

DUP picking wrong fight over policing report

Newton
EMERSON



THE DUP has picked an unnecessary fight over the PSNI's report on policing in south Armagh. While there are challenging aspects to the report, Jeffrey Donaldson has focused his condemnation on proposals for cross-border cooperation, denouncing even the minimum recommendation of hot pursuit powers as a slippery slope towards "all-Ireland policing structures".

Cross-border police cooperation is already routine and in south Armagh threatens only the IRA. Much of this cooperation, such as information sharing, is based on 2007 EU-wide legislation that was to contain hot pursuit powers. They were quietly dropped after London and Dublin expressed concern about the impact here, as Sinn Féin was inching towards acceptance of policing. Sensitivities were such that even a UK and Ireland opt-out was feared to be too controversial, so all member states volunteered to drop the provision everywhere. It remains unthinkable to most people in the Republic that a PSNI vehicle might cross the border. As these are all points of republican discomfort, a unionist party could choose to be relaxed about them – but that might require being relaxed about its position in the polls.

THE PSNI does, of course, tread gently on pro-agreement republicans, as it does on many loyalists. This is simply beyond doubt. It has taken a freedom of information request from Seaford UUP councillor Alan Lewis for the PSNI to confess it is not investigating the Northern Bank robbery. There have been no convictions for the 2004 crime and a fortune remains unrecovered, yet no officers are tasked to it and Lewis received only guff about how "this would change if new lines of inquiry are identified". How can anything be identified if nobody is looking for it?

This blind eye is particularly generous when the IRA took the mickey out of the PSNI by leaving \$50,000 of the stolen notes at a police social club in south Belfast.

THERE is increased scrutiny of online polling methods after LucidTalk put the DUP behind the UUP and the TUV. Although LucidTalk has a good record predicting elections, one concern with its voluntary panel method is that it inevitably attracts people more interested in politics than the norm and there is no obvious way to adjust for any odd effects. For example, switching from the DUP to the TUV over Brexit looks like a rather specialised reaction, given the small size of anti-protocol protests and indeed of the TUV. In the latest LucidTalk raw data just 6 per cent of respondents did not vote at the last assembly election, including those too young to vote. That was adjusted down to 2 per cent. The actual figure in 2017, which had an unusually high turnout, was 35 per cent.

Effectively ignoring non-voters risks missing the most common behaviour of fed-up unionists – staying at home.

THE chairman of Marks & Spencer has warned of a "substantial reduction in



IN THE SPOTLIGHT: Chief Constable Simon Byrne

food supply" to Northern Ireland unless the sausage sea border grace period is extended again at the end of this month.

Marks & Spencer is uniquely vulnerable to the protocol because so many of its product lines are branded ready meals. However, after the gloating about full shelves here and empty shelves in Britain, it is useful to be reminded the hard part of the sea border has barely been implemented. To the extent supply problems in Britain are due to Brexit trade issues, we have escaped because of the grace period, not the protocol.

THE crisis at the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) has made the first page of *Private Eye*, as it is fresh enough to the interminable saga to still be shocked by it. GTCNI, the statutory body for regulating the profession, has become so dysfunctional it has failed to register 500 teachers in time for the new school year. Earlier this year, eight of its 33 members resigned because almost nobody in charge is on speaking terms, as later claimed at a Stormont committee.

Tourism Ireland has placed itself in the ridiculous position of not naming the fifth-largest city on the island

Nine of the council's 12 staff say they have experienced or witnessed bullying and there were 112 whistleblowing complaints in 2019 and 2020 to the sponsoring Department of Education. A redundancy appeal, two grievances and disciplinary hearing are under way and three industrial tribunals are pending.

MLAs at the committee suggested the situation is irreparable and the department should shut the council down. When a private organisation implodes, bankruptcy will ultimately solve the problem. A quango needs to be put out of its misery.

TOURISM Ireland has placed itself in the ridiculous position of not naming the fifth-largest city on the island. The Dublin-based cross-border body is to avoid referring to Derry, Londonderry or even Derry/Londonderry and to refer instead to "the Walled City", according to internal emails.

The decision follows a small number of complaints and a brief fuss on social media after an online Tourism Ireland quiz gave "Co Londonderry" as Seamus Heaney's birthplace. While that was unwise, banning any naming of city and county is clearly disproportionate and will doubtless be followed by complaints about using "the Walled City". It raises the interesting question of when complainants should not be indulged. What is the worst that could happen if people were just told to get over themselves?

ON THIS DAY

SEPTEMBER 4 1921

Collins in Armagh

MR MICHAEL Collins, Minister of Finance in the Dail Cabinet, paid his first official visit to Armagh yesterday and was accorded a remarkable reception from the people of the city and neighbouring counties. With the exception of his appearance at Dail Eireann meetings, this was the first time that Mr Collins has appeared in public since his name became known to the world over as that of the Commander-in-Chief of the Republican forces. Elaborate arrangements were made by the organisers and upwards of 20,000 people assembled to greet Mr Collins.

The day commenced with the presentation of addresses to Mr Collins the City Hall, a procession to the College grounds and a monster meeting there. Mr Edward (Eamonn) Donnelly, president of the Armagh Sinn Féin Club, presided. The chairman said that the day had arrived at last in Armagh when it took its place with the rest of Ireland and its representative in the Republican Parliament was here to meet his friends.

Mr Eoin O'Duffy said that he had escaped the bullets and he was back there – fresh from Sandy Row. If these people in Belfast continue to ally themselves with the enemies of this country, it might be necessary for a time to cut off Belfast absolutely from the rest of Ireland...

Mr Michael Collins, who was greeted enthusiastically with the audience singing 'The Soldier's Song', spoke briefly in Irish and paid tribute to 'the glorious dead – to the men who had nobly sacrificed themselves that their country might be free'. He went on: 'Sir James Craig that said he was responsible for peace in Northern Ireland. In Ireland today there is peace – everywhere except in the domain of his Parliament... Our proposal is that they [the Unionists] should come in. We can afford to give them even more than justice. We can afford to be generous (applause). That is our message to the North. To those who are with us, I can say that no matter what happens, no matter what the future may bring, we shall not desert them. Their Parliament in its doomed building ... is shaking. Tyrone and Fermanagh have fallen away; they come to us for protection.'

COLLINS'S historic visit to Armagh – for which he had been returned in May – was meticulously arranged by Eamonn Donnelly to raise Northern nationalist morale on the eve of the Treaty negotiations. Accepting the freedom of the Nationalist-controlled city, Collins coupled a promise of generous treatment for Unionists in a united Ireland with words of reassurance to his Ulster supporters. In truth, however, Sinn Féin had no real strategy to tackle partition, already established.

EDITED BY ÉAMON PHOENIX
e.phoenix@irishnews.com