



RESHUFFLE:
New DUP
leader
Edwin Poots
announced
Paul Givan
as the party's
nominee to
take over from
Arlene Foster
as first minister

Neither DUP nor Sinn Féin prepared for early election

WE MUST wait another week to confirm that Sinn Féin will permit the DUP's Paul Givan to become first minister. It seems safe to assume his appointment will go through, despite some republican grandstanding. Neither party is prepared for an early election and both could be punished for causing another Stormont collapse.

Perhaps we are fortunate the Northern Ireland Office has not found time to pass the New Decade, New Approach law that would have stretched the permitted week without a first minister or deputy first minister to six months.

This is intended to stabilise the executive if one of the two main parties walks out, by leaving the other still in office. However, in the very different context of one party needing the other to facilitate a reshuffle, the law could have led to six months of mischief and manoeuvring.

Givan will spend next week being tested over Irish language legislation, having infamously cut the L10a bursary before Stormont's last collapse.

There is an older irony. In 2007, while he was DUP culture minister, Edwin Poots cancelled the Irish language act the government promised under the St Andrews Agreement.

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FOR all the *Yes, Minister* jokes about sausage wars, serious games are being played over the Northern Ireland Protocol. An unknown EU member state appears to be threatening the Republic with a sea border between Ireland and Europe, to discourage Dublin lobbying for a softer sea border here. US President Joe Biden has given the UK an extraordinary diplomatic rebuke for "inflaming" tensions, yet also said the UK should reach a "negotiated settlement".

Brussels insists the protocol is the settlement and negotiations are over. Biden has also offered Boris Johnson a way to square the Brexit circle: if the UK adopts EU food rules, the White House will ensure this does not prevent a US-UK trade deal.

That truly could be a best of both worlds for the whole UK: free trade with Europe and America and the sea border virtually gone. However, it would jeopardise other trade deals, such as the one about to be struck with Australia. And could Biden really deliver a deal



Newton EMERSON

that locked out American farmers? Trade deals take years – will he still be in office or in control of Congress?

These questions might not be decisive, given Johnson's style of government. All he needs to move on is a good story.

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SINN Féin is apparently the obstruction to removing the fair employment exemption for teachers, the only religious job discrimination permitted in Northern Ireland outside a church or home setting.

Fair employment laws have always contained the exemption but only with a clear legislative 'off switch', implying it should be temporary. Every executive party has long claimed to want to scrap it. However, fresh efforts to do so have run into a mysterious blockage at the Sinn Féin and DUP-controlled executive office. Neither party will elaborate but only Sinn Féin has equivocated over this issue in the past. At least it has the decency to be embarrassed about it.

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THE DUP has backed a bill to liberalise Northern Ireland's pub and club opening hours, meaning it has finally taken a Free

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Presbyterian coup to let us drink until 3am. As if that was head-spinning enough, only Sinn Féin has objected to an SDLP proposal to review the liquor licensing system. Under Northern Ireland's uniquely restrictive 'surrender principle', the number of licences has been effectively fixed since partition. As more have been acquired by supermarkets and off-licences it has become increasingly impossible to open a bar, handing existing publicans a lucrative cartel. Sinn Féin's acquiescence to this is not thought to be concern about the devil's buttermilk. Stormont officials simply cannot be bothered tackling the problem and Sinn Féin cannot be bothered tackling its Stormont officials.

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CINEMAS will be able to serve alcohol – if they can find a liquor licence to buy – under an amendment to the bill from independent unionist Claire Sugden. Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK and Ireland where this is not presently the case so the reform is overdue, although its appeal fades somewhat with age. At 34, Sugden can still imagine drinking through a two-hour movie without worrying she will miss half of it.

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THE secretary of state has appointed former Irish rugby player Trevor Ringland as the UK government's special envoy on Northern Ireland to the United States.

Sinn Féin has complained this is "arrogant and disrespectful" as Ringland is a professed unionist and the executive already has a diplomatic bureau in Washington.

Could a professed nationalist represent the UK government? As foreign relations are not devolved, why does Stormont have a diplomatic bureau?

The day before Ringland's appointment, Sinn Féin's representative in North America published an article calling for a US special envoy to take on "English nationalists" and "the Orange card". Was that respectful?

Perhaps Irish-American congressman Richard Neal should have the postscript on Ringland's appointment, although he made this remark last month: "I often get told by unionists that they never got a hearing in Washington. They did, just nobody agreed with them."

ON THIS DAY

JUNE 12 1921

Reprisals Horror after RIC men shot

AFTER a period of comparative quietude, Belfast was started on Friday by the news that an attack had been made on three RIC men, one of whom was fatally shot. Following this incident, three of the most shocking crimes ever recorded in Belfast were perpetrated in the early hours of yesterday. The names of the victims are: Alexander McBride, publican (30) of Cardigan Drive; Malachy Halfpenny, postman (22) of Herbert Street; and William Kerr, hairdresser (26) of Old Lodge Road.

The incidents preceding the tragic occurrences go to show that the deeds must have been carried out in a most callous and brutal fashion. Mr McBride was a well-known publican and carried on business in Church Street.

The second victim, Mr Halfpenny, an ex-soldier, resided near Ardoyne Church. Relatives gave details of a horrifying nature and in each instance were similar in so far as the invasion of the dwellings by the slayers and their disgusting and brutal treatment not alone of the victim but of other residents.

It appears that a few minutes after 1am, both Mr and Mrs McBride were awakened by a sharp knock at the door. The raiders said that they were police. Mr McBride went down and opened the door when the leader of the gang ordered him to go up and dress.

The lorry [carrying him] came to a sudden stop near Ballysillan. The victim was taken to a lane and done to death. Seven shots were fired at him. Mr McBride's body bore marks as if he had also been maltreated. A pair of Rosary beads were entwined in his hands. He was a native of Carey, Ballycastle and engaged in the licensing trade. He was not associated with any political organisations.

The murder of the young man, William Kerr was of equally atrocious. His sister, Alice, [said] her brother was dragged onto the street and put on the lorry. 'You will not see your brother again,' they told her. His remains were later found opposite Dan O'Neill's Loaning.

The deceased was a member of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Foresters.

The third victim was Malachy Halfpenny (22) of Herbert Street, Ardoyne. He served for three and a half years in the Royal Field Artillery.

(As on previous occasions, IRA attacks on police in Belfast provoked brutal reprisals against – often innocent – Catholics. A Free State intelligence report from 1924 lists the names of an RIC 'murder gang', allegedly led by two men, County Inspector Richard Harrison and District Inspector J W Nixon. USC commander Col. Fred Crawford actively encouraged such reprisals.)

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