

POLITICAL UPDATE ON THE DEVOLUTION OF POLICING AND JUSTICE POWERS.

Under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement Political Powers are slowly being transferred to the Northern Ireland Assembly so that we as a people rule our own administration and the English Parliament have no input.

The transfer of powers was to happen in May 2008 but that did not happen. In November 2008 the D.U.P leader Peter Robinson entered into an agreement with Sinn Fein on a process to allow this to happen. Since then the various elements of that process have been worked through.

Throughout this the D.U.P. consistently said the one remaining issue to be resolved was finance. We have been involved in a lengthy joint negotiation on this issue for some time with Gordon Brown the British Prime Minister. That negotiation is now at an end as Gordon Brown has agreed a sum of one billion pounds. It is now time for the D.U.P. to deliver on their commitments.

Sinn Fein set out to get an agreement on finance to meet the needs of the policing and justice system, to ensure transfer would not impact on the budgets of the other departments and the Sinn Fein officer board has approved the package.

The negotiations have run into difficulties and whilst some progress has been made the D.U.P leader Peter Robinson seems to be dragging his feet. There is an election in May next year and Peter is looking over his shoulder at outside pressure from Jim Allister leader of the new party Traditional Unionist Voice who is opposed to sharing government with Sinn Fein and also internal tension of his party members who are also opposed to power sharing.

The D.U.P has gone to the British Government with a "shopping list" to delay the transfer with issues like orange order parades and the maintaining of the police reserves. They are saying that they want the removal of the current Parades Commission and replace it with another adjudicating body but this will not resolve the parades issues, what will resolve it is discussions between the loyal orders and the nationalist and republican areas which are affected by those parades.

The Ashdown Report talks about the transfer of parading issues and decision making powers to local politicians, what we are saying is that if there is going to be a transfer of parading issues then you have to transfer all responsibilities.

The British, Irish and the U.S governments all support the transfer of powers. The D.U.P and the U.U.P and the P.S.N.I and the unionist community all want this to happen with the exception of Jim Allister T.U.V who is entrenched in bigotry. The D.U.Ps "shopping list of demands" is being used as pre-conditions to block the transfer of powers and if it is not resolved quickly there is a chance that the Stormont Administration might collapse.

The D.U.P and Sinn Fein both accept that neither party will accept that ministry when it is transferred for the first year and that it will probably go to The Alliance Party.

Councillor Angela Nelson