



LEADING THE WAY: Former DUP leader Arlene Foster with Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, who is about to assume the role

PICTURE: Mark Marlow

# ‘Events, dear boy, events’ left Sir Jeffrey tormented

IT MIGHT feel like Jeffrey Donaldson has ascended rapidly to the DUP leadership, having replaced Edwin Poots in under a month. That is almost certainly not how it feels to him.

Rumours of Donaldson replacing Arlene Foster began in late 2018, with the presumption he would make his move in early 2019, after Foster took the fall for the backstop in the Brexit Withdrawal Agreement. Then he would lead a triumphant renewal of the confidence and supply deal with the Tories at its two-year expiry date that June. But Brexit negotiations were extended three times, up to January 2020, by which point the Tories had let confidence and supply lapse and replaced Theresa May with Boris Johnson, who replaced the backstop with the protocol. Stormont was back, with Foster as first minister, just in time to lead the executive through the epidemic.

Rarely can the cliché ‘events, dear boy, events’ have had a politician so tormented.

■■■

THE postponement of sea border food checks for another three months shows London and Brussels are circling the landing zone on a veterinary deal.

It will be somewhere between the New Zealand model sought by the UK and the Swiss model favoured by the EU, President Joe Biden and the Alliance Party, the three great powers of Brexit.

Many checks will be abolished, although there may still be some constraints on the ‘sausage war’ items of ready meals and chilled meat. There will be a fudge over arbitration and possibly a fig-leaf on Stormont consent.

The interaction with other UK trade deals will be too complicated to understand, yet too trivial to matter. Every side will lose a bit but have to sell it as a win, especially the DUP.

As all this is obvious, it would be great if everybody just got on with it.

■■■

LOYALIST Communities Council spokesman David Campbell has resigned from Cooperation Ireland, where he has been an unpaid director for 11 years, one week before the LCC issued a statement saying Irish government ministers “are no longer welcome in Northern Ireland”.

Telling people not to cross the border is obviously incompatible

Newton  
EMERSON



with Cooperation Ireland’s mission. One of the charity’s main sponsors is Ireland’s Department of Foreign Affairs, where the minister since 2017 has been Simon Coveney, unionism’s Brexit bete noire. That must have been increasingly awkward.

■■■

THE Northern Ireland Office has issued a strongly-worded Commons answer saying it will commission abortion services if the executive does not do so. Coming days before the government pledged to enact Irish language legislation, it seems Westminster is becoming a ‘backstop’ for Stormont dysfunction.

Labour has added it will “push for the full implementation of... New Decade, New Approach” through legislative amendments.

DUP MP Sammy Wilson compared this “undermining devolution” to imperialism, telling Tory MP Simon Hoare, chair of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, he was “like some 19th century colonial ruler”.

A better comparison for a unionist would be the government sending commissioners to Liverpool three months ago to take over parts of the city’s failing council.

Of course, many in Liverpool think that is colonial rule as well.

■■■

SINN Féin has taken abstentionism to a new level in the Dáil, where the electronic voting

*Confusingly, the signal Sinn Féin is trying to send by abstaining on abstaining is of being less abstainy. Next year, it has to somehow find a way of almost voting yes*

system has buttons for ‘yes’, ‘no’ and ‘abstain’ and displays the results by party on a large screen.

Last year, the first time Sinn Féin did not oppose the special criminal court’s annual renewal, it ‘abstained in person’, as the late nationalist MP Frank Maguire would have put it.

This year, apparently not wanting to be seen abstaining, all the party’s TDs walked out before the vote so their tally was shown as zero.

Confusingly, the signal Sinn Féin is trying to send by abstaining on abstaining is of being less abstainy. Next year, it has to somehow find a way of almost voting yes.

■■■

MOBILE phone operator O2 has reintroduced EU roaming charges for UK customers, the first network to do so since Brexit. Even if this applies in full here, civil disobedience will hardly be justified.

Exceeding the 25GB allowance would require watching an hour of video a day, every day, while roaming, so it is similar to existing ‘fair use’ terms from other operators, north and south.

The real concern is of a slippery slope – O2 had long insisted it had “no plans” to reintroduce roaming and was still stating this as recently as January.

■■■

IN A more serious Brexit threat, Brussels is considering excluding UK-made television and film from strict EU quotas for “European productions”.

Because the protocol only covers goods, this would affect Northern Ireland and could devastate our valuable film and TV industry.

The danger has been apparent since the morning after the EU referendum: Arlene Foster and Martin McGuinness attended the opening of a TV production office in Belfast, where the appalled owner warned he might have to relocate to Dundalk.

Stormont and Westminster could have spent much of the five years since seeking some degree of services access to the single market, perhaps in return for rigorous protocol enforcement.

But the DUP and the Conservatives cannot even raise that possibility because they have to pretend Brexit has no downside.

## ON THIS DAY

JUNE 26 1921

### Lloyd George Invitation

MR LLOYD George fired another bombshell into the political arena on Saturday evening. It will be remembered that Mr Eamon de Valera was arrested [by troops] in a house at Blackrock, County Dublin and released from custody next day.

On Saturday morning, Mr Lloyd George caused it to be announced that he had sent the following letter to Mr de Valera and a letter in identical terms to Colonel Sir James Craig: ‘10 Downing Street, Sir, The British Government are deeply anxious that the King’s appeal for reconciliation in Ireland shall not have been made in vain. ... They feel it incumbent upon them to make a final appeal, in the spirit of the King’s words, for a Conference between themselves and the representatives of Southern and Northern Ireland. ... We make this invitation with a fervent desire to end the ruinous conflict which has for centuries divided Ireland and embittered the relations of the peoples of these two islands who want to live in neighbourly harmony...’

No statement whatever has been obtained from de Valera but the general belief is that he will consult his colleagues before taking action. As a great number of Dail Eireann members are in custody, many serving sentences, the preliminaries may occupy some time. Mr de Valera served Mass yesterday morning at Blackrock College where he was formerly a master.

#### King William’s Statue

SOME in Dublin suggested recently that the Corporation of that city might, as a friendly and grateful compliment, present the famous equestrian statue of King William III, now near College Green, to Belfast Corporation. The monument is not the oldest statue in Ireland but its antiquity is quite respectable as it has been in Dame Street since the year 1701. It is a work of art with a history.

In the days when Orangeism and Ascendancy were aggressive and rampant in Dublin, ‘King Billy’ was profusely decorated on each successive 12th July. An extraordinary genius named ‘Watty’ Cox, once notorious as a revolutionary publicist, had an irreconcilable enmity towards King Billy. He managed to place and ignite a large quantity of gunpowder near the pedestal of the statue one night and the equestrian figure was displaced – only to be restored.

LLOYD George lost no time in summoning de Valera and Craig to a conference in London ‘in the spirit of the King’s words’. This was the background to the Truce, ending the violence, and preliminary talks between de Valera and the PM (minus Craig) on July 14, 1921. Meanwhile there was speculation about the future of King Billy’s statue in Dublin’s College Green.

EDITED BY ÉAMON PHOENIX  
e.phoenix@irishnews.com