

**COMPOSITE MOTION ON DEVOLUTION
TUV CONFERENCE 8TH NOVEMBER 2008
Speech by Keith Harbinson, Traditional Unionist Voice Vice-
Chairman**

Let us be clear from the outset Ladies and Gentlemen Mandatory Coalition has failed. It has been tried, it has failed and it now needs to be confined to history where it belongs.

We constantly hear of the new Northern Ireland grappling to come to terms with its sectarian and divisive past, yet we are made to endure arguably the most divisive and sectarian framework of all, mandatory coalition on a day and daily basis. The very nature of the d'Hondt voting system means that we as voters in Northern Ireland are the only citizens of the United Kingdom who are deprived democracy in our political structures. Under the current system it will not matter how you and I vote as Unionists, we shall still not be able to remove Sinn Fein/IRA from our government, why...because they are guaranteed a return to the joint governmental office as the largest Nationalist party. Ladies and gentlemen this is deprivation of the very lynchpin principle of western democracy.

Democracy however is not the only thing we as citizens of Northern Ireland are being deprived of. We are also being deprived of good and durable government. This is largely down to the fact that as with the man who built his house upon the sand, the current political pantomime that is being played out before our very eyes was predicated on principles that did not recognise democracy, did not recognise the inherent political divisions and did not recognise the majority feeling within the Unionist community. In short, it has no stable foundation on which to deliver success.

Another reason for the current legislative assembly's failure to deliver good government is the fact that it places unrepentant terrorists at the very heart of our government. Incredibly of course some Unionist politicians tell us that Sinn Fein/IRA are fit for government, fit to sit as a joint partner in the running of our country. How hypocritical then that these same Unionist politicians are currently withholding the devolution of policing and justice from them, like matches from a child. Surely if these people are fit to govern hand in hand on every other issue, they should be fit to accept every element of that partnership role. The simple answer of course is ladies and gentlemen that Sinn Fein/IRA are not fit to undertake the role of government in any capacity, in any remit or over any department, and to place the devolved powers of policing and justice into their hands would be every bit as dangerous as the proverbial matches in the hands of children.

Despite the grand claims of their government partners, Sinn Fein/IRA have not bought into the British State, if they had would we have seen the shameful scenes many of us endured first hand last Sunday when we met in support of our brave troops at their homecoming parade. Sinn Fein/IRA as we meet today ladies and gentlemen are still pursuing the same wreckers agenda they always employed. The simple fact of the matter is they do not currently, nor will they ever recognise the constitutional position of Northern Ireland, and the question therefore needs to be asked, if they

don't recognise the Constitutional authority of the country that they seek to sit on the government of, how can they possibly be providing good government? These people are dedicated to the destruction of this country and everything that it represents. This amounts to a personal attack on you and I and our British identity.

Notwithstanding all of this however, what explanation can be provided for the failure of the Executive to meet since mid-June, in a climate that sees Economic and Social deprivation on the rise, unemployment on the rise and our country teetering on the brink of a recession that many predict will hit harder here than the rest of the UK. Well quite simply no one seems to be able to provide us with a coherent response or indeed to accept responsibility. The government partners who so amorously accepted each other at the start now round to blame each other and stalemate ensues whilst the voting public suffers. Is this good government?

Many of the promises made by the Unionist representatives who sit in government have been exposed for the bogus and false declarations many of us knew they were. The reality of non-delivery, which has been exacerbated by the current economic climate, has undermined public confidence in the political process to the extent that many people have reportedly been turned away from ever entering a polling booth again. My plea to them today is simple; please do not measure us all against the failings of others. What we offer you and what we offer the people of Northern Ireland today is a better future, is a chance to have sustainable, durable and hardworking devolved government right here in Northern Ireland. I would ask you to consider what the devolved Assembly has delivered for you since 8th May 2007. I would ask you to look beneath the grand claims of that Assembly as to what has been achieved, and to see them for what they really are. It is nothing more than smoke and mirrors politics. The only conclusion that can be drawn from that assessment when laid bare is that we must seek to have it replaced.

As stated from the outset, Mandatory Coalition has failed, and failed miserably. By bringing an end to mandatory coalition lets seek in these troubled times to bring value for money back into our politics. A voluntary coalition framework will provide democracy, if a government partner is not cutting the mustard, then the ability to remove that underachieving entity from their seat in your government exists, thus ensuring that once there, they are working for the benefit of you the public at all times, and that politicians on all sides are for the first time accountable to all citizens.

It is no surprise that Mandatory Coalition has failed, it stands to reason that whenever two parties who are at least on the facade politically poles apart, it does not matter that it is the will of Westminster or the will of Dublin that this government be formed, and that this government will preside over the successful operation of this country, it has become increasingly clear that it is not the will of the electorate of this country.

The dissolution of the Northern Ireland Assembly is not something that should be feared or avoided at all costs, it is not the backward step that some Unionist politicians portray it to be. It is only by taking this necessary step that we can hope to replace it with something that has the ability to deliver stable government, sustainable government and most importantly value for money government to this country.