



THE LAW'S DELAY: Jeffrey Donaldson makes a keynote speech on Thursday on the protocol. The NIO has still not passed the New Decade, New Approach law that will effectively prevent Stormont collapsing if one of the two main executive parties walks out

Blame NIO sluggishness for DUP threat to walk

IT is only thanks to the sluggishness of the Northern Ireland Office that Jeffrey Donaldson can drop even a hypothetical hint of collapsing devolution. The NIO has still not passed the New Decade, New Approach law that will effectively prevent Stormont collapsing if one of the two main executive parties walks out. In July it appeared the law was going to squeak through before Westminster's summer recess, spurred by concern over the DUP leadership crisis. Now it could take another month or more to pass, plus a further two months to come into effect (although that two-month provision is just a line in the bill that could easily be dropped).

There are bound to be suspicions the law was stalled once Donaldson became DUP leader to give both him and the government a half-credible threat to deploy against the protocol, if only to settle riotous loyalism.

However, in any choice between cock-up or conspiracy, the former should be the default assumption – especially if it involves the NIO.

UUP leader Doug Beattie is advocating a new cross-border body to help manage the protocol and address its democratic deficit. Under the Good Friday Agreement, such a body would be created and overseen by the North-South Ministerial Council. This earned him a rebuke from DUP MP Sammy Wilson, who accused the UUP of being "focused on getting a solution that suits Dublin".

Jeffrey Donaldson's subsequent threat to devolution includes a boycott of the North-South Ministerial Council, no doubt meant to contrast with Beattie's proposal.

Yet in September 2019, Donaldson said the DUP would accept some sea border arrangements if they were managed through the North-South Ministerial Council.

This was no obscure remark. It made headlines as the first indication of the DUP softening on the backstop and also of Donaldson emerging as the next DUP leader.

BETWEEN 2015 and 2020, Stormont's Department of Education ran a voluntary early retirement scheme for teachers over the age of 55, purely to free up jobs for younger recruits.

The project aimed to replace 200

Newton
EMERSON



teachers a year with an annual budget of around \$50 million. It was wound up due to fewer applications than expected but not before establishing the precedent of funding a major retirement scheme for a fairly minor reason.

So there is no excuse not to consider something similar to help address the impact of Covid in schools. Principals are having to accommodate a small minority of staff who do not wish to be vaccinated, who have genuine fears or vulnerabilities or who are simply unable to cope.

An offer of early retirement or voluntary redundancy would be humane to staff and pupils and almost certainly save money, for society overall if not to the education budget directly.

THE PSNI has put three disused border police stations back on the market after pausing their sale three years ago due to "uncertainty around EU exit".

Resuming the sale of Castledearg and Aughnacloy is seen as reflecting confidence in the protocol: both would have been required for any hard border arrangements.

The third site is at Warrenpoint, beside the harbour, seen as reserved for any sea border arrangements. It appears there is police confidence this will also not be required.

There are bound to be suspicions the law was stalled once Donaldson became DUP leader to give both him and the government a half-credible threat to deploy against the protocol, if only to settle riotous loyalism

IN 2009, Sinn Féin blocked a waste incinerator at Belfast's North Foreshore, despite its councillors previously endorsing the plan and a Sinn Féin minister, Conor Murphy, building another incinerator nearby.

The change of heart was because the party had jumped on a bandwagon against the Poolbeg incinerator in Dublin and felt it had to make this an all-Ireland policy.

The Dublin campaign failed but the Belfast block succeeded, shunting the proposal to Hightown, where controversy still rages.

Is the same about to happen with built-to-rent apartments?

This model of developer also acting as landlord is taking off across Belfast, with approval from the council's Sinn Féin-chaired planning committee.

But the party has become embroiled in opposition to built-to-rent in Dublin. While some of its concerns are specific to a huge project in Mary Lou McDonald's constituency, she has made a general and debatable complaint about built-to-rent raising house prices.

Given the political importance of Dublin's housing crisis, it is unlikely Sinn Féin can keep this stance to one side of the border.

THE daft academic concept of 'peace journalism' occasionally rears its head in Northern Ireland, only to be chopped off by journalists who reserve their right to be as unhelpful to the peace process as truth or mere opinion requires.

Now it has surfaced again in a united Ireland conversation project by the Derry-based Holywell Trust, which wants to commission academics to "review and assess the impact of the use of language by Northern Ireland-based media and the positive/negative contribution that this makes to addressing division and deepening understanding of the constitutional issue".

The project has received a small grant from the Republic's Department of Foreign Affairs, leading to unhelpful reports of "unionist fury".

Laughter would be a more appropriate response. Every attempt to apply this sort of finger-wagging to the media here ends up being ridiculed and there is no reason to believe this time will be any different.

ON THIS DAY

SEPTEMBER 11 1921

Coalisland Shooting Charge

A SPECIAL court was held in Dungannon on Wednesday before Mr Robert Newton, JP at which District Inspector Walshe charged Robert Marshall of Derry Green, Coalisland with attempting to shoot Francis McNally, Derrytresk, a member of Annaghobee Pipe Band which was returning from a hospital fete at Donaghmore on 15th August. Francis McNally, Coalisland stated he saw accused and another man coming towards the band. Accused presented a revolver at witness, first at his head and afterwards at his body. Marshall used some expressions and witness heard the revolver clicking twice but it did not go off. Witness, for the safety of the band and himself, hit the accused with a pike which he was carrying and knocked him down. Witness struck Marshall on the head and body with the pike several times. Some other member of the band took the revolver from the accused. Mr Byers (defending) said that, although the indiscriminate use of firearms was to be condemned, he would point out that there was nothing very serious in it. [Opposing bail] District Inspector Walshe said the incident might not appear very serious but immediately after it happened a man was murdered. Bitter feeling had been aroused in Coalisland.

Specials Charged after Attack

TWO Special Constables, recently stationed at Kilrea (County Derry), Alex McCloud and William Shaw, and a civilian, Daniel Morrison, were charged at a special court in Dungiven with having, on 1st September 1921, at Derrychier, broken a window and, by menaces and threats, demanded entrance to the licensed premises of John Bernard Mullan and demanded and received intoxicating liquor by menaces without payment.

District Inspector Pim, prosecuting, stated that Shaw, when arrested, said he was on patrol on 31st August. About eleven o'clock McCloud asked him to go out for a drink. They proceeded to Garvagh and called at Mullan's house. 'I said for a joke that I would have a glass of brandy. I had two or three of these.'

Bernard Mullan said that at two o'clock in the morning on 1st September he heard a motorcar stop in front of his house.

There was a knock at the door. Four shots were fired outside. He opened the door and brought in three men. McCloud and Morrison had revolvers.

'They put the revolvers on the counter while I supplied them with the drink they called.'

The Bench returned accused for trial, admitting them to bail. (While Belfast remained the epicentre of sectarian and political violence, sectarian incidents, often involving the ill-disciplined USC, were widely reported in rural areas where Catholic-owned public houses were a particular target.)

EDITED BY ÉAMON PHOENIX
e.phoenix@irishnews.com