



Assembly Election



Manifesto 2016

Straight talking

Principled politics

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Preface



The dismal failure of Stormont is not something any of us should accept. By your vote on 5th of May you will decide to settle for more of the same or vote for change that you'd notice.

TUV has been the authentic voice of opposition to the shambles and squander of Stormont. Thus, it is the votes for TUV that will register the demand for change.

You've seen in Jim Allister what one determined TUV voice can achieve in the Assembly. Just think of the potential of multiple TUV MLAs.

In this manifesto we not only set out our critique of the present failed arrangements, but we also give our positive vision for a better and more democratic future. A future which we hope will be in the context of a nation freed from the shackles of the EU.

Then, the UK and this devolved region can truly experience a genuine fresh start.

William Ross
TUV President

Northern Ireland in its national and international setting

Northern Ireland is and must remain an integral part of the United Kingdom, which needs to salvage its independence by exiting the EU: that is the TUV view.

Maintaining the union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain is the only Union which matters. The European Union is a disastrous drain on our nation's resources and restraint on our economic growth. Hence, TUV's strong support for Brexit.

Thus, during this mandate, we hope to see our nation liberated from the clutches of the EU. The consequences for this devolved region of the UK will be reflected in this manifesto.

**EU
BETTER OFF
OUT**

Brexit: a vital step to prosperity

In the upcoming In/Out referendum this nation will make the most critical decision for decades. We will either succumb to the "ever closer union" which drives everything the EU does, for the purpose of subduing national sovereignty, or, we will retake control of our own country, borders and destiny by wisely leaving the EU. TUV will be unambiguous and vigorous is campaigning for the UK to break the chains that bind us to Brussels.

Under the pretence that we were joining a mere "common market" this once independent nation was sucked into an ever closer political union, bound by treaties which strip us of the right to control our own borders, our own trade, our own laws and our own destiny. With every EU treaty the Brussels noose has tightened; the tentacles of Brussels bureaucracy and diktats touch all our lives, both personally and corporately.

In what is likely to be our last opportunity, our nation will in the referendum have the chance to liberate itself and retake control of our own destiny and borders. What is happening across Europe on the migration front is a salutary lesson in the folly of EU nations surrendering control of their own borders. This is what the EU demands with its treaty ensconced free movement imperatives. David Cameron in his puny "demands" sought to do nothing about this or any other issue of importance. The impotence of the Cameron stance is demonstrated by the fact that not one of his "concessions" has produced a single treaty change. So, in reality and in law, nothing would change: the onward relentless march of ever closer union would continue.

No matter what way you look at the EU issue, it makes no sense for the UK to be involved:

We are a huge net financial contributor, pouring £20 billion every year into the bottomless pit of Brussels - and we've been doing it for 40 years. The net cost of EU membership to the UK is over £1m every hour. This is £20 billion which would be far better spent on our own people, our own farmers, rather than the inefficient farmers of Italy and Greece.

Though one of the biggest economies in the world and above all a trading nation, we cannot even make a trade deal with another country, because only Brussels can do that. This hugely inhibits our growth, which might well suit those who want to hold us back, but which tethers us to the most moribund economic region in the world - the EU, whose share of the world's GDP has fallen dramatically.

The UK's trade deficit with the rest of the EU is of the order of £160m per day; the proportion of our exports to the EU is falling annually, while our exports to the rest of the world rise, confirming that this is where the growth in our trade lies. We need liberated from the declining EU to build that trade.

The reality of our trade deficit with the EU means that after a Brexit, EU states, including the Republic of Ireland, will still want to trade with us, because the deficit shows they need us more than we need them. So all the scare stories about losing trade with Europe are exactly that: unfounded scaremongering.

It is utter nonsense to be told that we couldn't live without Brussels subsidies. It is our own money that we are getting back, but only some of it because we are net contributors. Outside the EU we'd have that £20 billion per year to spend on our own people.

It is a myth that Northern Ireland, in particular, would be unable to survive without EU handouts. Not only is it our own money we are getting back, but we are still net contributors. Our proportionate share of the UK's annual contribution is about £500m. In 2014/15, we got back £300m on agriculture (AQW 51652/11-16) and £133m from EU structural funds (AQW 52551/11-16).

Prosperity and growth, along with the dignity of standing on our own feet and making our own decisions, await us outside the EU. Why are we waiting? Brexit is central to TUV's vision for Northern Ireland.

The positive economic consequences of leaving the EU - a real Fresh Start

With the £20 billion per annum, which presently goes into the bottomless pit of Brussels, available for the UK to spend on its own people, Northern Ireland must get its fair share. Under the Barnett consequential formula this could be about £500m pa. Stormont must fight for its share of resources freed up by UK exit from the EU.

