

Nothing Great About Britain's EU Departure



After another week of mayhem in London, a potential Brexit deal looks set to be rejected by English MPs on both sides of the House of Commons along with, unsurprisingly, the DUP. To see our closest neighbour and largest trading partner entering into self-destruction, with both major political parties riven by in-fighting, is incredibly sad, and should be a source of real concern on this side of the Irish Sea. If some of us are laughing at the goings-on in Britain, we should think again. In times past, talk of Britain coughing and Ireland contracting a cold was regularly commented upon. As the March 2019 deadline looms, it would appear that something far worse could be in store for Ireland than a mere cold.

The notion that Britain should be punished by exiting the European Union has never been in Ireland's best interests, and it's a shame that a 'them and us' culture has re-emerged, with such a drum being most loudly beaten by Tory Brexiteers and the DUP. It is not in Britain's long-term interests to lose friends and alienate people, and while no-one would pretend that the European Union is perfect in its current guise, the logic in leaving such an extensive trading bloc is still difficult to fathom. And given the ongoing mess, anyone suggesting that the UK will be better off out of Europe is perpetuating a clear falsehood. There remains the prospect of a chaotic, unresolved state of affairs at the UK/Ireland border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, in addition to a plethora of problems at Dover in particular.

It's difficult to gauge how significant the schism between the Ulster Farmers Union (UFU – in addition to Northern Irish business representatives) and the DUP will be in the long term. However, that this particular rope bridge has shown signs of tethering is, at the very least, worth paying heed to and may come with some political consequence come the next Westminster election. Said UFU Chief Executive, Wesley Aston: "We want to make sure we avoid a no-deal situation. No deal for Northern Ireland agri-food and farming in particular would be absolutely disastrous and we have made that patently clear over this last while."

There is general sympathy in Ireland for Theresa May's predicament given that she has clearly acted to protect the interests of both Ireland and Northern Ireland in the draft deal. She proposed that the UK should stay in the Customs Union rather than face a chaotic exit with World Trade Organisation rules alone in application, which could well lead to a blocking of ports and a break in the food and medicine supply chain.

Yet, mystifying from this perspective, the British civil servants who crafted the deal with the EU are being condemned by the Brexiteers who have yet to offer any meaningful or practical solution to a mess made manifest by their referendum hyperbole. Back in the real world, which even the change of Daily Mail editorship appears to recognise, Ireland needs to hold its nerve, champion the friendship with the UK and internalise our own giggles at the mess the Brexiteers have unleashed on a misled public. A good deal for the UK is also a good deal for Ireland and we must not lose sight of that.