

Henry Hill: Brokenshire threatens direct rule if no deal reached in Ulster

Government gives Ulster parties more time to reach a deal

Today will mark the first day that senior civil servants in Northern Ireland will take direct control of provincial budgets, [according to the News Letter](#).

[The Belfast Telegraph reports](#) that James Brokenshire, the Northern Irish Secretary, has warned that there is only a small window to salvage devolved government after Monday's deadline for forming an Executive passed without agreement.

Under the devolution model in Northern Ireland, the largest party from each of the two principal communities must agree to form a coalition to share the Executive, along with any other party of sufficient size which chooses to take part.

As Sam McBride points out, the road from civil service auto-pilot to 'direct rule' – effectively administration by the Northern Ireland Office – is a short one, for all that Sinn Fein posture that it is 'not an option'.

Michelle O'Neill, their 'northern leader', insists that Brokenshire's only recourse [is another election](#). It's hard to judge the extent to which this is a bluff: the last election certainly went very well for them, but it's not clear how financially equipped any of the parties are for another go.

Yet despite that fact Brokenshire seems to be playing down the prospect of another poll, whilst making clear that the Government is willing [to reintroduce direct rule](#) if required. After all, there must be somebody politically accountable for the Northern Irish civil service.

If that happens the long-term future of the current arrangements is unclear. The DUP are warning that Sinn Fein have [run out of patience with devolution](#), focusing instead on bolstering their position in the Republic and trying to exploit Brexit. It certainly seems as if the death of Martin McGuinness has coincided with a change in the party's strategy regarding Stormont – although it bears remembering that he did collapse the last administration.

One final option the Secretary of State might consider has been floated by the *News Letter*: should MLAs [stop being paid](#) if the legislature collapses? It would certainly incentivise them to strike a deal.

Meanwhile the Ulster Unionists have crowned Robin Swann [their new leader](#). Mike Nesbitt, his predecessor, had to step down after a very disappointing set of election results. Swann seems likely to be a more traditional figure than his predecessor, which will probably help the party to stabilise.

May stalls Sturgeon as unionists start trying to build campaign

The Prime Minister has declined to open negotiations with the Scottish Government on a second independence referendum after the Scottish Parliament voted to ask for one, [the Scotsman reports](#).

This sort of boldness is a marked change from the typical unionist strategy of the previous two decades – giving in – but the Prime Minister has at several reasons to play for time.

First, the Government won't want the distraction of an existential struggle for the territorial integrity of the nation in the midst of the Brexit negotiations. The Government only has so much bandwidth.

Second, as [James Forsyth points out](#), neither Theresa May nor the Scottish Conservatives seem to believe that a second independence is inevitable. This absence of unionism's usual fatalism likely explains the unexpectedly bold strategy: they believe that if a referendum can be pushed back beyond the next Scottish elections in 2021, it may not happen at all.

After all, pressure on the SNP's domestic agenda is already mounting, and both [Ruth Davidson](#) and [David Mundell](#) have

Indeed with the exception of a finance bill needed to keep the lights on it's now been more than a year since the Scottish Parliament actually passed a law.

Third, should such optimism be misplaced then unionists need space to build and road-test the next pro-Britain campaign. Because one of the few things veterans of Better Together seem to agree on is that it should be nothing like Better Together.

The [Spectator](#) has some news on this front, although it isn't heartening: apparently the skeletal campaign has the interim name 'New Direction', and is considering hiring Andrew Cooper as its pollster.

With Labour determined not to get involved in the main cross-party campaign (they'll probably float around on the fringes advocating whatever split-the-difference panacea is calling itself 'federalism' that year), it's almost a certainty that the net campaign will be dominated by Tories.

That's not the handicap it was – both May and Davidson poll well in Scotland – but it will [take time to build a campaign](#) around such new and unexpected foundations as a large and relatively popular Conservative opposition in Holyrood.

It would be a fatal error, however, simply to recreate an ersatz *Stronger In*. All the Scottish unionist leaders may have campaigned for it, but that's still no reason to copy a loser.