Additionally, of course, the liberating effect of again being able, as part of a major world economy, to make our own trade agreements across the world must be fully exploited with Northern Ireland helping to shape the new trade opportunities in collaboration with the Department of Trade in London. Likewise, freeing our businesses and farmers from the shackles of Brussels bureaucracy will present exciting opportunities for growth. In addition, there is great potential for our fishing industry, which Brussels regulations have destroyed, outside the EU.

Any Stormont Programme for Government must prepare to exploit these opportunities.

New thinking will be required outside the suffocating restraints of the EU. We must learn to think as a forward-looking, growth-seeking part of the fifth biggest economy in the world, instead of having our every move subject to the dead hand of Brussels control. Escape from the EU's state aid rules will give London and Stormont the chance to shape and aid our growth to suit our needs.

Then a local investment strategy and a matching funding infrastructure will have the chance to succeed and attract FDI in a more business friendly setting.



Getting devolution that works

Fresh Start or same old Stormont Shambles?

Since the last Assembly election in 2011 Stormont has lurched from crisis to crisis. Isn't it time to ask why? This dysfunctional system is incapable of giving you the good government you deserve. Are you willing to settle for and vote for more of the same?

Those who promise you (again) a 'fresh start' are the very people who have presided over the years of failure. The Stormont executive is kept alive on a diet of constant concessions to IRA/Sinn Fein. 2015 epitomised that as we witnessed one of the DUP's greatest rollovers yet in face of IRA/Sinn Fein terror.

The IRA murdered again in August 2015; the resulting Government Panel confirmed the continued existence not just of the still armed IRA but its wicked Army Council, controlling both the IRA and Sinn Fein. Amazingly, the DUP's response was to renew their government vows with Sinn Fein and commit themselves to a "fresh start" with terrorists in government. What a shameless climb-down! Guns and government, as with Trimble, now don't matter to the DUP. Ironically, it was over that very issue that Arlene Foster resigned from the UUP. Now she leads the DUP in precisely that arrangement.

In 2016, however, we all have the opportunity to do something about it. 5th May is that day of opportunity. At the polls you can demonstrate that such pandering to Sinn Fein is not in your name. By voting TUV you will send out that message loud and clear.

Time for something new

With the present structures incapable of working, it is time to sweep aside the debris of failure and seek devolution that is durable and workable. **For any system of government to survive, it must embrace, not negate, the basic democratic imperatives, which apply everywhere except Northern Ireland: the right of voters to change their government and have an Opposition.**

Because the present Stormont system of mandatory coalition denies both, it can never succeed. Only a coalition of the willing and a vibrant Opposition will bring stability to government. This is TUV's positive vision.

Standing Up to Sinn Fein/IRA, delivering for Unionism

During the last Assembly term TUV proved that we are the party which stands up to Sinn Fein/IRA and delivers for Unionism.

Ann's Law was the first victory for innocent victims in years. **Thanks to TUV, terrorists are now barred from £90,000 per year Special Adviser posts.**

TUV led the opposition to the Maze shrine. While others branded opponents of the scheme "nutters", TUV ensured that the voice of innocent victims and thousands of ordinary Unionists was heard loud and clear. A strong showing for TUV will ensure there is no backsliding on this issue.

Jim Allister secured pension parity for RUC widows who have remarried or will remarry in the future, through moving amendments to the Pensions Bill.

Opposing a SF/IRA Speaker

At the Act of Remembrance last year, the Sinn Fein/IRA Speaker sought to remove the National Anthem. TUV ensured that this was not allowed to happen.

TUV opposed the election of a Sinn Fein/IRA Speaker in the last Assembly. Shamefully, DUP MLAs trooped through the lobbies to elevate Mitchel McLaughlin to the post of Speaker. Why? Will they elect another member of Sinn Fein/IRA to replace him? Where do the UUP stand on this issue? With TUV you know where you stand. No TUV MLA will vote for a Sinn Fein/IRA Speaker.

Exposing Stormont Squander, securing value for money

In 2013 Jim Allister piloted a Private Member's Bill through the Assembly specifically preventing anyone with a serious criminal conviction from holding the post of Special Adviser. There were other aspects of the Bill which didn't receive quite as much attention at the time such as making statutory provision for a Code of Appointment, Code of Conduct and an annual report on the number and cost of Special Advisers.

The report for 2014/15 shows that the cost of SpAds in Northern Ireland for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 was £2,016,362.31. This means the average cost of each of the 19 Special Advisers is just over £106,000 a year.

The most recent figures for Scotland and Wales are in stark contrast. The Scottish government gets by with 14 SpAds which cost a total of £1,022,396 while Wales – according to figures published in 2015 – has just 8 costing £468,468.

When TUV brought a private members bill to the Assembly to cut the number of SpAds and cap their pay what happened? The DUP and Sinn Fein/IRA teamed up to kill it off.

