

# Adherence to flawed exit plan could quickly unravel

**Newton EMERSON**

**T**HE problem with Stormont's lockdown exit plan is not that it lacks dates or specific triggers to move from one stage to another, all of which would be a hostage to fortune.

Its fundamental flaw, as with its predecessor last May, is that its five stages do not have to line up across its nine categories. For example, we could move to stage three ("gradual easing") on category four ("sports and leisure") while still at stage two ("cautious first steps") on category six ("travel and tourism").

Everywhere else in the UK and Ireland avoids this in multi-stage plans because it is so difficult to follow. By last summer, it was clear many people had given up trying to understand Stormont's restrictions – and that was with no vaccine in sight and after months of sunny weather. This year, having been locked up all winter and with vaccination proceeding apace, adherence could quickly unravel. Mother's Day next weekend will be an early test, as it was last year at the start of social distancing measures.

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THE Loyalist Communities Council says withdrawing support for the Good Friday Agreement until the Brexit protocol is changed does not mean it has abandoned peace, democracy, respect for nationalist views or the principles of the agreement itself. So what does it mean? A reference by the council to the Anglo-Irish Agreement suggests the non-violent tactics of 1985 – prime of life memories for men in their 50s, of course – are under consideration: protests, road blocks, a boycott of Irish goods and political non-cooperation. This rapidly degenerated into riots, burning police officers out of their houses and the collapse of the 'rolling devolution' assembly. It also failed to change the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The only political gain was by the SDLP, which won a seat after every unionist MP resigned, triggering 15 by-elections.

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ALTHOUGH the loyalist move is no laughing matter, my memories of the 1985 boycott as a grocer's son are of fear soon turning to farce. Even the staunchest shoppers would not forgo their Jacob's biscuits and simply denied this most Irish of brands was manufactured in the Republic. UVF leaders were observed in a town centre watering hole plotting the boycott over pints of Harp, which at that time in Portadown was rolled into pubs in barrels straight off a Dundalk train.

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IT DID not take long for the DUP's latest pretence at stopping sea border preparations to be exposed as a stunt. Acting attorney general Brenda King reportedly found DUP agriculture minister Gordon Lyons needed the entire executive's permission for work to be halted. The DUP's next step is to turn this argument around, by withholding its permission for work to continue.



DIFFICULT PLAN TO FOLLOW: Belfast in lockdown

PICTURE: Mal McCann

Westminster or a judge will eventually call time on this nonsense, which barely affects sea border operation, but the DUP's petulant theatrics still come at a high cost. These are critical months if Northern Ireland is to gain any advantage from its unique market access, yet the DUP has decided to squander them by scaring off investors with uncertainty and alarming headlines, all so it can chase a few votes from the TUV.

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IN A punchline to the DUP's sham fight, the UK unilaterally announced a six-month extension to the sea border's grace period on food imports. Brussels is entitled to retaliate and says it will do so but it will have to show leeway, as an extension is necessary to avoid supermarket disruption and the UK is trying to make the protocol work.

Although an extension had been considered likely, the EU had been haggling hard over length and terms. Business groups in Northern Ireland are strongly indicating the EU was the more intransigent side. They

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deserve to be believed, having not stinted with their criticism of the UK.

It is possible unionist tantrums slightly strengthened London's hand but the DUP is unable to claim credit even for this, having painted itself into such a corner on opposing the protocol outright.

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NO EXTENSION will be long enough to implement the protocol if the EU's conception of it is unworkable. Checks at the sea border already amount to 20 per cent of the total of all such checks performed across the EU and would be more than the EU total when grace periods end, according to testimony to the assembly from the most senior civil servant at the department of agriculture, confirmed by Northern Ireland's chief vet, who said "that's not going to work". Stormont and sea border officials also deserve to be believed, having stood up to attempted DUP meddling.

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SINN Féin MP Chris Hazzard has been criticised for praising the Chinese Communist Party, although his constant praise for Cuba and Venezuela makes this no surprise. Concern should be focused on more serious figures and bodies in paying homage to Beijing. Ulster University has a Confucius Institute, a cultural organisation widely considered an instrument of the Chinese Communist Party. In 2017 it paid £3,030 for Hazzard to take a six day trip to China to "promote cultural and sporting links". He declared it in Westminster's register of interests two years later, under a late entry procedure.

## ON THIS DAY

MARCH 6 1971

### Lynch Defends 'Articles'

ARTICLE 3 of the Irish Constitution, which defines the Republic's right to jurisdiction over the North, is to be preserved as a fundamental principle of the Republic's thinking, said the Taoiseach, Mr Jack Lynch last night. In a BBC interview, Mr Lynch, replying to a suggestion by Mr Chichester-Clark that North-South relations could be vastly improved if Dublin abandoned the jurisdiction claim, ruled out any possibility of it being changed.

"This is fundamental to our thinking. We are one nation and we regard in our Constitution that Irish territory is Ireland as a whole and its territorial seas. I speak in that respect for the great majority of the people living on this island..." "Would the border disappear in his lifetime?": I could not say that it will. I know that it's going to be a long haul."

### Funerals of Shot Policemen

THE funerals of the two policemen shot dead in Belfast last Friday night will take place today. Detective Inspector Cecil Patterson (46) and Constable Robert Buckley (32) were killed in Alliance Avenue as they got out of a police Landrover. Other police were injured. Meanwhile the soldier killed in Derry on Sunday has been named. He was Lance Corporal William Joliffe (18) of Chipperham. He died when a gang of about twenty youths hurled ten firebombs at his Landrover.

### Maudling's Stormont Speech Angers MPs

TWELVE hours after Mr Reginald Maudling, the British Home Secretary, arrived at RAF Aldergrove yesterday for a three day visit to NI, Opposition politicians were claiming that he showed a complete unawareness of what was going on here.

During his address at Stormont, the British Minister said: 'The struggles and violence between Catholics and Protestants that have so disfigured Belfast and other parts of NI during the past two years have, I believe, grown less'

### Shipyards Bias Raised

A CALL for an end to the discrimination against Catholics in employment at Belfast Shipyards came last night from the Central Citizens' Defence Committee.

The committee claimed that 10,000 workers were Protestant and a mere 3,000 were Catholics. 'Virtually all of these Catholics are, in fact, engaged in sub-contract work. Such an intolerable situation can no longer be allowed to exist in an industry so heavily financed from public funds ...'

**AS the Troubles escalated, issues such as discrimination in employment-highlighted by the exclusion of Catholics from Belfast shipyard – and the South's extra-territorial claim over NI bubbled in the background. Meanwhile Reggie Maudling, the Tory Home Secretary, managed to unite Unionist and Nationalist against him. As his plane took off, he famously exclaimed: 'What a bloody awful country! Give me a large Scotch.'**

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