Welsh Labour MP renounces devolution

Ann Clwyd, the long-serving MP for Cynon Valley, has declared that her long-

standing support for devolution to Wales “was wrong”, [according to ITV](#).

In her new autobiography, *Rebel with a Cause*, she claims to have been “bitterly disappointed” by the Welsh Assembly’s record – despite Labour having run it either alone or in coalition since its inception.

Clwyd points out something that we have previously [highlighted in this column](#): how the devolved government is so thin-skinned that it tries to present criticism of its record as an insult against Wales, thereby preventing the spread of good ideas that was meant to be one of devolution’s boons.

Her complaints about the Welsh party’s dismissive treatment of critical MPs also sheds a new light on Carwyn Jones’ comments of last week about [how little UK Labour ‘interferes’ with him](#).

[Calling Conservatives: New public appointments announced. Housing Ombudsman – and more](#)

Four years ago, the TaxPayers’ Alliance reported that “in the last year, five times more Labour people were appointed to public bodies than Tories”.

Since then, the figures have varied, and some Conservative members or supporters have been selected to fill important posts.

Nonetheless, it remains the case that, since it took office in 2010, our Party has punched beneath its weight when it comes to public appointments. One of the reasons seems to be that Tories simply don’t apply in the same number as Labour supporters.

To help remedy this, every fortnight we put up links to some of the main public appointments vacancies, so that qualified Conservatives might be aware of the opportunities presented.

Department of Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy – [Small Business Commissioner](#)

“We are seeking to appoint the UK’s first Small Business Commissioner. This is a new statutory role covering the UK and established under provisions within the Enterprise Act 2016. The Small Business Commissioner will enable small businesses to resolve payment disputes with their larger customers and avoid future issues by encouraging a culture change in how businesses deal

with each other. They will provide general advice and guidance to small businesses to prevent disputes occurring in the first place, direct them to existing support and help them resolve their complaints about payment issues.”

Time: Full-time.

Remuneration: £120,000-£130,000 per annum.

Closes: 27 March

UK Research & Innovation – [Board Members](#)

“The UKRI Board will be expected to support the set-up of the organisation, providing clear strategic direction and oversight, promoting the importance of UK Research and Innovation and supporting the senior leadership team of the organisation to embed new ways of working across UKRI... As well as the above requirements which would be expected for all UKRI Board Members, there are specific roles on the Board that will require additional expertise, and a larger time commitment to UKRI.”

Time: 20 days per annum.

Remuneration: £9,180 per annum, plus £459 per diem for extra days.

Closes: 31 March

Intellectual Property Office – [Chair of the Steering Board](#)

“The Intellectual Property Office Steering Board is responsible for advising the CEO and Minister on the overall direction and policies of the IPO. It ensures the IPO delivers on its strategic priorities and that resources are allocated effectively for their delivery. The Steering Board also regularly reviews the management and performance of the IPO and ensures high standards of corporate governance are maintained at all times. The role of Chair is an important one and demands effective strategic leadership of the Board and the ability to speak on its behalf. The Chair will work closely with the full-time Chief Executive, who is the IPO’s Accounting Officer.”

Time: 22 days per annum.

Remuneration: £450 per diem up to £10,000 per annum, plus “reasonable expenses”.

Closes: 31 March

UK Hydrographics Office – [Independent Non-Executive Director \(Digital\)](#)

“The UKHO Board meets regularly to review business performance and progress, ensure good governance and to consider the strategy to move the business forward. Fellow non-executive board members bring a variety of experiences and this appointment complements that range of skills. You will provide expertise to consider and challenge the technological information and knowledge management aspects of our complex, challenging and niche business. The navigation market is undergoing major changes to its international regulatory model, the global maritime economy and the level of competition in provision of data is escalating.”

Time: 30 days per annum.

Remuneration: £18,000 per annum plus expenses.

Closes: 31 March

Independent Monitoring Board – [National Chair](#)

“We are looking for an outstanding individual to lead the IMB operation through a period of internal reform and change; and at a time when strengthened independent scrutiny is an important part of the Government’s prison safety and reform programme.

