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TUV FACT SHEET

The facts behind how Martin McGuinness could become First Minister

Under the Belfast Agreement the First Minister and deputy First Minister were elected jointly on a cross-community vote, thus affording Unionism and Nationalism a veto, whereby Unionists could insist on the First Minister coming from the biggest tradition.

The legislation flowing from St Andrews changed this and provided that instead the First Minister would come from the biggest party, thus opening the door to a Sinn Fein First Minister being foisted on a Unionist majority in the Assembly. The Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Bill was only introduced by the government after its contents were settled at secret proximity talks between the DUP and Sinn Fein in London in November 2006, talks from which any possible dissenters within the DUP were excluded.

Peter Robinson's fingerprints are all over this legislative change because he thought it would be terribly clever to have the threat of a Sinn Fein First Minister as a means of coercing unionists into voting DUP. But, the real test of the DUP's attitude to this dastardly change is found in what they said and did when Parliament debated the Bill.

Jim Allister, then a DUP Party Officer, had exposed the danger with this statement on 17 November 2006:

[MEP comments on St. Andrews Bill](#)

www.jimallister.org/default.asp?blogID=541

Comment from DUP MEP Jim Allister on the St. Andrews Bill 17 November 2006

"The St Andrews Bill contains a political bombshell for Unionism. Bad as it was, the Belfast Agreement, at least, guaranteed that a unionist majority in the Assembly would always result in a Unionist First Minister. This Bill (Clause 8) changes that. It now affords the prize of the top office to the Party with the most seats. Thus, in future, we could have a Sinn Fein First Minister, in spite of a Unionist majority in the House, if they were the party with the greatest number of seats.

This is monstrous and a gross affront to democracy. I cannot comprehend how any Unionist could, in consequence, regard this Bill, quite apart from its other deficiencies, as a suitable route to acceptable devolution. The ticking time bomb of a Sinn Fein First Minister being foisted on a Unionist Assembly, is something which should unite every Unionist in opposition. I trust it will."

Sadly, when the Bill came before Parliament not one DUP MP spoke out against this change. Here are the facts:-

1. Debate in the **Commons** on 21st November 2006 was deliberately curtailed by a business motion which restricted debate to 6 hours. This business motion was nodded through **with no objection from the DUP**.
2. There was an opportunity to force a vote on the Bill at the end of the 2nd reading, but the **DUP did not do so**. Moreover, though several DUP MPs spoke during the 2nd reading debate **not one of them uttered even one word of objection to the change over the First Ministership!**
3. Likewise, after the committee stage the Bill was given its 3rd reading on the nod, again **without a single DUP objection**. There was ample opportunity to force a vote against the Bill, given its inclusion of this obnoxious change within Clause 8, but the opportunity deliberately was not taken. Why? Because **clearly the DUP MPs were content with the change**.
4. In preparation for the committee stage MPs had the opportunity to table amendments to each and every clause, **but no DUP MP tabled any amendment to the infamous Clause 8, signifying their contentment with its contents**.
5. When the Bill went to the **House of Lords** on 22nd November 2006 an UUP amendment to remove the provision whereby the First Minister would come from the biggest party was debated and voted upon. Whereas two DUP peers, Lords Morrow and Browne (Baroness Paisley absent) voted in favour of the amendment, when that vote was lost and the original and objectionable Clause 8 was voted upon, **the DUP peers voted in favour of it**, while UUP peers voted against. Thus, in the House of Lords **DUP peers actually voted in favour of the Clause in the Bill which permits Martin McGuinness to become First Minister!**

So, it is crystal clear that the DUP was complicit in permitting the legislative change which allows McGuinness to be foisted as First Minister on a Unionist majority in the Assembly. How the DUP sold the Unionist title deeds to the office of First Minister is one of the most shameful escapades of roll-over unionism.

So, when in a future election the DUP tries to play the fear card over their partner becoming First Minister, their hypocrisy will be vigorously exposed and they will be reminded that they were complicit and desirous of this appalling change. There is no point in pretending outrage over McGuinness switching into Peter's seat, when it was Peter himself which thought this change in the law so politically expedient.

But this issue throws up questions the DUP must answer. Not just the question, every time the DUP raises the spectre, of why not one of their MPs voted against it, but will they serve under McGuinness? Is their love of power, any power, so great that they will subject themselves and Unionism to such humiliation? Principle will never save us from the DUP propping up IRA/Sinn Fein in government, but maybe pride will.

For Commons debate see <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm061121/debtext/61121-0004.htm#0611215600001>

For Lords debate see <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200607/ldhansrd/text/61122-0002.htm#0611224200002>