Similarly, when parties were shown to be abusing the expenses system at Stormont it was questions from TUV which exposed the fact that nothing was done to recover any of the money claimed by Sinn Fein/IRA for fictitious cultural societies or the £700,000 claimed by Republicans for a "research company" which couldn't produce any evidence of research carried out.

Stormont is a byword for waste and squander. Examples of Stormont squander since 2011:

- £130m on useless North/South bodies
- £15m on wining and dining
- £100,000 on coffee, scones and fruit platters for MLAs at committees
- £25m on 161 spin doctors
- £400,000 to photograph ministers
- £10m on Special Advisers

The public were appalled when a DUP Special Adviser received a golden handshake of £46,000 to take up a position as an unelected MLA. To make matters worse, weeks later she became a Junior Minister. **Complaining about the self-interest of politicians will do nothing. It is up to you to use your vote to deliver a clear message that the gravy train must stop.**

You can only do that by voting for the one party which has been consistent in its exposure of abuse of public finances - TUV.

Other parties may trumpet the fact that they are cutting the waste at Stormont by reducing the number of MLAs. TUV has long advocated a much more radical reduction in the number of MLAs. The changes will mean that the number of MLAs will be reduced to 90. TUV wants to cut the number to 72 (i.e. electing 6 MLAs to represent each of the local councils except for Belfast which would have 12). This would be more than adequate to serve the needs of Northern Ireland.



A path to making Stormont work

In October last year TUV launched our Path to Making Stormont Work document.

The failure of the present Stormont arrangements is self-evident. That this failure arises from the unworkability of the present structures should be equally obvious, yet some want to try to patch it up. All they are doing is perpetuating the failure.

PLAN A

TUV has a clear vision of what will work and provide good and durable government. It is voluntary coalition with an Opposition. This does not deny cross-community government. Indeed, the strategic use of weighted majority voting would guarantee this. With no party big enough to govern on its own, coalition is inevitable.

As elsewhere, for it to work, it must be a coalition of the willing. **Those, after an election, who can agree a programme for government on the key economic and social issues and who together can command the requisite majority in the Assembly, form the government - whoever they are. Those who can't agree - whoever they are - form the Opposition, challenging and presenting an alternative at the next election.**

To ensure cross-community involvement TUV would accept a weighted majority of 60% in an Assembly vote to approve the new government and its programme. As politics further normalise, it should be possible to reduce the threshold to 50% over successive elections. The much abused Petition of Concern procedure should be banished, along with designations which entrench the divisive basis of the present system.

Despite the failure of mandatory coalition, some may refuse to contemplate anything but more of the same failure, but we need to move on. Until enough are ready to embrace essential change and permit government which can work, then, an approach which concentrates their thinking and maximises local control within Northern Ireland could be beneficial.

The collapse of mandatory coalition need not mean the end of devolution. Far from it. Indeed, it can be the catalyst to project Northern Ireland forward into governmental arrangements that work and end the cycle of failure.



PLAN B

The key to preventing the collapse of the present failed Stormont meaning the end of devolution is to salvage that which has worked and jettison that which has failed.

By its nature devolution embraces two distinct aspects: legislative devolution (exercised by the Assembly) and executive devolution (exercised by ministers). Analysis of the failure of the present Stormont throws up the obvious conclusion that it is the dimension of executive devolution which has failed. Legislative devolution has been reasonably successful, both in processing such Bills as have been presented, including Private Member's Bills, and in performing the scrutiny function through its committees.

In moving forward, there may be merit in building on what has been successful, by preserving legislative devolution, while giving time for executive devolution to evolve into something workable. The practical outworking of such an approach would be that the elected Assembly would be preserved as the legislature for transferred Northern Ireland matters, along with its important scrutiny function, but without a local executive. Executive functions would be exercised by British ministers, but with the vital distinction that they would be accountable to the Assembly and their legislative programme would pass, not through Westminster, but through the Stormont Assembly.

Such a form of power sharing is not untried. Though the EU has little to recommend it, for decades the European Parliament has exercised a shared legislative function with the Council of Ministers (formal co decision on many matters). Indeed, there a further complicating dimension is that it is the European Commission which initiates legislation, but it processes through the Parliament and the Council of Ministers.

In practice this would mean that the British ministers would introduce their legislation to the Assembly, it would pass through the normal processes of second stage, committee stage, consideration stage and final stage, before being signed off by the Secretary of State and given Royal Assent by Her Majesty.

To cope with policy conflicts between the Assembly and Westminster and incompatible expenditure demands, there would have to be a procedure of conciliation between the Assembly and the British ministers. A similar model has existed for years in the EU between the Parliament and the Council of Ministers. In Northern Ireland the Chair of the relevant committee could act as rapporteur for the Assembly in any negotiations with the minister, with both sides statutorily bound to make determined efforts to reach consensus.