The recent White Paper on Prison Safety and Reform set out plans to ‘strengthen the governance arrangements and accountability for IMBs, to support them in providing high quality scrutiny’ and the successful candidate will work closely with the Deputy Director IMB Secretariat lead to put the new governance arrangements and processes in place.”

Time: Eight days per month.

Remuneration: £400 per diem plus expenses.

Closes: 03 April

Central Arbitration Committee – [Chair](#)

“The CAC is an independent statutory authority with specific functions relating to trade unions and employers. The most significant function of the CAC is adjudicating on the recognition and de-recognition of trade unions for collective bargaining in the workplace. This is carried out by applying the underpinning UK trade union recognition legislation when considering a union’s application for collective bargaining in a workplace, whilst seeking agreement between a union and the employer where possible. The incoming Chair will also set the strategic direction of the CAC by monitoring developments in employment law, reviewing the CAC’s case work and its performance, and identifying risks and succession planning.”

Time: One day per week.

Remuneration: £25,357 per annum (full-time equivalent), annual increases.

Closes: 10 April

Marine Management Organisation – [Chair](#)

“The non-executive Chair of the MMO will lead the Board, set the overall strategic operational direction of the MMO, ensure good governance and with the Board, hold the Executive to account. The Chair will be responsible for: providing effective leadership and strategic direction to develop a cohesive and focused Board which recognises the need to work collaboratively with the Defra group, wider Government, other delivery bodies and stakeholders to deliver Government objectives effectively and efficiently...”

Time: Eight days per month.

Remuneration: £40,459 per annum.

Closes: 18 April

Department for Communities and Local Government – [Housing Ombudsman](#)

“The Housing Ombudsman has responsibility for investigating complaints against social landlords in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman Scheme. Housing is an important part of everyone’s lives and issues relating to our homes can have a huge emotional impact. The Housing Ombudsman plays an important role in ensuring the fair resolution of disputes, aiming to resolve problems quickly and efficiently. Rented housing plays a vital role in the nation’s housing and we are keen to see that tenants experience good standards of service regardless of whether their landlord is a local authority, housing association or private landlord.”

Time: Full time.

Remuneration: Up to £120,000 per annum.

Closes: 23 April

[Newslinks for Wednesday 29th March 2017](#)

Brexit Day 1) May signed the letter yesterday. Today we begin to leave



“Shortly after 4.30pm yesterday, Mrs May signed a letter notifying the European Council of Britain’s intention to leave the EU. Once the letter is handed over today, two years of talks will begin on the terms of withdrawal allowed under Article 50 of the Lisbon treaty. Mrs May sat in the cabinet room at Downing Street beneath a portrait of Sir Robert Walpole, the first prime minister, as she signed...The prime minister will address the cabinet at 8am today before travelling to the Commons to outline her negotiating strategy. Last night she began a diplomatic charm offensive to lay the ground for what allies admit will be gruelling and often fractious talks.” – [The Times \(£\)](#)

Editorials:

- A “golden chance” to reform the state – [Daily Telegraph](#)
- This represents more than Britain’s “biggest diplomatic challenge” – [The Times \(£\)](#)
- We are “barking on a fraught and difficult course” – [Guardian](#)
- This is the “most momentous day in modern British history” – [The Sun](#)

Comment:

- Hail, festal day! – Jacob Rees Mogg, [Daily Telegraph](#)
- Happy Article 50! – Quentin Letts, [Daily Mail](#)
- The job is done – Douglas Carswell, [The Sun](#)
- What I imagine the letter said – Tom Peck, [Independent](#)
- Voters should get the last word – Tim Farron, [Guardian](#)
- The time frame is “unrealistic” – Gina Miller, [Independent](#)
- The choice we face – Gordon Brown, [FT](#)
- There’s “nothing to fear” – Ashley Fox, [Daily Express](#)

>Today: ToryDiary: [A truly historic moment. Today we start the process of leaving the EU.](#)

Brexit Day 2) May to talk of “fierce determination” to get best deal

“Theresa May will call on Britons to put their Brexit disagreements behind them and join forces on the “momentous journey” to freedom from the European Union. On the day she formally sets Brexit in motion by triggering Article 50, the Prime Minister will lay out her “fierce determination” to get the right deal for “every single person in this country”. On Tuesday night, with a Union flag by her side and beneath a portrait of Robert Walpole, Britain’s first prime minister, Mrs May sat at the Cabinet table and signed the historic letter to give notice of Britain’s decision to leave the EU. On Wednesday it will be hand-delivered to Donald Tusk, president of the European Council, and when he opens it, the clock will start ticking on two years of negotiations to agree the terms of Britain’s withdrawal.”

