



'DIMINISHED INFLUENCE': DUP leader Sir Jeffrey Donaldson delivers his speech on the Northern Ireland Protocol to senior party members at the La Mon hotel in east Belfast last week
PICTURE: Peter Morrison/PA

What is DUP's endgame?

JEFFREY Donaldson quoted an economist in his speech last week who claimed that the Northern Ireland Protocol could cost \$850 million per year to the economy and asked us to imagine what we could do if we invested that money in schools instead.

As a big red Brexit bus drove past in my mind, I thought to myself, "yeah, as long as they're not Gaelscoileanna, I assume, Jeffrey?"

There was an awful lot of rhetoric in the speech in which the mantra was repeated ad nauseum that the protocol undermines the integrity of the north's place in the union. The truth is the protocol has done nothing of the sort. That process began on June 23 2016 with the Brexit vote.

Donaldson said he intended to "set out our strategy to address the problems with the protocol and to offer a solution that is capable of delivering a better way forward and one that can bring unionism and Northern Ireland together".

Twenty minutes into the speech I was still waiting for the strategy. What we got instead was the setting out of four acts of defiance.

The DUP said it would immediately withdraw from the north-south institutions, saying they could not continue to operate Strand 2 of the Good Friday Agreement when Strand 3, east-west relationships, had been undermined by the protocol.

This is nonsense. Strand 3 is the mechanism by which the British and Irish governments cooperate on non-devolved matters. Withdrawing from the north-south institutions is premised on the myth that the Irish government can or would unilaterally renegotiate the protocol within Strand 3 and Jeffrey Donaldson is not dumb enough to believe that would happen.

The second stop was that DUP ministers would seek to block any future checks at ports once grace periods come to an end. He stated that DUP ministers would use their votes at the executive to frustrate any additional checks, now or in the future and that the executive

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could not act without their consent.

Customs and excise are reserved matters so in order for the infrastructure to be put in place, the money needs to come from Westminster to build the sheds and to employ the additional customs officials required to carry out the checks. Westminster hasn't done that to date and shows no sign of gearing up for the end of grace periods. Down the line, the DUP may claim a win on this, but it's more likely checks won't happen because of Boris Johnson's inaction.

The third pillar (of salt) was that the DUP is seeking legal advice as to whether there is any scope to limit or eradicate the existing checks at the ports and if that can't be achieved, then the position in office of DUP ministers would become untenable. This would mean an end of the Stormont assembly.

This threat is the one that makes least sense. The DUP has 28 MLAs. It has eight members of parliament and its days of holding the balance of power in Westminster

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are well and truly gone; and what a spectacular squandering of that opportunity we all witnessed.

If the DUP collapse the Stormont institutions, its 28 MLAs and their support staff are out of a job. The party's political influence is diminished because a party leader has a lot less pull in the international political arena than a first or deputy first minister would have.

The fourth strand was that the DUP would frustrate any attempt to introduce legislation at the assembly or regulations within devolved government departments that would give effect to evolving EU laws as they impact the protocol. This is the assembly they're going to walk out of in a matter of weeks, we're led to believe, so they can frustrate nothing when direct rule is in place.

What really is the DUP's endgame here? It could be gambling that Brandon Lewis will call an election within the required legislative time-frame if they walk out and that the campaign is an opportunity to win back votes that opinion polls indicate have migrated to other parties.

The DUP isn't going to be more hardline than the TUV in any contest. The approach of the Ulster Unionist Party, who oppose the protocol, has been pragmatic in putting forward suggestions seeking to minimise any negative impact. That's an approach which could garner votes from a section of the electorate that is both pro-union and pro-Europe.

If the DUP walk out, it is a strong possibility that the doors will be locked, direct rule will be imposed and we may never see a Stormont assembly ever again.

Observe the sons of Ulster marching towards... a united Ireland? In Frank McGuinness's play, a horrified McIlwaine realises "we are the sacrifice" in flashbacks to the Somme. The DUP may be determined to die with its boots on, but it may come to the sobering understanding that its sacrifice will be immaterial to the outcome of Brexit.

ON THIS DAY

SEPTEMBER 16 1971

Internees Freed

AS ANOTHER batch of released detainees trickled out of Crumlin Road Gaol and off the prison ship Maidstone at Belfast docks last night, it was believed that Mr Brian Faulkner, the Stormont PM who is also Minister of Home Affairs, was within hours of signing internment orders for many of those left behind.

At least 13 of the 240 detainees were freed. Mr Michael Farrell of the People's Democracy, who has been prominently identified with the fight for equal rights, said: 'I come out a more determined opponent of Unionism than when I went in'. Detainees released from the Maidstone included three Armagh PD members, Dermot Kelly, a 28-year-old accountant, Eugene Casson (28) a roofer, and Liam Shannon (28), a solicitor. Among those released from Belfast Gaol were Kevin McCorry, organiser of the NI Civil Rights Association and John D Murphy, printer of the People's Democracy paper.

End Street Violence – Hume

MR JOHN Hume has called on all organisations in Derry 'with the slightest shred of influence' to make every effort to end the street violence and to concentrate their energies on the campaign of civil disobedience.

The past week had seen a considerable amount of angry reaction in the community to certain serious incidents involving the British Army, he said. 'The only people to suffer from the violence taking place on our streets have been the residents of the areas involved,' the SDLP MP said.

Paisley Backs Shankill MP

SHANKILL MP Mr Desmond Boal yesterday resigned from the Unionist Party. He accused the party of adding 'a new dimension of dishonesty' to its politics in the approach of the Heath-Lynch-Faulkner talks which will be held at Chequers in two weeks' time. Mr Boal's resignation was applauded last night by Protestant Unionist leader Rev Ian Paisley as 'timely and necessary'.

Peace Line Serves as City Boundary

BELFAST'S Peace Line provides a ward boundary, the Local Government Boundary Commissioner said yesterday. 'The barbed wire is the evidence of the division of opinion and it is the evidence on which I have acted in some cases,' he added. The Commissioner, Mr Frank Harrison QC, was unavailing his plan for 26 districts, made up of 524 single-member wards.

By mid-September, most of the prominent civil rights activists interned in the first August swoops had been released, among them People's Democracy leader, Michael Farrell. As rioting continued in nationalist areas, John Hume sought to channel community anger into a civil disobedience campaign. Meanwhile, Paisley's friend and political adviser, Desmond Boal QC, resigned from the UUP to join the fiery cleric's DUP.

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