Individual MLAs would continue to have unfettered opportunity to introduce Private Member's Bills. As for the British ministers' exercise of executive functions, these would be subject to all the scrutiny powers of the Assembly and its statutory committees, with their powers to command witnesses and papers. With this approach those elements which have been working could be retained and in time, as alliances evolve, the return to the exercise of executive power could occur through coalition of the willing and a counter-balancing Opposition.

Moreover, if any coalition collapsed, the default position of Stormont retaining the legislative role would sustain devolution. Refusing to accept the failure of mandatory coalition is not serving Northern Ireland well. The perpetual cycle of crisis and sticking plaster talks, before lurching to crisis again is destroying the body politic and public confidence in it. It is time for fresh thinking, such as these proposals contain.

The truth about Sinn Fein/IRA holding the First Minister's post

Under the Belfast Agreement the First Minister had to come from the biggest tradition, meaning he/she would always be a Unionist so long as there was a Unionist majority in the Assembly. 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. The DUP's fingerprints are all over this legislative change because they thought it would be a clever device to use 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.



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? 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 agreement 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 was 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. 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.**

When the DUP tries to play the fear card over their partner becoming First Minister, their hypocrisy deserves to be vigorously exposed and the electorate reminded that they were complicit in and actually wanted this appalling change.

There is no point in pretending outrage over McGuinness switching into Arlene Foster's seat, when it was the DUP 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? Because McGuinness could only be appointed First Minister if the DUP nominate the deputy First Minister!

**Time to reject
Sinn Fein/DUP
misrule**

Time to Vote TUV

5th May - Your day of Opportunity

ENOUGH vs ENOUGH
Vote **TUV**

The big economic issues

Turning the economy around

At the start of the last Assembly the Executive claimed the economy was the top priority. They pledged to rebuild and rebalance the Northern Ireland economy.

How did that work out?

After five years, our GDP growth is the lowest in the United Kingdom. In 2015, it was 1.6%, against a 2.4% UK average.

We have half the percentage growth in gross value added of Scotland.

Since 2012, our gross value added per head of population has fallen. In productivity, we have underachieved compared with the UK average.

The Executive has presided over a Northern Ireland that is the least productive part of the whole of the United Kingdom, at only 82% of the UK average. Only by investing in infrastructure and skills can we address those issues.

Maybe the biggest indictment of all is the ignominy of having the highest level of economic inactivity in the United Kingdom. A staggering 27.7% of the working-age population were inactive in 2015 – and that under an Executive whose priority was to rebuild and rebalance the economy and despite a specific Programme for Government commitment to reduce economic inactivity.

A strategy to address economic inactivity was announced by the DEL Minister but it is unfunded in the latest budget. It is in that context that, this year, we will take £100 million out of the block grant to meet the demands of some of those on welfare. Welfare reform might have had the effect of incentivising more people into work, but what we will do here in Northern Ireland is blunt that incentivisation by propping up benefit levels above those of the rest of the United Kingdom.

Then we come to the level of debt. Just before the Executive took office in 2011, our National Loans Fund borrowing was £36.9 million. In the 2016/17 Budget, it is projected to be £357 million — an almost tenfold multiplication. **Borrowing by this small country is to be £2.1 billion, giving us the highest level of borrowing per head of the population in all the devolved regions.** That is on top of our part of the national borrowing. That £2.1 billion is up from £1.9 billion last year, and we are paying interest.

It is a burden for this and future generations that has been imposed by the failing Executive.

The Stormont Executive has long promised a manufacturing strategy for Northern Ireland. Instead we have seen catastrophic job losses in manufacturing at JTI, Michelin and Bombardier. Yet the DETI minister is in denial that manufacturing is in a difficult position.

As with Michelin, failure to adequately address energy costs is losing us vital jobs. Energy policy has drifted from excessive promotion of expensive renewables to precipitately pulling the plug on such schemes to undue reliance on an unfulfilled cross-border interconnector, with little parallel urgency towards the Moyle interconnector. Muddle, not vision, has informed the Executive's approach.

We need to move away from a system which shackles us to the Republic of Ireland and build our links with the rest of the UK where economic growth is much stronger and our future is secure. Exit from the EU will liberate us all, across the UK, from the bureaucracy and shackles of Brussels and empower the UK to trade freely across the world.

Defending the UK's unified tax system

Devolving Corporation Tax powers to Stormont has been hailed as an economic saviour for Northern Ireland. TUV does not agree. **TUV wants to see a prosperous Northern Ireland but the path to this is not to break up the UK's unified taxation system. If cutting corporation tax was the silver bullet for our economy, then, companies such as JTI Gallahers and Michelin would not be pulling out with a corporation tax cut just round the corner!** Any cut to the level of corporation tax in Northern Ireland will see a corresponding cut in the block grant of hundreds of millions per annum. This could be of the order of £350-£400m per annum.

