PUP fails to make a splash with GFA announcement

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THE Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) was clearly hoping to make a major splash with its announcement on Monday that it is withdrawing support for the Good Friday Agreement, on the grounds that the protocol shows the consent principle does not apply to unionists.

The problem with this claim, apart from the argument itself, is that the splash occurred in March when the Loyalist Communities Council made the same announcement on behalf of the UVF, UDA and Red Hand Commando.

The PUP is not the UVF, of course, no sirree. However, when the March announcement was made, PUP leader Billy Hutchinson gave interviews defending it and had spent two months beforehand warning it was going to happen.

If Hutchinson wants a political career announcing the same thing over and over again and expecting everyone to think it is new, he is just going to have to become chancellor of the exchequer.

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THE PUP announcement coincided with the hijacking and burning of a bus in Newtownabbey. The following night, bus drivers withdrew services after PSNI intelligence of further attacks. The UVF is believed to be responsible in both cases, yet this may not be the direct escalation it appears. Brexit is an unwelcome distraction from loyalism's long-term plan to get its leadership pensioned off into the community sector. Things had been progressing fairly well until political tensions antagonised younger members and created openings for mischief by renegade factions.

So it is possible some loyalist leaders see torching buses as de-escalation: a demonstration of action, even a 'letting off of steam', with no harm done except to drivers, passengers and taxpayers in general. If loyalists cared about taxpayers, there would be no retirement plan in the first place.

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TO STOP his party losing votes to the TUV in one direction and the UUP and Alliance in the other, Jeffrey Donaldson has to find a position on the protocol that simultaneously addresses bus-burning loyalists and garden centre Protestants.

In a sign he may be taking this challenge too literally, the DUP leader delivered his latest critique of the protocol in an east Belfast garden centre.

The official excuse for staging the event at this location was sea border restrictions on importing plants, although the DUP may be struggling to find any business that will complain about the protocol without also complaining about the DUP.

Donaldson had a phone call with the taoiseach the same day and issued a statement calling on the Irish government to "use its influence to press EU negotiators to stretch and prioritise the interests of Northern Ireland over the interests of EU capitals" and "reach a sensible outcome which is sustainable and can command the support of unionists".

The audacity of this would be staggering enough without the DUP boycotting the Irish government over the protocol at the North-South Ministerial Council.



OLD HAT: If PUP leader Billy Hutchinson (pictured at an Ulster Covenant commemoration in 2012) wants a political career announcing the same thing over and over again and expecting everyone to think it is new, he is just going to have to become Chancellor of the Exchequer

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SINN Féin's position on the universal credit uplift is looking increasingly absurd.

The DUP will agree to extend the £20 weekly increase throughout the whole three-year term of the next executive budget, currently nearing completion.

Sinn Féin should have no argument with that: last week, its finance minister, Conor Murphy, declined to extend the uplift for six months using unspent funds because the cost will rise so quickly. It needs to be properly budgeted.

Yet Sinn Féin is turning the DUP down because the extension it will agree is not permanent. Is anything permanent? What would an unbudgeted permanent commitment even mean?

Sinn Féin communities minister Deirdre Hargey has complained the DUP used its executive veto 41 times over the past 18 months to block discussing an extension. How many times has Sinn Féin turned down a three-year extension?

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THERE was cross-community agreement at a Stormont committee briefing on Alliance's new integrated education bill. Catholic and Protestant church trustees both said their schools are already integrated because children of all backgrounds can attend them.

Actual churches are the same, of course. Any Catholic can attend a Protestant service or vice versa and that is apparently the end of the ecumenical matter.

Bishop Donal McKeown and DUP MLA Robin Newton (no relation) expressed concern Alliance's plan to promote integrated schools would make Catholic and state church-trustee schools "second tier" or "second class".

It would take a high degree of promotion to offset the privilege the churches enjoy. They are accorded a governing role in a fully-funded universal public service, purely because they once owned some school buildings generations ago, most of which have long since been replaced.

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IT IS highly unlikely MPs will be banned outright from having second jobs but Westminster is still having a serious debate on the subject due to the Owen Paterson lobbying scandal. Only two of Northern Ireland's 18 MPs have registered other paid employment: Sinn Féin's John Finucane, who works up to 20 hours per week at his law firm; and the DUP's Carla Lockhart, who works 8 hours per week administering her family's farm.

The prospect of tackling a lawyer and a farmer shows why a ban is unlikely.

The DUP may be struggling to find any business that will complain about the protocol without also complaining about the DUP

ON THIS DAY

NOVEMBER 13 1971

Bishop on Irish Crisis

'IRELAND, as a whole, is passing at the present time through the most serious crisis since our Civil War. If the present vicious spiral of violence and repression continues, the entire island could be plunged into anarchy and chaos. The whole achievement of half a century of freedom and hard-won democratic structures, our insipient and fragile economic progress, are all threatened by every bomb exploding in the North, as well as by every maltreated internee and shot civilian.'

So said Bishop Cahal Daly, Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise, when he addressed the Longford Association in London. 'Unless peace is restored and quickly, nothing but anarchy, unemployment, poverty and disintegration of society can result. Violence will become a way of life for many and can permanently warp the personalities of youth. The effects could be with us for decades in terms of violent crime, gangsterism, lawlessness and psycho-social illness. Nothing can justify the present campaign of violence: it is morally evil and opposed to every Christian principle.'

Brigadier Denies Torture Claims

BRIGADIER Frank Kitson, the British Army officer serving in NI named in newspaper reports of internee torture allegations, hit back yesterday. An Army statement from Lisburn HQ said: 'Dr John O'Connell [a Labour TD] claimed that certain serious allegations had been made against the Brigadier when serving in Kenya. Brigadier Kitson categorically denies that allegations of this nature have ever been made against him.' Brigadier Kitson has been commanding the British Army Forces in Belfast for the past fourteen months. He is also credited with playing a leading role in the breakdown of the wall of silence which has protected IRA activities.

Woman Blinded by Rubber Bullet

A 51 YEAR OLD Belfast woman is blind for life as a result of being struck in the face by a rubber bullet last week. The family of Mrs Emily Groves were told of her condition by a RVH surgeon on Saturday.

Mr William Groves, her husband, said she was standing at the window of their home when she was struck. The Army had been carrying out a search operation at the time.

BORN in Loughguile, Co Antrim, the son of a teacher, Cahal Daly (1917-2009) was one of the 20th century's most influential Irish Catholic Churchmen. From a northern nationalist background, he justified the Irish struggle for independence after 1916 but condemned the IRA campaign in the Troubles. Brig Frank Kitson, an expert in 'low-intensity operations', served in Belfast from 1970-72 and is widely seen as the architect of the British army's anti-IRA strategy and the 'coercive control' of the nationalist population.

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