

A test for the Foreign Secretary

I wish the Foreign Secretary well in her new role sorting out the Northern Ireland Protocol.

It is important she stands up to the EU. She needs to rub out the wrong statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that the U.K. might need to break international law in a limited way. She needs to insist on reversing the diversion of trade from GB/NI in accordance with the Protocol and insist on upholding the Protocol's affirmation of the importance and integrity of the U.K. internal market.

This is a much easier negotiation to win than the one Margaret Thatcher won when she secured a large U.K. rebate on EU contributions with no real leverage. There is plenty of leverage here, as we can simply impose a fair solution as NI is part of the U.K. and under the U.K. Parliament and government's control now we have left the EU. She must enforce the Manifesto promise to end ECJ jurisdiction over any part of the U.K.

We have our own fuel. Why are we relying on the goodwill of foreigners.

The Express on line has run my piece on domestic energy production in place of imports in the Comment section.

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Ukraine

In 2010 President Yanukovich was elected President of Ukraine. International observers did not claim the election was unfair. As an Eastern Ukrainian with sympathies for Russia in 2014 the President rejected the draft EU Association Agreement and opted for closer ties with Russia. This was highly contentious in western Ukraine and led to protests. Some think the EU and the US encouraged the protesters, leading to the resignation of a President who could no longer keep control. His replacement led Ukraine to an EU tie up. Russia sent in troops to Crimea, took control with no resistance and held a referendum. They claimed 97% support for their takeover on an 83% turnout. There were no western observers or audit of this result, and the two

choices did not include the old status quo. Subsequent independent opinion polls have shown a high level of support for the results of the referendum anyway, just as independent polls before the annexation showed majority support for closer links with Russia.

Western policy has failed towards Ukraine. The UN did on a majority vote condemn the Russian actions and called for the restoration of Crimea to Ukraine, The Western powers rightly did not seek to claim Crimea back by military intervention. To this day they have said Crimea should be returned but have ruled out military involvement. It would kill too many people, and it would be difficult to impose Kiev and EU rule on many people of Russian origin in Crimea who prefer Russian rule.

All this is topical again because some other parts of Eastern Ukraine are in revolt against Kiev rule and have sympathies for Russia. Russian troops have been massed on the frontiers. The West led by President Biden has told Russia not to invade and has threatened penal sanctions were they to do so. What is clearly needed is a political solution in Eastern Ukraine that works for its people. The eastern voters have little chance of winning an countrywide election in Ukraine any more, unlike 2010, because their numbers have ben reduced by the loss of Crimea.

Ukraine is the political battleground between EU and Russian influences in Eastern Europe. The EU and US misjudged the situation badly in Crimea when they pressed the EU Association Agreement against the wishes of the then President and lost a part of the country. They need to be careful not to misjudge again.

Brexit at the Environment Department.

The good news at the Environment Department is they did grasp the big opportunity that leaving the EU offers when it comes to ending our involvement with the Common Agricultural policy. Over the years it inflicted considerable damage on the UK. It left us short of milk quotas, shrinking our dairy industry and forcing us to import more milk based products. It prolonged the hit from BSE on our beef cattle. It paid grants to get UK farmers to rip out orchards so we imported more continental fruit. It paid large grants to successful large scale arable farmers that w did not need to pay. The UK lost considerable market share in temperate foods. The Dutch took over our flower market and came to dominate salads, the Spanish the vegetables market, the Danes the pig meat market. Most of the CAP is being swept aside.

The not so good news is the delay in putting in a replacement, and the absence of strong policies to promote more UK food production. For a department which wants to be green there is a surprising lack of interest in cutting the food miles. There are no dedicated schemes to give grants to

farmers to create the orchards we have lost or to put in competitive capacity to the Dutch green houses for market gardening. There are expensive schemes to take land out of agricultural use altogether to make us more import dependent for food.

The Department is promoting more tree planting., which is fine. It needs to encourage more sustainable forestry, as what we need to do is grow more of our own roof trusses and floors, more of our own biomass for power stations and wood for furniture production.

The Department is doing little to recreate a healthy and sustainable fishery run by UK based fishing vessels and crews.

How to cut energy prices

it sounds as if the government does now think it has to act to cushion the impact of energy bills on household budgets in April. It also sounds as if they will let the price go up, so they will probably determine to route more taxpayer cash to lower income families through benefits and tax credits. Alternatively they will subsidise energy companies to keep bills down. This would be a dearer route but would help more bill payers.

What they need to do is to solve the underlying problem of a shortage of energy. Our electricity system is too reliant on wind and solar which can drop off to very little power when the weather changes. They need to keep more of the fossil fuel capacity we currently have as back up. They need to install more reliable green generation with more hydro, biomass and nuclear. Depending more and more on unreliable imports means paying peak prices at times of general shortage with adverse effects on bills.

The government as argued here before needs to licence new gas and oil from U.K. sources. It is not green to ban domestic production only to rely on more carbon intensive imports of coal and gas instead. The U.K. could follow the US model of lower gas prices with plenty of home production rather than the European model of very high prices, gas scarcity and reliance on Russian imports.

It is far from helpful that the government will end up with higher benefits, more subsidies and higher public spending because they have allowed a severe shortage of gas to emerge. Cutting our stockholding capacity and our domestic output comes with a dear price.