



NO CHICKEN TONIGHT: Northern Ireland has escaped some of the supply issues facing chains including McDonald's and Nando's

With supplies, it often helps to be small

DO BREXIT and the protocol explain why Britain is suffering shortages in supermarkets and chain restaurants such as McDonald's and Nando's, while Northern Ireland is escaping? Yes and no.

The problem in Britain is not a lack of EU imports or sea border red tape at Dover but a shortage of 100,000 lorry drivers. This is partly due to tens of thousands of people returning to the EU, which in turn is partly due to Brexit – but also due to Covid, new UK tax rules against the self-employed and general labour market changes.

Nothing in the protocol helps with this: we are only in the EU single market for goods, not labour. We have a shortage of 5,000 lorry drivers, for the same mix of reasons. Our escape so far is largely due to being better prepared for supply issues because Brexit led us to expect them. This is also a case where it helps to be small: with only seven Nando's in Northern Ireland, they can all find chicken somewhere.

JEFFREY Donaldson says he will run in Lagan Valley if no DUP MLA stands down to give him their seat before the next assembly election. This can only be seen as a desperate admission, as it pits him against Edwin Poots and first minister Paul Givan for the constituency's two DUP seats. If there was any other option on the horizon, the DUP leader would not have committed himself to something so awkward. It seems particularly weak to ignore the South Down seat held by Jim Wells, who has lost the whip and the support of his constituency association.

Lagan Valley had three DUP seats until 2017, when the SDLP's Pat Catney won by 400 votes after receiving 1,200 UUP transfers. In theory, this should be recoverable if Donaldson can slightly grow his party's vote or just make it a bit less transfer-toxic to other unionists – and that is clearly what he has had to promise his assembly party. In practice, it will be a tall order to beat any 2017 result now DUP support has almost halved in the polls.

However, it is unlikely to be Donaldson who loses the third seat. Merely being first on the ballot in

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alphabetical order puts him in pole position.

THERE have been desperate attempts to read something into Donaldson's appointment as UK trade envoy to Cameroon – incidentally, the world's fifth-largest Guinness market – in addition to trade envoy to Egypt, a post he has held since 2015. Although these roles are not insignificant they are also not particularly time-consuming, mainly involving a few days every few years leading overseas delegations. No Plan B to stay at Westminster should be inferred – the story is simply an excuse to make terrible Egypt-themed puns, for example: this isn't the meaning of unionists in denial; wasn't RHI a pyramid scheme (technically no, but let's go with it); and imagine Donaldson outside City Hall shouting "Nefertiti! Nefertiti! Nefertiti!"

UNIONIST politicians have over-reacted after police allowed an INLA show of strength to go ahead in Derry. The PSNI can easily justify not wading in on safety grounds – what matters is whether a subsequent investigation delivers. However, the PSNI can be criticised for brushing off complaints with its standard appeal for information from the public. How

much can the public add when the PSNI admits it had advanced intelligence? How much danger should potential witnesses be expected to bear when it is safety-first for everyone else?

INLA-linked groups are in receipt of 'peace funding'. As SDLP policing board member Dolores Kelly has pointed out: "Who in the community would step forward with information when they can see these people are being paid off?"

To the extent paramilitaries prey on their communities, police appeals for information are little better than victim-blaming.

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In the classic manner of most sectarian arguments, this misses the real issue: both routes stop just short of Glengormley because the Department for Infrastructure cannot face the cost and controversy of extending a bus lane through the town centre. For many people in the vast swathe of suburbs beyond Belfast Zoo, this means their daily commute would go from a single bus journey to two journeys, changing to the Glider half-way. How would that be an improvement?

EVERY problem with the welfare system is a calamity for the individuals affected but there needs to be some perspective on how accurate a huge and complex bureaucracy can be overall.

The UUP has complained after Stormont's Department for Communities had to ask Capita to "rework" 2,000 disability benefits assessments. Another 6,600 had to be changed after a 'quality audit', 1,000 of them significantly. This is a total error rate of 3 per cent. Similarly, a story two weeks ago about \$65.2 million of benefit fraud in 2020, with just \$1.3m recovered, represents a one per cent loss to the benefits budget. If Stormont was always this efficient there would be dancing in the streets.

Choosing the new Glider route through north Belfast is turning into an orange-green split, with nationalists favouring the Antrim Road and unionists the Shore Road

ON THIS DAY

AUGUST 28 1971

Wilson Raps Internment

MR HAROLD Wilson, the Labour Opposition leader, said last night that troops in NI were trying to be impartial in a difficult situation, but now they were being used. 'For example', he said, 'it's only people from one side in the main who have been interned. Now there are extremists and dangerous men – very dangerous men – on the other side who have not.' The decision to inflict internment certainly was a gamble, said Mr Wilson. However the former Labour PM said he would regard direct rule from Westminster as 'the last resort', while adding: 'I think it would have to come if the situation got worse'. Meanwhile the Stormont PM, Mr Faulkner described a Northern Ireland Labour Party proposal for a 'community government' as unrealistic.

Hume on Campaign's Success

The call to the people in Derry to withhold rates and rents has met with outstanding success, Mr John Hume, MP said last night. He said the fact that local authorities were not revealing any information about the impact of the campaign in itself showed that it was successful. He could state that in the Creggan Estate, for instance, there had been a 93 per cent response. 'This is quite magnificent and it shows that the people have accepted that, to be successful, the civil disobedience campaign means personal involvement. Mass involvement shows that everywhere a large section of the community has withdrawn its consent for the system. The only way to solve the situation thus created is for Westminster to take the necessary steps to create a system which will have the approval of the people.'

Teachers Against Internment

Teachers in Down and Armagh, meeting at Newry last night, stiffened their resistance to internment and announced that on the day internment forms are signed schools would close in protest. Teachers' salaries for that day would go to the internees' dependants. The meeting reiterated unanimous support for the programme of civil disobedience and said that teachers would cooperate to implement it.

Overnight Stops at Aldergrove

British European Airways (BEA) is to suspend all overnight halts at Aldergrove Airport, it was announced in London last night. The suspension follows a request by three of the airline's captains who asked to be relieved from having to stay overnight in the riot-torn city. (THE former Labour PM's view that internment was one-sided undermined Faulkner's position. It was clear, however, that Wilson did not relish the idea of Direct Rule; in 1969 his Defence Secretary, Denis Healey had warned the Labour PM that their only option was to support the 'Protestant majority' or 'risk a 1912 situation'.)

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