>Today: MPs etc: [May’s Article 50 statement: “Now that the decision has been made to leave the EU, it is time to come together.”](#)

Brexit Day 3) On addressing Commons she will “aim to strike a note of reconciliation”



“Theresa May will call on the British people to unite as she triggers article 50, beginning a two-year process that will see the UK leave the European Union and sever a political relationship that has lasted 44 years... May will aim to strike a note of reconciliation when she addresses the Commons, claiming this is the time for Brexiters and remainers to “come together” after holding an early morning meeting of her cabinet. “When I sit around the negotiating table in the months ahead, I will represent every person in the whole United Kingdom – young and old, rich and poor, city, town, country and all the villages and hamlets in between. And yes, those EU nationals who have made this country their home,” she will say.” – [Guardian](#)

- She says “it’s time to come together” – [The Sun](#)

- Remainers must accept this is it – Raphael Behr, [Guardian](#)

Brexit Day 4) She speaks of commitment to EU nationals

“Theresa May has vowed to represent all sections of the country – including EU nationals – as she triggers Article 50 and begins an arduous two-year negotiation to sever ties to Brussels.... “When I sit around the negotiating table in the months ahead, I will represent every person in the whole United Kingdom – young and old, rich and poor, city, town, country and all the villages and hamlets in between,” she said. “And yes, those EU nationals who have made this country their home.” – [Independent](#)

- Barnier hopes to get agreement on residency rights by end of year – [Guardian](#)

Brexit Day 5) Dominic Raab: We will prepare for all outcomes



“Today, Britain begins negotiations to leave the EU. We start with economic self-confidence and political ambition. But, the first year will be hard going. The EU didn’t want us to leave, and Brussels has other things on its mind. To give ourselves the strongest chance of the best deal, we need to be patient, constructive and big-hearted – without blinking. ... I appreciate some will be anxious during the process. By definition, negotiations involve uncertainty. But, outside the Westminster village, polls show the public strongly support this vision. A recent National Centre for Social Research study found 88 per cent of people support our free trade strategy, while 68 per cent want to end open-door immigration – including 58 per cent of Remain voters.” – [Daily Telegraph](#)

- Heseltine, Mandelson, and Cable call for May to drop “no deal” option – [Independent](#)
- Wales stands to lose out – David Williamson, [Wales Online](#)

Brexit Day 6) Daniel Finkelstein: Here’s how to negotiate

“In 1912, with Theodore Roosevelt in the middle of a battle to return as president of the United States, his campaign manager realised that the picture of the candidate that adorned his literature had been reproduced without the permission of the photographer. If the man sought redress,

copyright law might allow him as much as \$3 million. Curtains for Teddy. So his manager thought carefully and sent a telegram... What Teddy Roosevelt's campaign manager understood, however, is that it's just as important to get inside the head of the people on the other side in a negotiation as it is to know what you want." – [The Times \(£\)](#)

>Today: Henry Newman in Comment: [Sequencing and money. The first big challenges to the Brexit negotiation.](#)

More Brexit

- Pro-leave MPs refuse to sign “negative” report – [FT](#)
- The process “continues to pitch senior political figures against each other” – [Guardian](#)
- Tory MP says “few dare to question” the Brexit orthodoxy – [Guardian](#)
- Farage says he'll emigrate if Brexit doesn't work out – [Independent](#)
- Remainers vow to fight on – [FT](#)
- We need to make concessions – [FT](#)

