

AFFAIRS OF THE NATION



TRUMP 'HATES' WIND ENERGY

THE EU elections may have been a bad day for the planet, with climate disinformation helping the far right take seats across Europe, but the vista is altogether more appalling in the US, where Donald Trump has casually asked the fossil fuel industry for a \$1bn "donation" in return for undoing all of Joe Biden's climate measures if elected.

The *Washington Post* reported that the US's most famous felon requested the dig-out during a dinner he hosted for 20 oil executives. Meanwhile, industry lobbyists are busy drafting executive orders for Trump to sign if he wins in November.

Putting humanity's fate in the hands of profit-seeking executives sounds like something only a deranged narcissist would do. But governments have been doing it for years –



Donald Trump

making a high-stakes bet that private investors will lead the transition to renewable energy.

"We are living through perhaps the biggest policy experiment in human history, relying primarily on the private sector to end the climate crisis," says Brett Christophers, author of *The Price is Wrong: Why Capitalism Won't Save the Planet*. "But this experiment... may cost us our planetary future."

The most crucial question in the race to avert climate collapse is if the shift to renewable electricity generation can happen quickly enough. For years we've been told that when renewables were cheaper than fossil fuels, the market would kick in and asset managers would pour money into clean energy.

Renewables are now much cheaper than fossil fuels but the second part of the equation has not materialised. Renewable energy is growing but figures released last week show that global fossil fuel consumption reached a record high in 2023.

Christophers' book convincingly shows that profitability, rather than price, attracts investors. Fossil fuels guarantee returns of over 15% compared with just 5-8% for wind and solar.

As Shell CEO Wael Sawan has put it: "Our shareholders deserve to see us going after strong returns... Absolutely we want to go for lower and lower carbon but it has to be profitable."

Last year the then head of BP, Kerryman Bernard Looney, was similarly blunt on the transition to renewables: "If we see value,

we'll do it. If we don't, we won't."

There you have it; we'd like to not destroy the world but our shareholders come first.

Is there a way out? Massive state spending. Only the state, Christophers argues, has "both the financial wherewithal and the logistical and administrative capacity" to deliver the vast investments needed.

Trump reportedly told the oilmen at his dinner that he "hates" wind energy. His extreme climate denialism is itself a valuable return on decades of industry investment – in propaganda.

NICHOLAS ASHLEY-COOPER, 12th Earl of Shaftesbury, has never lived in Ireland but has managed to hang on to a colonial inheritance – ownership of the bed of Lough Neagh. This entitles him to royalties from the industrial dredging of sand, a practice environmentalists say is one factor in the ecological disaster at the lake. The earl insists this link is unproven.

Campaigners also argue his ownership is a barrier to managing the lake to protect it from various threats, especially intensive agriculture. This week he appeared to succumb to pressure on ownership when he suddenly announced he "would like" to transfer it to "a charity or community trust model".

There's a big difference between 'would like' and actually handing it over. His 3,000-word statement listed numerous caveats and concerns – the gist of which seemed to be that the natives can't be trusted to manage the lake. This may take some time.



DUP UNDER PRESSURE

DUP PARTY spokesmen (there is a dearth of women) are displaying a distinct lack of confidence in interviews about next week's general election. The party is nervous because, although opinion polls show they retain their position as the main unionist party, a Queen's University poll on June 21 shows that many unionist voters will only vote for a candidate opposing the Windsor Framework, which operates the Irish Sea border. Furthermore, 45% of DUP, UUP and TUV voters rank opposing the Windsor Framework as a more pressing concern than the cost-of-living crisis.

Gavin Robinson MP, the new DUP leader, has certainly taken this set of priorities on board but he is handicapped by the fact that he was one of the negotiators of the deal his party struck with the British government to return to Stormont in February. Robinson now admits former leader Jeffrey Donaldson "oversold" the deal but he has been tied in knots in TV interviews since Robinson himself joined Donaldson in claiming the deal ended the Irish Sea border – "zero checks, zero paperwork".

DUP canvassers are being hit on the

doorsteps with objections to the 'Donaldson deal'. It's clear the party believes there will be consequences but how serious is difficult to predict.

Robinson himself is threatened, facing Alliance leader Naomi Long in East Belfast. In 2019 he was only 1,819 votes ahead of her. This time, a TUV candidate resolutely opposed to the 'Donaldson deal' is also in the field and will certainly take votes from Robinson. However, unlike 2019, there is also an SDLP candidate pointlessly contesting the solidly unionist seat who will take votes from Long. That will probably do enough damage to hand the seat to Robinson, although with his majority reduced to the hundreds.

The most vulnerable DUP seat is South Antrim, another solidly unionist seat that has always returned either a UUP or DUP candidate. Again, there is a TUV candidate but the only question is whether the DUP's almost invisible Paul Girvan MP will retain the seat against a strong challenge from the UUP's Robin Swann.

As health minister during the pandemic Swann was the north's most popular minister. He regained the health portfolio when the executive returned in February but has resigned to fight South Antrim. The money is on Swann to take the seat from the DUP, with TUV votes helping him gain a decent majority.

On the nationalist side – although they wouldn't admit it – there's a degree of complacency and no major upsets are envisaged. The SDLP's Colum Eastwood

will retain his Foyle seat over Sinn Féin, but with a reduced majority, and Claire Hanna will keep South Belfast, guaranteed by SF stepping aside. Number crunchers reckon that SF's John Finucane will increase his majority in North Belfast, helped by boundary changes.

The only real threat to a SF seat is the ever marginal Fermanagh/South Tyrone. In 2019 SF's Michelle Gildernew had a majority of 57 (sic). For this election, SF has pulled off a coup by fielding Pat Cullen, former

general secretary of the British nursing union, the RCN. From Carrickmore in Tyrone, Cullen is popular and during the UK nurses' strike in 2023 had a very high media profile in negotiations with British ministers.

Cullen is facing the UUP's Diana Armstrong, the daughter of former UUP leader Harry West. Alliance and the SDLP have fielded candidates and Alliance may take some votes from Armstrong. Cullen's popularity will ensure the SDLP's presence

does minimal damage. The prediction is Cullen will increase the SF majority to around 500.

Overall, it looks like SF will take seven seats, as will the DUP, with the SDLP taking two, and one apiece for Alliance and the UUP. Still, events can derail predictions. Donaldson appears in court on July 3, the day before the election. Also that day the Parades Commission will adjudicate on a provocative Orange march past Ardoyne on 'the Twalf'. Who knows what effect either event will have.



Gavin Robinson