A cut to corporation tax will therefore result in a drastic reduction to the money Northern Ireland receives from Westminster which in turn will have serious consequences for public services in our Province. When added to the £500m being taken out of the block grant over the next 4 years to mitigate welfare reform, the consequences for spending on vital services could be catastrophic.

Bankrupting Northern Ireland will not concern Sinn Fein, but it should concern unionists.

The Silk Commission considered the question of devolving corporation tax to Wales - another region dependent on its block grant - but readily recognised that “the costs would outweigh the benefits”. The Welsh government shared this analysis telling the Commission that while the “devolution of corporation tax could offer the Welsh Government a powerful tool to promote economic development, this is a volatile tax which is strongly linked to the economic cycle. There would therefore be significant budgetary risks to Wales.”

Stormont, which cannot handle the powers it has, ignored all these warnings and rushed headlong into the vanity project of attaining Corporation Tax powers. Now, with the Chancellor set to reduce the GB rate to 17%, any differential with Northern Ireland will be substantially dissipated, underlining the Silk Commission’s warning about the folly of making such a “volatile tax” the key building block of an economic strategy.

For Sinn Fein, of course, the opportunity to cut fiscal ties to London is irresistible and trumps any professed concern for public sector workers - who will be hit by cuts to the block grant. Sadly, the DUP and UUP acquiesced. TUV believes the UK should retain its unified taxation system.

That is the natural Unionist position and it also makes sound fiscal sense for Northern Ireland. **Building up our skills base, instead of cutting such funding, as Stormont has done, is the real key to maximising and sustaining foreign investment.**

Town centre regeneration

The decline in town centres across Northern Ireland deeply concerns TUV. Once bustling high streets and their remaining businesses are now struggling to survive. Crippling rates have been a major contributor to decline. Aesthetically pleasing artwork on empty shop fronts may bring cosmetic change, but are no substitute for kick-starting economic revival in our town centres.



In Great Britain the level of business rates is being addressed, but not in Northern Ireland. Indeed, reducing rates would probably do more for business than reducing corporation tax.

As things stand, businesses are being penalised if they choose town centre premises because of higher rates. TUV believes that they should be rewarded for doing so. This will help fill the empty units and entice more consumers back into our town centres.

Another drain on our town centres are excessive car park charges. Many people question why they should pay to shop in town centres while at out of town developments they can park for free. A more sensible approach to parking charges – and more free parking – would help regenerate our town centres and encourage vital trade back.

Energy and environment

TUV believes it is important that we act as responsible custodians of our environment so we can ensure future generations can enjoy the rich diversity of our planet. However, we reject punitive green taxes and limitations on individual liberty as these are ineffective, financially punishing and based on dubious science. TUV recognises there are many drivers of changing climate, including uncontrollable natural forces, and encourages honest scientific enquiry into these matters.

Absurd proposals such as monthly bin collections are totally rejected by TUV. Likewise, we are not impressed by the large scale wind farm craze and unrealistic and expensive green energy targets. Wind energy is the most expensive form of energy. Further, there has been wholly inadequate preparation of the electricity grid to even accommodate all the wind turbines that have been encouraged.

DETI has failed miserably in its oversight and forward planning in respect of energy policy. Its pre-occupation with the all-Ireland single electricity market has served us ill, with a failure to expeditiously restore the Moyle interconnector to full capacity a major threat to our long term security of supply. Aligning Northern Ireland to the ROI monopolistic and more expensive southern market, instead of the bigger opportunities of the UK market and networks has been a mistake, producing prices higher than they need be.

TUV rejects an ideological position on such new opportunities as fracking, but, instead is prepared to sensibly balance the opportunities against the environmental impacts.

Transport

The priority must be towards building roads because of their economic, rather than political, justification. The prioritising of the A5 as a joint venture with the Dublin Government is a political case in point, whereas, getting an upgrade to the vital A75 Stranraer to Carlisle link, in co-operation with Scotland, has been largely ignored.

Choking Belfast City centre with bus lanes is not in the commercial interests of the City.

The development of the International airport and adequate public transport links, including a rail link should be prioritised, especially now that Dublin, which already steals so much of our air traffic, is considering a direct rail link from Belfast. There is something radically wrong with the approach of government if it allows a situation to evolve whereby Northern Ireland passengers could connect directly by rail to Dublin airport, but not to our own international airport.

Agriculture and fishing

Farming and the agri-food sector are key to the Northern Ireland economy, being the biggest contributor to sales, exports and employment within the manufacturing sector.

In TUV farmers have a friend, ever willing to fight their corner. The roller coaster impact of global pressures makes for an industry where stability in price is elusive, yet overheads constantly rise. In consequence farm incomes have tumbled, making growth a difficult aspiration and the targets of 'Going for Growth' increasingly ambitious. But they also make a food export marketing body a greater need than ever.



