

Traditional Unionism

In the aftermath of the Dromore by-election Jim Allister sets out the core values of his Traditional Unionist Voice and his hopes for the future of the party

▶ **T**he purpose of Traditional Unionist Voice is to deliver what it says on the tin: a voice for tens of thousands of unionists alienated by the spectacle of unrepentant terrorists at the heart of government and disenfranchised by the fact that both the other unionist parties are now enthusiastically working and implementing the Belfast Agreement.

As the 10th anniversary of the Belfast Agreement approaches, if the DUP was behaving honestly, it would join in the celebrations, evidencing the same joy as they display in partnering Sinn Fein in government. Make no mistake. Part of the DUP's volte face is that they have fully accepted the architecture and structures of the Belfast Agreement, and, very importantly, its all-Ireland trajectory. The tinkering at St Andrews did nothing to alter any of this.

Fundamental to TUV's *raison d'être* at this time is utter rejection of the undemocratic monstrosity that lies at the heart of our present Belfast Agreement devolution, mandatory coalition. Our mission is to not only rid our government of unrepentant terrorists, but also banish the vehicle of

mandatory coalition which put them there.

Mandatory coalition is incapable of democratic defence or reform. At a stroke it robs the electorate of both the fundamental right ever to vote a party out of government and the essential right to have a vibrant opposition. Devolution under the Belfast Agreement is built on these twin undemocratic pillars, buttressed by the dysfunctional nonsense of the joint office of First Ministers. Embarrassed by its excesses, unionist politicians publicly rail against mandatory coalition, but privately they did little to end it. At St Andrews, it seems, Ian Junior's constituency wish list got more attention. The promised review will perish on the fact that



The Dromore by election

The prospects of Jim Allister's new party have been greatly boosted by their impressive performance in the Dromore by election last month. Though they came only third in first preference votes in a strongly unionist local constituency, behind both the DUP and the UUP, the fact that more of their transfers went to the UUP rather than the DUP was sufficient to deny the DUP the seat. These TUV transfers, presumably a deliberate decision to punish the DUP, along with those from other parties gave a narrow victory to the UUP. The added fact that the turnout was relatively high for a local government by election at 39% has clearly worried the strategists in the DUP:

| Party | First Preference | Transfers | Final count |
|----------------------|------------------|--|-------------|
| DUP | 069 | | 1505 |
| Traditional Unionist | 739 | to DUP 327 | |
| UUP | 912 | to UUP 377 | 1571 |
| Alliance | 357 | total final transfers from all other parties | |
| SDLP | 290 | | |
| Sinn Fein | 350 | to UUP 282 to DUP 111 | |
| Greens | 59 | | |

either community can veto its removal. With no Party willing to voluntarily coalesce with IRA/Sinn Fein, they can be relied upon to exercise that veto. So it will stay as long as Belfast Agreement devolution stays.

Trimble-like – or Trimble-light – the DUP parrot, ‘What’s the alternative?’ This is as much of a see-through a fig leaf in 2008 as it was in 1998. There is always an alternative to doing wrong. Here are some to begin with – each compatible with the sanctity of our constitutional position as an integral part of the UK.

In devolutionary terms, voluntary coalition is the proper and acceptable route to shared government, just as it is in the rest of the UK. No party has sufficient electoral support, nor likely to have, to form a government on its own, so a coalition is inevitable. Traditional Unionist Voice has no difficulty with shared government. It’s unrepentant terrorists in government we object to, not democratic nationalists. Indeed, in a voluntary coalition additional safeguards like weighted majorities on sensitive issues are possible. Thus those who can command a majority, with a cross community component if

necessary, should form the government, with the remainder in effective opposition, capable of presenting an alternative government at the next election. Thus the DUP can enter government with Sinn Fein if they wish, but, at least they’d have to do it openly and honestly, and the electorate, if they wished, could replace them at subsequent elections – just as the voters of Scotland and Wales can do.

Some say devolution is unattainable without Sinn Fein. I disagree. But if that is so, then for me it raises the fundamental question of why then we’d want such rigged devolution. Unpalatable as it might be to those living off our present bloated Assembly, there can be good government without full-fledged devolution. The present regime has hardly covered itself in glory, with Causewaygate, ruination of our education system, broken pledges on a promised huge financial package and no water charging, ministerial resignation, and a dysfunctional OFM/DFM which can’t even agree to rectify the Direct Rule definition of victim to distinguish the innocent from the perpetrators of terror who made them victims.

Legislative devolution, administrative

devolution, even the ‘corporate assembly’ which the DUP once embraced, are all alternatives to the hopelessly flawed devolution of the Chuckle Coalition.

Northern Ireland is a small place of just 1.7m people. Yet now we are one of the most over-governed regions in Europe. There are eleven ministries, when four or five would do. There are 108 MLAs when half the number would be plenty. The tiers of government are exceeded only by the growth industry in Quangos.

With local government due to be reformed, what would be wrong with a single super council at Stormont to administer Province-wide services like health and education, and our laws passed properly at Westminster as befits an integral part of the UK? In nearly a year of devolution we’ve seen nothing novel in Stormont legislation. It wouldn’t do much for the suppliers of government limos or those aspiring to join the ubiquitous ranks of ‘special advisers. But it just might save the taxpayer a lot of unnecessary expenditure, while improving the delivery of services that really matter. Best of all, politically it would deliver us from the unseemly exhibition of a gaggle of unrepentant terrorists jointly ruling over us.

Such a system would be very different from Direct Rule because the super council at Stormont would make pivotal decisions and provide the key direction within its wide ambit of powers. The Stormont council, not the diminished Direct Rule Ministers, would primarily shape the lives of Northern Ireland’s citizens.

Small government is often good government. Government without IRA/Sinn Fein Ministers, whose abiding devotion is to destroy the state over which they govern, would be a definite advance for unionism. Moreover, such certainly fits with traditional unionist values, something which I for one am not ashamed of.

Thus, Traditional Unionist Voice exists to challenge what has been foisted by intrigue and deception on unionist voters, to give hope to those despairing of the abandonment of principle and to articulate a better way forward than government by and with the acolytes of the still-continuing IRA Army Council. ■