extension wasn't arranged at the negotiating table. It is claimed in the EU camp that an agreement was close to being reached, but this is disputed by the British. Whatever the reality, it was clearly necessary, in light of growing unionist and loyalist discontent, to take action to lower the political temperature.

The short-lived and much-criticised invocation of Article 16 of the protocol by the EU on January 29, in order to control the export of Covid vaccines from the Republic

into the north and without notifying the administrations in London, Belfast or Dublin suggests that some of the people currently running the show in Brussels are still at the learning-stage with regard to Irish issues. Up to recently, former minister in the Irish government Phil Hogan was European Commissioner for Trade and it seems likely that someone in his particular position would have been able to warn against and indeed prevent such a mistake being made, but he lost his job last August in a furore over a golf dinner in the west of Ireland which was considered to breach Covid19 restrictions.

Twenty years ago Czech president and former political dissident Václav Havel gave me an interview in Prague where he described the EU as "this great integration effort". It was an apt description of an institution that created solidarity between former enemies in the aftermath of two world wars and has also contributed to the peace process on this island. Five years earlier, in a speech at Trinity College Dublin he expressed concern that the EU had become so immersed in complex negotiations about institutional, bureaucratic and other matters that it was losing sight of the big picture: "It is as if the builders of a Gothic cathedral had forgotten they were building a cathedral".

That's what happened with the Article 16 screw-up and possibly also with the protocol. There is talk of a lawsuit against the British over their unilateral action on the grace period but apparently by the time it yielded a result the six-month extension would have come to an end. It seems pointless and would only exacerbate tensions further. To adapt a phrase from Boris Johnson and his friends: "Let's get the protocol done!"

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ON THIS DAY

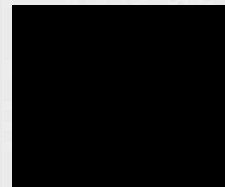
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Truce Moves

THE Falls Road area of Belfast, where a young man was shot dead and three others injured on Monday, was peaceful last night as truce negotiations between rival IRA groups were going on. Mr Tomas MacGiolla, President of Sinn Féin (Gardiner Place), said the negotiations went on all day yesterday and last night but he was unable to say how successful they had been.

The only incidents reported in Belfast this morning were two explosions, one at the Northern Bank at Atlantic Avenue and the other outside the Gallaher tobacco firm in York Street.

Monday night's shooting on the Falls in which 26-year old Charles Hughes was killed was



— not between the Officials and Provisionals. Police were told yesterday that a group of IRA Provisionals had visited clubs in the Falls area on the night of the killings. At a bar on the corner of Sultan Street and Bosnia Street they ordered customers outside, then hurled a firebomb into the building.

Taylor: Aim to 'Wipe Out IRA'

REFERRING to recent shootings in the Falls area, the Stormont Minister of State at the Ministry of Home Affairs, Mr John Taylor said at Stormont yesterday that responsibility for the deaths lay on the various branches of the IRA. It was the firm resolve of the Government, he told the House, to see that the IRA was wiped from the streets of NI. Mr Taylor said that the vast majority of the Catholic community were opposed to the IRA.

The Minister said it was an internal dispute between the two wings of the IRA, the Provisionals and the 'Gouldingites' [Official IRA]. The Provisional IRA campaign witnessed the first of a series of deadly feuds between the two wings of the IRA in Belfast—the left-leaning 'Officials' or 'Stickies', led by Dublin-based Cathal Goulding, and the rapidly-growing Provisionals under a mainly Northern leadership of '40s men' like Joe Cahill and younger recruits, soon to become prominent. John Taylor, MP for South Tyrone, was a member of the Joint Security Committee at Stormont Castle along with the PM, RUC Chief Constable and GOC.

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