

Protocol offer the real 'best of both worlds'

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THE protocol is now being renegotiated, even if only London wants to use the term 'renegotiate'.

Brussels has made a substantial offer with an interesting balance: it is generous in practice, proposing a large reduction in sea border checks, yet unyielding in principle, with no change to the concepts of risk and accountability that require checks. London is focusing on the principle of European Court oversight but there is an apparent wish on both sides to meet in the middle and a landing zone to do so: Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein are all outside the EU and inside the single market via a treaty with its own court, which follows the European Court at arm's length.

The DUP is clearly pricing in a deal and preparing to back down, as has always been leader Jeffrey Donaldson's plan. The EU offer has been welcomed by Sinn Féin, the SDLP and Alliance, who formerly demanded "rigorous implementation". This reveals the landing zone for all sides in Northern Ireland. EU access and the lowest possible sea border is the real 'best of both worlds' and can – or at least should – be welcomed by everyone.

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THE person who sounds most upset about this week's Brexit developments is Tánaiste Leo Varadkar, who said: "The message must go out to all countries around the world that this is a British government that doesn't necessarily keep its word."

His distress is no surprise, as the likeliest conclusion of the latest protocol negotiation is everyone accepting Varadkar was duped in the first negotiation, then moving on. It is an extraordinary political soap opera that Varadkar will return as taoiseach in 14 months and have to make deals with Boris Johnson again.

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THE DUP 'boycott' of the North-South Ministerial Council is a farcical fig-leaf of anti-protocol protest. The party always said it would not block health cooperation, so it could not be accused of playing games with the pandemic. Now DUP first minister Paul Givan has signed off a £1 billion cross-border peace package via the council with the excuse the funding has "a particular theme that relates to health".

This silliness is almost matched by a judicial review against the boycott. A judge found DUP ministers are acting inconsistently with the law, which is all a judicial review can do. Unlawful is not illegal, let alone criminal. The judge noted he could order ministers to comply but nothing happens if such orders are ignored.

The DUP declared the verdict proved there is a political crisis, justifying triggering Article 16 of the protocol. Admittedly this was a superb punchline, for the tiny number of unionist voters following closely enough to appreciate it.

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THREE weeks ago the DUP and TUV posed a trick question to UUP leader Doug Beattie: would he serve as deputy first minister to a Sinn Féin first minister?

If Beattie says yes, he is conceding



PROPOSALS: European Commission vice-president Maros Sefcovic unveiled new proposals this week on the Northern Ireland Protocol

he cannot beat Sinn Féin. If he says no, he is a sore loser who would wreck devolution. So he keeps saying he is fighting to win – the position all parties take going into an election.

However, repeating the same stock answer has failed to shut the question down. It is cropping up in every interview Beattie does, like a signposted elephant trap he keeps falling into. A political leader ought to be able to devise a better form of words, or just grasp the nettle and say he would serve, as everyone knows he would. Confronting the question would do Beattie less harm than the impression he is creating of learning on the job. The irony is that the DUP is only asking it to ensure Jeffrey Donaldson becomes deputy first minister.

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THERE has been widespread media coverage of a declaration by two legal experts, one of them former director of public prosecutions Barra McGrory, that the Good Friday Agreement does not require concurrent referendums on Irish unity, north and south.

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Although this has often been overlooked or misreported, it has never been in dispute – the agreement only explicitly requires a referendum in Northern Ireland.

In theory the Republic could consent to unification via its government or the Dáil. In reality, as every change to Ireland's constitution requires a referendum, there would have to be at least one, even just to change the article limiting the Dáil's jurisdiction to the Republic's territory. It is only the 'concurrency' of referendums that is in question.

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A CONSTRUCTION licence has been granted to the Islandmagee gas storage project, which will hold 14 days' supply for Northern Ireland in seven underground caverns. Developers Islandmagee Energy say they will ultimately switch from storing natural gas to green hydrogen, produced from renewable electricity, to help meet net-zero targets. There is another green energy use for underground caverns: storing compressed air, using renewable electricity, to generate more electricity on demand. Large-scale plants have operated around the world for decades and the technology is now taking off. Salt caverns are ideal, as they seal themselves under pressure. The only salt mine on the island of Ireland is under Carrickfergus.

Who would have imagined Sammy Wilson's constituency becoming our green battery?

ON THIS DAY

OCTOBER 16 1921

Sectarian Attacks on Pupils

THE campaign against Catholic schoolchildren which was started by a mob in Conway Street has now spread to Ballymacarrett, the victims being the children attending Richardson Street (Ravenhill Road) and Willowfield Schools. The interference with the children at Richardson Street Schools has occurred at intervals during the past few weeks and repeated applications have been made at Mountpottinger Barracks for police protection, generally with success.

Attacks on children returning from Willowfield Schools this week, however, have been of a more serious character and adequate protection by the authorities on the Woodstock Road is an absolute necessity to prevent a possible tragedy as, yesterday, iron bars, belts and stones were used by a mob of boys aged from 12-18 years. On Wednesday, after leaving school, the children were mercilessly stoned by a mob and a seven-year old boy sustained a scalp wound from a stone. Yesterday the attackers, armed with iron bars, sticks and belts rushed at the children as they emerged from school. To the credit of two residents of the locality, it may be stated that they interfered and saved two of the boys from a savage beating.

Trafalgar Square Protest over 'Expelled Workers'

THE [Labour-leaning] Daily Herald says: The outrage to which trade unionists have been subjected in Belfast by their violent expulsion from shipyards and other works is being brought to the attention of British workers by a special delegation of members of the Belfast Labour Party and Trades Council. They have arranged a demonstration in Trafalgar Square on next Sunday at 3 p.m. All London workers are urged to attend. The case will be presented by Councillor James Baird and Mr John A Hanna. Their object is to inform British trade unionists of the real causes of the boycott of Irish Nationalists in Belfast.

The growth of trade unionism, they point out, has endangered the power of the bosses in the North of Ireland. Religious and political bigotry was deliberately used by the leaders of Ulster Unionism who were also leaders of big business, to keep the workers from uniting to fight their common battle. The masters are still stirring up these evil forces in order to prevent economic and political unity among the workers. (MUCH of the violence which scarred Belfast was vicious and sectarian including these orchestrated attacks on Catholic pupils – similar to the shocking scenes at Holy Cross in our own day. By now, over a year has passed since the Belfast sectarian work expulsions, publicly supported by Craig, prompting a deputation led by Councillor James Baird, himself a Protestant expelled worker, to London.)

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