

Donaldson's remarkable history on Afghanistan

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JEFFREY Donaldson's plea to help Afghan refugees, supported by the rest of the executive, has not come out of the blue.

Rather remarkably, the DUP leader was involved in talks between the former Afghan government and the Taliban, which began in 2012, with what now seems the poignant hope of Nato withdrawal by 2015. Donaldson and SDLP founder member Denis Haughey were flown to Kabul by the UK government to advise participants.

They travelled as chair and board member of the Causeway Institute, which went on to arrange 'conflict resolution workshops' in Afghanistan the following year. Causeway is one of three companies Donaldson has founded over the past decade with SDLP, Alliance, Sinn Féin and other DUP politicians to sell peace process expertise around the world. Two firms are still active, including Causeway, although it changed the 'Institute' to 'Initiative' in its name last month after Companies House warned the title is reserved for charities.

The international peace industry was an audacious turn for Donaldson's career after years of disrupting the UUP in objection to the Good Friday Agreement. His latest move may cause some disruption inside the DUP, which still will not comment on one of its councillors wading into a refugee row in Carrickfergus.

SINN Féin was quick to condemn republican youths in Derry for putting offensive and sectarian symbols on a bonfire, yet the party had no condemnation of pro-IRA chanting that same evening by thousands of young people at the Féile finale concert.

Unionists and loyalists did condemn the chanting, yet none will be spurning the 'bonfire diversion' cash split between Féile and loyalist areas. Pro-IRA chanting is a feature rather than a bug of this DUP-Sinn Féin carve-up; it balances the books for any projects 'linked' to the UDA and UVF.

Féile could rise above much of this by no longer having the Wolfe Tones play *Celtic Symphony*. The principle of curtailing the song's performance has already been conceded; Féile FM banned it years ago for fear of losing its licence.

NORTHERN Ireland's big taxi operators have broken their industry by casualising the workforce through contracted self-employment, like internet firms such as Uber, while lobbying for convoluted licensing requirements to obstruct firms like Uber. The epidemic has finally brought this regulatory contradiction to a head, with drivers retiring or getting other jobs and refusing to return. So operators are now lobbying for licensing requirements to be relaxed to quickly employ new drivers, or more accurately not employ them. A media campaign is highlighting the impossibility of obtaining taxis at weekend closing time, as if that has not long been the case.

All this spin is aimed at SDLP transport minister Nicola Mallon. She needs to ignore it and ensure drivers are hired on proper terms.



TIMES CHANGE: DUP leader Sir Jeffrey Donaldson speaking during the debate on Afghanistan in the House of Commons last week. In 2012, along with the SDLP's Denis Haughey, he was involved in talks between the former Afghan government and the Taliban

AVERAGE house prices have risen 9 per cent in a year here to \$153,000, according to all sales registered through Land and Property Services (LPS). If only sales through estate agents are considered, the average is \$195,000 – a more representative figure for ordinary owner-occupiers. The Covid property boom is such a bizarre phenomenon, people are starting to ask when we will get the inevitable bust. It could still be some way off if the last boom is any guide. At the peak of the property madness in 2007, the LPS-type average alone hit \$225,000. As Ulster Bank economist Richard Ramsey has calculated, that is \$303,000 in today's money.

FUMES from one of the Strangford ferries are causing health problems for crew, according to trade union Unite. The problem with the Strangford II vessel is exhaust pipes at water level; other ferries are as polluting, even if their fumes blow away above the crew's heads.

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This story raises the great unmentionable of cruise liner pollution in Belfast, which is on a different order of magnitude. One large ship emits as much nitrous oxide as half a million cars, as much particulate matter as one million cars and as much sulphur dioxide, almost unbelievably, as 375 million cars – more than all the cars in Europe.

Liners can at least be prevented from idling their engines in port by running power cables to the quayside. Although Belfast Harbour has ambitions to do this at its new liner terminal, the standardisation problems are formidable and need worldwide cooperation to solve.

Everyone is glad to see the liners back but we need somewhere to plug them in.

IN A satisfying tale of bureaucratic humiliation, Covid fines are to be refunded to Black Lives Matter protesters who should never have received them. The PSNI had issued a 'computer says no' statement claiming it could not refund the \$60 fines as the Covid regulations contain no mechanism to do so.

However, nothing in the regulations prevents the police from calling up the Courts Service and begging it to send the protesters back their money, which is clearly what happened as panic gripped PSNI headquarters. This is a perfectly timed reminder of the common law principle of liberty: everything is allowed unless specifically banned, rather than banned unless specifically allowed.

ON THIS DAY

AUGUST 21 1971

Anglo-Irish Storm

IRISH and British relations took a bashing last night when UK Premier Heath launched a blistering attack on the Taoiseach, Mr Lynch who, earlier, by telegram, condemned British attempts to find 'military solutions' to the NI crisis. Mr Heath's message to Dublin used the strongest language and brought into the open a rift which may be difficult to heal.

The Taoiseach declared: 'The events since the introduction of internment clearly indicate the failure of internment and of current military operations as a solution to the problems of NI. It must now be obvious to you that solutions require to be found through political means and should be based on the principle of immediate and full equality of treatment for everyone in NI, irrespective of political views or religion.' In the event of the continuation of existing policies of attempting military solutions, I intend to support the policy of passive resistance now being pursued by the non-Unionist population. ...'

Mr Heath told Mr Lynch: 'Your telegram is unjustified in its content, unacceptable in its attempt to interfere in the affairs of the UK and can in no way contribute to the solution of the problems of NI.... The military operations to which you refer are designed solely for the defence of the people against armed terrorists whose activities, many of which originate ... in the Republic ... I find your reference to supporting a policy of passive resistance... calculated to do the maximum damage to the cooperation between the communities...'

Catholics Resign from Public Life

THIRTY-TWO of Derry's leading Catholic local government figures announced yesterday that they were resigning their city positions immediately. They said it was a protest against internment, the 'reign of repression in the city' and the 'humiliating treatment on Wednesday of MPs John Hume and Ivan Cooper when they were charged with 'failing to move on command of HM forces'.

Among them are the three local members of the Derry Development Commission, including the vice-chairman, Mr Stephen McGonagle.

Hume's Call Against Repression

SDLP MP John Hume appealed for a massive turnout at Derry's Anti-Repression rally in the Brandywell. Mr Hume said: 'It is now essential that everyone takes a stand... We welcome full-scale support from all areas of the North.'

WITHIN days of internment, Brian Faulkner must have felt like James II: 'a new resignation every day' as the always limited-nationalist consent for Stormont rule evaporated. But as minority demands for the abolition of Stormont intensified, Ted Heath robustly refuted Dublin's right to be consulted in NI affairs.

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