>Yesterday: ToryDiary: [The remains of Remain still don't understand Leave voters or Brexit – particularly on immigration](#)

May talks of “ambitious” Gulf trade deal

The Prime Minister made the announcement as she prepares to trigger Article 50 tomorrow which will start two years of negotiations to leave the European Union (EU). She also welcomed a commitment of £5billion of investment from Qatar as a “bold statement of continued confidence” in the British economy. Speaking at the UK-Qatar Business Investment Forum in Birmingham, she said a “global Britain” would be the “most committed and most passionate” advocate for free trade anywhere in the world. – [Daily Express](#)

Sturgeon wins Holyrood vote for independence rerun



“Nicola Sturgeon has won a key Holyrood vote on her plans for a second independence referendum, triggering accusations from UK ministers that her demands are premature. Sturgeon won by a 10-vote majority after the Scottish Greens backed her proposals to formally request from the UK government the powers to stage a fresh independence vote at around the time Britain leaves the EU, in spring 2019... The vote, which split the Scottish parliament cleanly between pro- and anti-independence parties, deepened the dispute between the two governments over both the need for and the timing of the vote.” – [Guardian](#)

- It passed 69-59 – [Independent](#)
- After a three-hour argument – [Daily Express](#)
- This “sets up a clash” with Downing Street – [FT](#)
- Westminster “digs its heels in” – [Herald](#)

Comment:

- The relationship between May and Sturgeon – Alan Cochrane, [Daily Telegraph](#)
- Is it all about legs? – John Crace, [Guardian](#)
- Yes. But it’s been blown out of proportion – Sarah Vine, [Daily Mail](#)

Accounts Committee to say DfE is “jeopardising” schools with its “lack” of financial awareness

“The Department for Education is suffering a “collective delusion” about the financial pressures facing schools, MPs will suggest today. The department risks jeopardising the education of a generation of children and “does not seem to understand the pressures that schools are already under”, according to a report by the public accounts committee. Officials are poorly placed to act swiftly if cuts threaten quality, it adds. Schools will have to find efficiency and procurement savings of £3 billion by 2019-20 and the report, which is being published today, concludes that staffing levels will suffer.” – [The Times \(£\)](#)

- DfE launches own property company – [FT](#)
- GCSE reforms criticised – [The Sun](#)

More Westminster

- Standards Committee calls for MPs to be treated as criminals if they don’t declare interests – [Daily Telegraph](#)
- Philip May: business-speak translator... – [Daily Telegraph](#)
- ...and Europhile? [FT](#)
- Feldman criticised for taking paid strategy role – [The Times \(£\)](#)
- Brokenshire says NI direct rule “still an option” – [Guardian](#)
- Committee criticises DfID for ending aid programmes – [Guardian](#)
- Emergency debate granted over disability cuts – [Independent](#)

>Today: Rebecca Lowe Coulson’s column: [Why government should focus on reducing poverty – not increasing equality](#)

Trump claiming presidential immunity in sexual contact case



“President Donald Trump’s lawyers will argue that he has presidential immunity from a defamation case brought by a former contestant on his reality TV show The Apprentice who accused him of unwanted sexual contact. The lawyers said in a state Supreme Court filing on Monday that they will formally ask for a dismissal or a suspension of the January claims by Summer Zervos, until he leaves office. They said the constitution provides immunity for Mr Trump from being sued in state court while he is president. The lawyers said their position is supported by a long line of US Supreme Court cases requiring courts to show deference to the president and his schedule.” – [Daily Telegraph](#)

- Krushner’s having a “crisis” too – David Usborne, [Independent](#)

News in Brief

[A truly historic moment. Today we start the process of leaving the EU.](#)

The word “historic” is overused in politics, but today truly merits the title. At 12.30pm, Sir Tim Barrow will deliver a letter from Theresa May to Donald Tusk, the President of the European Council.

In those pages, the Prime Minister will use the power vested in her by Act of Parliament to inform the European Union that the United Kingdom is triggering Article 50, and wishes to leave the organisation. The two-year process of negotiating Brexit will begin.

So begins the last act of our nation’s turbulent membership of the Eurofederalist project.