Obtaining greater stability in farm gate prices is key to success, with processors, banks and government all having to play their part. Hence, radical thinking should not be eschewed, though current EU competition laws probably prohibit the statutory minimum pricing that some desire. Outside the EU we'd be master of our own legislation and destiny.

With farming in crisis the truth is that the EU has done little to help, even refusing intervention when the milk price collapsed. Getting out of EU would be liberating.

The false portrayal of Northern Ireland agriculture as being wholly dependent on EU membership is frequently most notable for its failure to mention any of the following hard facts:

Every penny we get from Brussels is some of our own money being recycled back to us and is but a mere fraction of the £20,000,000,000.00 the UK pays in every year;

the EU itself has attacked local agriculture with crippling fines of €80m; more often than not when our industry is in crisis Brussels sits on its hands, as with its refusal to bring in intervention to deal with the catastrophic fall in the milk price;

EU restrictions prohibit the UK government and Stormont from granting meaningful aid to farming because of EU "state aid" rules;

Brussels strangles farming with hideous bureaucracy, cross-compliance nonsense and needless red tape;

It is the EU which impedes several agricultural practices and imposes hugely expensive restraints, be it the Nitrates Directive, slurry spreading rules (imposing massive capital costs for storage facilities) or a myriad of other regulations imposed for regulation sake;

EU agricultural spending is on a downward trajectory over coming years, coupled with an increasing bias towards Eastern and Southern Europe.

All of the above are part of the price our local industry pays at the hands of oppressive Brussels Diktats.

Shaking off the shackles of Brussels would not only be liberating for all industry, farming included, but it would restore the destiny of our country to our own hands; making our own laws and keeping and spending our own money. If government needed to support a sector then it could, free from the veto of Brussels and its "state aid" rules.

Given the centrality of agriculture to the feeding of the nation, it is inconceivable that there would not be a national agricultural support scheme as required. Such would be in the interest of farmers and the consumer alike, because such support underwrites cheaper and safe food. Thus consumers and producers would require action when appropriate from government.

But there is an even wider dimension to liberation from Brussels Diktats. For the first time in over 40 years the UK would be free to make our own trade deals with whichever countries served our interests. Presently only Brussels can make such deals. But with Brexit the UK government would resume control, making trade arrangements in support of our agricultural and other sectors as best suited our needs and opening up markets far and wide.

As for the suggestion that we would be shut out from trading with Europe, including the Republic of Ireland, this has to be one of the biggest scare stories of the frightened 'In' campaign. Put very simply, because we buy more from the other EU countries than we sell them (the trade deficit was £59b in 2014 - some £169m per day), EU countries will still desperately want to trade with the UK. They will need us more than we need them in trading terms. Thus, an advantageous trade agreement for the UK is inevitable. So much for all the scare stories about the UK being cut off from EU trade.

Likewise, our trade with the Republic would continue under such a deal. In 2014 Northern Ireland sold £8.3b worth of goods to GB and £2.3b to the Republic and £2.4b elsewhere (only £1.3b to other EU countries). It is important to retain the sense of proportion which these figures reveal.

Far from, as some scaremongers suggest, our home market being flooded by lower-quality produce, for the first time as a nation in forty years we'd be empowered to impose our own tariffs and control our own trade, as the situation demanded it.

So, TUV has a vision for agriculture that is not hidebound by the ever tightening grip of EU bureaucracy but is set free by Brexit.

Fishing - the saddest Brussels tale of all

Our fishing industry, once so prosperous, is in the doldrums. Why are our once great ports of Kilkeel, Ardglass and Portavogie now mere shadows of their former selves? Simply because the EU's Common Fisheries Policy has destroyed our fishing industry through its absurd rules and authorised piracy of our waters. British waters for British fishermen is our goal.

TUV will strongly oppose wind turbine farms in our productive fishing grounds.

For fishing and farming escape from the dead hand of Brussels would be liberating, not devastating.



Education

The last Assembly saw an intensification of Sinn Fein/IRA's assault on our education system. While leading grammar schools in Northern Ireland, is a particularly scandalous. While the Collegiate – which was oversubscribed – was closed by the Sinn Fein Minister, he approved an Irish language school with just 14 pupils in Dungiven.

Similarly, while a number of years ago Lisnaskea High School was closed for having "only" 140 pupils an Irish language school has been approved on the site of the old High School with only 38 pupils!

These double standards cannot be allowed to continue.

There must be no funding hierarchy whereby secondary schools are disadvantaged. Northern Ireland must value all its children, but to do so we must equally facilitate the academic potential of some – rather than thwart it - and the different talents of others. Choice, not prescription, is our guide.

