



WARNINGS:
There's a world of difference between the threats being issued by DUP leader Jeffrey Donaldson

There's an obvious answer to Jeffrey's impossible demands

Is Jeffrey Donaldson threatening to collapse devolution or merely to cause an early election? One threat is being allowed to blend into the other, yet there is a world of difference between them.

When the DUP leader first warned two weeks ago of quitting the executive, he said this would be "to refresh our mandate."

In an interview this week, he appeared to suggest the DUP would not return to office after an election unless its protocol demands are met. As those demands exceed everything the UK has asked for from Brussels, they cannot possibly be delivered.

Donaldson's escalating desperation invites the obvious solution: there should be an early election, the DUP should lose its place as the largest unionist party, then everyone else can get back to work without it.

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THE DUP is not as close to losing the top unionist spot as polling figures imply.

Recent LucidTalk percentage results of TUV 14, DUP 13 and UUP 16 would probably give actual seat results of around TUV 5, UUP 15 and DUP 20 – and it is seats that count. Although a UUP victory is plausible, unionism's three-way split creates a new problem: the largest unionist party might not hold a majority of unionist seats. It could be UUP 20, DUP 18, TUV 3, for example. The DUP and TUV could then claim the UUP had no mandate to give its designated community's consent. Stormont's ugly scaffolding was not designed to cope with this scenario.

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THE DUP's reckless games with devolution are all the more outrageous for being a farce. At assembly questions to First Minister Paul Givan, UUP leader Doug Beattie asked if the DUP's boycott of the North-South Ministerial Council extends to the specialist committee on implementing the Northern Ireland Protocol. There was laughter in the chamber when Givan admitted he did not know.

What this means is that the DUP is boycotting a whole strand of the Good

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Friday Agreement over the protocol but may have forgotten to boycott the protocol itself – and certainly forgot to tell its own first minister, either way.

A further farce with the boycott is that the DUP is now insisting it makes no difference. When Sinn Féin claimed DUP withdrawal from the North-South Ministerial Council will jeopardise \$1 billion of EU peace funding, the DUP's Diane Dodds said this was "nonsense" as similar EU programmes ran without ministers during Stormont's three-year collapse.

If a DUP boycott does not prevent cross-border EU involvement in Northern Ireland, what is the point of it?

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AT prime minister's questions in the Commons, SDLP leader Colum Eastwood got to ask the key question about this DUP-manufactured crisis: will the government fast-track the almost completed bill, agreed in New Decade, New Approach, to prevent Stormont collapsing if one of the two main executive parties has a "petulant strop?"

Boris Johnson replied only with a generality that the institutions "should be robust", before changing the subject to the protocol. The SDLP then put a video of Eastwood's question online but did not include the answer, because grandstanding and getting

a soundbite out was the sole purpose of the exercise. And that's how the government gets away with it.

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THE BBC cannot broadcast All-Ireland finals because the GAA sold the rights to Sky. Similarly, Northern Ireland soccer matches can only be broadcast on Sky. The BBC can show highlights and full games from other competitions in both sports. Perhaps it could do more. But there is no sectarian conspiracy in its output or among its staff: the very idea is laughable to anyone who has experienced BBC Northern Ireland's editorial self-inspection.

That has not stopped Sinn Féin attacking the BBC.

Sinn Féin is fond of telling the media to recognise its increasing size and power. Does the party recognise the responsibility that confers?

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NO matter how fraught their relationship becomes, there are some things the DUP and Sinn Féin can always agree on. Both parties took exception to a libel reform bill being brought through the assembly by former UUP leader Mike Nesbitt, with SDLP and Alliance support.

Sinn Féin's Maoliosa McHugh said the DUP had been correct to block reform here when Westminster introduced it in 2013, partly because its test of "serious harm" would "set up an evidence threshold that will block ordinary citizens from taking libel action".

DUP former minister Peter Weir echoed this, saying Nesbitt's bill – a copy of the Westminster law – does nothing to help "ordinary people" sue large organisations.

These are bizarre objections when the main purpose of libel reform is to protect scientists and academics from being sued by large organisations. But blocking the law here has the incidental effect of making it easier for politicians to sue newspapers, as noted in the House of Lords at the time.

ON THIS DAY

SEPTEMBER 18 1921

TUC Report on 'Pogrom'

THE report of the British Trades Union Congress delegation, appointed last year to visit Belfast and investigate the circumstances of the Pogrom, states: 'There was found a general desire for a resumption of a normal relationship and conditions existing previous to July 1920. At the same time, however, representative bodies of workmen were emphatic in their declaration against working with adherents of the Sinn Féin movement'.

The report deals with the circumstances which led up to the disturbances in July last year: 'During the war, owing to 45,000 Belfast men joining the forces, there was a large influx of men from the South and West of Ireland to meet the shortage of labour in the shipyards and elsewhere... Of these a number were active Sinn Féiners... it is alleged that many of these have openly avowed their intention of obtaining the domination of Sinn Féin this... created a strong feeling of resentment... It is further alleged that a number of the Sinn Féin supporters carried arms.'

'The culminating point... was reached by the murder at Cork on July 17th [1920] of Colonel Smyth, DSO, an Ulsterman who had served in the war...'

This, and other reports of expulsions of Protestant workmen, together with outrages in the North of Ireland, created such a feeling that, following a protest meeting held in Queen's Road, at which inflammatory speeches were delivered, disturbances arose at Messrs Workman and Clark's which quickly spread to Messrs Harland and Wolff and other works with the result that thousands of workmen were either expelled or left their work as a measure of self-protection. It was hoped that matters would settle down as on previous occasions [but] on 22nd August, District Inspector Swanzy was killed in Lisburn while walking home from church. Reprisals followed...'

The report proceeds: 'The view has been put to us by many of our Trade Union colleagues in Belfast that, if the employers had taken steps to maintain discipline, as was done in 1912, by giving notice to stop the works, this would have been effective. [Harland and Wolff management considered this but]... were strongly advised by both the military and police that if any stoppage took place... the authorities could not accept responsibility for the maintenance of order...'

BOTH the British authorities and the TUC failed the 8,000-plus expelled Catholic workers, driven by mobs from their employment in 1920. Unlike in 1912, Lord Pirrie – apparently on RIC advice – refused to take disciplinary action against the Loyalists while James Craig endorsed their sectarian actions in a public speech at the shipyard.

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