What was pitched as a Common Market but became a nascent superstate has split a faultline through British politics since the 1970s – the EU debate generated noisy campaigning, quiet deliberation, divisions between parties and divisions within parties, the fall of two Prime Ministers and the fatal emasculation of a third. It brought us close to losing our currency, impinged heavily on our sovereign right to democratically govern ourselves, drove millions of voters to disillusionment and split first Labour and then the Conservatives. From Margaret Thatcher’s flag jumper to her speech in Bruges, and from John Major’s excoriation of the Maastricht “bastards” to Nigel Farage’s insurgency wearing “fruitcakes and loonies” as a badge of pride, it has the unusual distinction of being an incredibly dry and technical topic on paper which evokes almost unparalleled passions in practice.

It was a Conservative government, under Edward Heath, which took us into what became the EU, and it is a Conservative government, under May, that will now take us out again. This is an outcome which ConservativeHome has supported

for many years, and which I have supported for even longer than that. For those – of all parties and none – who campaigned to leave the EU during the dark days in which it was dismissed as a fringe interest, today begins the process of making those innumerable years of work worthwhile. Pounding the pavements, gathering in small meeting places above tired pubs, sticking at it when all seemed lost, and, yes, “banging on about Europe” took determination and belief from many people. Few of them ever expected any recognition for their work, and even fewer ever received it.

They deserve a moment of congratulation. Not just because they won, but because they have demonstrated that our democracy and society is still true to the principles of which we like to boast. People *can* change the course of history. Ordinary people *can* make the powerful do what they demand if they gather enough support. Persuading others *can* produce fundamental change peacefully. Democracy is real, not a theory, a mirage or a confidence trick.

Two other groups deserve our thoughts today.

The first are those who voted Remain. [As I wrote on 26th June last year](#), many of them feel an understandable grief at their defeat on something about which they care very deeply. For some, that experience of defeat will be made more, not less, stinging by its rarity in their lives. We should appreciate the reality of that feeling, recognise its power, and pay credit to the many, many former Remainers who have struggled to do what a democratic society demands: to accept and adjust and move on after an outcome you did not want. The shrinking minority who still hope that the referendum outcome can be ignored must be disagreed with, and must not get their way, but their former allies deserve our appreciation for not following them down the unhealthy route of denial.

The second group are those who voted Leave. The 17,410,742 people who, together, formed the largest vote for any idea, person or party in British democratic history. They were assailed from every commanding height by dire warnings, and often derided both harshly and unfairly, but they thought the issues through for themselves and stuck to what they believed was right.

Among them were an estimated 2.8 million people who normally do not vote, but recognised the importance of the moment and broke the habits of many years. They had given up faith in voting as a way to change things, but they gave it one more go. Today, many people who had thought themselves powerless will be watching as the most powerful people in the land begin to do as they asked. The power of that moment to convince such people that democracy does work and that their vote does matter should not be underestimated, the opportunity must be taken to keep them engaged, and the responsibility to honour that instruction must not be denied.

This is not the end of the process. Even leaving aside those trying to wish the referendum result away, there are many more fervent debates and hard decisions yet to come. The job of unpicking the uneasy grafting of EU law into British law will be vast and complex, as will the negotiations on our future relationship, both of which are about to begin. People will disagree, as is their right and responsibility, probably many times; referendum-time

alliances will break; new relationships will form, and fall again; and the wheels of our politics will turn on, eating up problems and churning out answers.

That, in itself, is an already visible benefit of Brexit. Our Parliament, and our wider democracy, has begun to flush with new life even before we finally escape the EU. The Article 50 Bill – just 137 lean words – had Parliamentarians energetically pitching clashing cases about fundamental principle at one another. Even more rarely, many voters followed the Westminster back-and-forth in detail.

As we settle on our terms of exit, and then decide what our country will look like after it leaves, voters and politicians alike will regain true control of all the essential laws of our nation for the first time in 45 years. At each election from then on, we will democratically set the policies that affect every aspect of our lives and which will shape our nation's future. This is just the beginning.