We oppose the Sinn Fein Minister's policy which has resulted in the removal of the possibility of pupils in Northern Ireland availing of GCSEs offered by examination boards in Great Britain. This was the disruptive outcome which the minister was warned about when he announced his foolish failure to follow GB GCSE changes on 17 November 2015. If he expected the GB Boards to specially mark NI students on an alphabetical basis, while switching to numerical grading in GB, then he was at best naive.

We now have a situation in Northern Ireland where the regulator (CCEA) is also the sole provider of examinations. This is a clear conflict of interest.

On top of all that, young people who move to other parts of the U.K. for employment or further education will face problems explaining what their qualifications actually mean. The portability of their GCSE qualifications has been destroyed by the minister's politicking.

TUV believes that the GCSE system should be standardised with that of England and that schools should return to a situation where they have the option to use English examination boards for GCSE examinations.

While there has been a disproportionate focus on teaching Irish, modern languages, which are essential in today's economy, have been neglected. If Northern Ireland is to compete on the international business scene there must be a focus on foreign languages both at primary and secondary level. TUV wants to make it compulsory that GCSE pupils take at least one modern language. We also believe that modern languages should be a compulsory part of the Key Stage 2 curriculum in primary schools.

A report by the Equality Commission published in October last year (Key Inequalities in Education) found "Protestants persistently have lower levels of attainment than Catholics at GCSE and A 'level". This fact cannot go ignored any longer. There is a need for focused action to address it.

TUV is committed to:

Fighting for a fair deal for the controlled sector;

Opposing preferential treatment for the Irish medium sector;

Ensuring that everyone, regardless of background, receives an education however local children should not be disadvantaged in situations where there are non-English speaking pupils in the class;

Seeking to address educational underachievement, particularly when it comes to Protestant boys;

Increasing the focus on the basic skills needed to prepare people for the world of work. There should be a greater focus on literacy and numeracy;

Getting rid of the exemption for teaching from fair employment legislation. Everyone should have an equal chance to avail of employment opportunities.



Nursery provision

Many hard-working parents face huge expense when they find a private facility to take their child. In some cases, the expense of nursery provision makes it unviable for them to work.

TUV believes there should be a right to a place for every child. Places that are available need to be provided where they are needed. There is a need for more forward planning so as to address problems such as under provision in one area and a surplus of places in another.

Further and higher education

TUV is alarmed by the lack of focus which there has been on this sector in the last Assembly term.

While there has been much grand talk about the need to build the economy the DEL budget has been repeatedly cut.

Northern Ireland will not attract high quality jobs unless we invest in further and higher education. The skills of the local workforce consistently rank much higher than the rate of corporation tax when it comes to the factors which foreign investors consider when making a decision as to where to invest.

Cutting the DEL budget while claiming to be following a policy to bring high value jobs therefore is totally contradictory.

It is vital that “chill factors” when it comes to attracting people from the Protestant community to our universities are addressed. In the 2014/15 academic year just 29.5% of those who enrolled at Queen’s were Protestant while 45.3% were Roman Catholic. That compares with a 48.5% / 43.3% breakdown of Roman Catholics to Protestants in the general population of 18, 19 and 20 year olds. This imbalance must be rectified.

TUV strongly supports the retention of Stranmillis Teacher Training College.

Libraries

TUV recognises the important contribution which libraries make to communities. We want to see well-resourced library provision. It is important that everyone – particularly children and the elderly – have access to the print and electronic resources which libraries offer. It is important that local libraries are protected from closure.

Health

The NHS is precious, it is free at the point of use and everybody should have reasonable access to it. TUV believes in universal healthcare and that healthcare has to provide for those who need it.

The frontline, not management empires, is our interest. It is the doctors, nurses and support staff who deliver the service. Cutting the number of beds has increased the waiting times. So, addressing these basic issues is key to reversing the decline. It's not more reviews and fewer hospitals we need, but more beds and staff freed up from bureaucracy.

The NHS is the property of all of us. It is unacceptable to be able to see a consultant privately within days, but only within months in the NHS - sometimes the same consultant! NHS work must come first.

The pressures at present are created by lack of investment, under staffing and bureaucracy. Successive DUP health ministers had let down patients and instead of shouldering the blame, they pointed fingers at the health trusts.

The shocking revelation that some patients are waiting 18 months to get a hospital appointment is indicative of the failings of this government. In England the target from referral to treatment is 18 weeks - in Northern Ireland it can take 18 months. That is absurd, embarrassing and dangerous. This is leaving people in pain and at risk.



To make health better, front line services must be protected by ring-fenced funding thereby ensuring that:

Hospital outpatient and inpatient waiting lists are efficiently dealt with.

Hospitals are clean and safe.

Front line services are staffed effectively and efficiently to ensure that we all get the quality of care that the 21st century health service demands.

Adequate protection of children who suffer from abuse and neglect.

The disabled are allowed to live quality lives and not excluded from ordinary life, but allowed to achieve their full potential.

Older people cared for in a dignified way.

Those with special needs are not forgotten but given what they need to live quality lives.

All communities have adequate and safe emergency cover at all times.

TUV supports campaigns to highlight the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. We believe that schools have a key role to play when it comes to promoting the benefits of avoiding smoking and excessive consumption of alcohol.

Longer term financial planning within health trusts, including the option to carry money forward into the next financial year.

Care for cancer patients

Every day 30 people in Northern Ireland receive the devastating news that they have cancer and each year 4,000 people die as a result of the disease. This equates to 1 in 4 of all deaths in Northern Ireland.

TUV believes that everyone newly diagnosed with cancer should have access to a Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS). Currently breast cancer and most lung cancer patients have access but there is considerable variation across Trusts and 1 in 4 patients miss out. A workforce census in 2014 revealed that Northern Ireland had the lowest provision in the UK. We believe that this needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

TUV supports Cancer Focus Northern Ireland's call for guaranteed adequate funding to provide universal access to NICE approved drugs and full compliance with Ministerial Targets for Cancer (i.e. 95% of patients with an urgent referral for suspected cancer to begin treatment within 62 days; 98% of patients commencing first treatment within 31 days of the decision to treat being taken and 100% of patents with an urgent breast cancer referral being seen within 14 days).

Mental health

A major failure of the Northern Ireland Executive has been the failure to adequately resource mental health.

Largely as a result of the Troubles, Northern Ireland has a 25% higher mental health need than England. Despite the prevalence of mental ill-health, the Northern Ireland Executive provides approximately 26% less funding than England and this funding has continued to reduce year on year since 2007/8.

In addition to resource failures the Northern Ireland Executive has thus far failed to enact new mental health legislation some 9 years after the need for legislation was identified by the Bamford Review. The delay in enacting new legislation demonstrates the ineffectiveness of the Northern Ireland Executive and an inability to prioritise legislation that can make a significant difference to the lives of many.

TUV firmly believe that the mental health crisis in Northern Ireland is a damning indictment of the Northern Ireland Executive and we therefore pledge to campaign for:

Increased funding for Community Mental Health services to support people experiencing mental ill-health in their recovery and to further support early intervention strategies which will help prevent the need for hospital admissions

Adequate acute psychiatric beds so that anyone who requires an acute hospital bed should be able to access it within their Trust area. No patient should be forced to travel outside their Trust area where they are less likely to benefit from the support of family and friends – something which is vital when it comes to mental wellbeing.

An education programme to enable schools to better support children experiencing mental ill-health or those children who are living with a family member experiencing mental ill-health

Development of specialised services for autism and availability of training and support for carers

Development of specialised services developed for people with a personality disorder as envisaged by the Northern Ireland Strategy for Personality Disorder and

Improved access to psychology services to be accessible by victims of the Troubles who continue to experience trauma.

Disability

TUV values the disabled in our society.

We believe that the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment should introduce a requirement that Invest NI offers for job creation assistance must include a provision that a percentage of the jobs be made available for people with disabilities.

Those small measures which the government takes to support the disabled need to work more efficiently and effectively. For example, the three-month delay in processing Blue Badge applications for those with a recognised disability is totally unacceptable. TUV is committed to services such as this working more smoothly.

We need to ensure that young people with disabilities can play as full a role as possible, including in sport. The success of Shankill Road girl Kirsty Devlin, who won two gold medals and two silver medals in gymnastics at the last Special Olympics, shows that people with disabilities can achieve success on the global stage for Northern Ireland.

The last Assembly term saw unacceptable delays in people being assessed for autism, with over 900 waiting beyond the promised 13-week limit. This was directly linked to poor government policy. In October 2015 TUV exposed the fact that although the Northern Trust is the largest health and social care trust in Northern Ireland, it has only 11 of the total of 68 clinicians trained to diagnose autism, whereas the Southern Trust has 23. A third of the total number of clinicians are in the Southern Trust but, in Belfast, there are only 11, in the Northern 11, in the South Eastern only 9, and in the Western only 14. Without equality of distribution of clinicians to diagnose autism, the postcode lottery kicks in.

While the recent announcement of a £2m boost for autism services is welcome, there are still major challenges which need to be addressed, particularly when it comes to the disjointed approach between the health service and education. The delays in pupils obtaining school places are wholly unacceptable.

TUV revealed the fact that there are 3,273 pupils in primary schools and 5,770 pupils in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland who have been diagnosed with dyslexia. The Department of Employment and Learning does not collect data on people in third level education who are dyslexic.

TUV believes that early diagnosis is important so that proper support mechanisms and allowances when it comes to examinations can be made in order to enable young people suffering from dyslexic and other learning difficulties to achieve their full potential.

TUV believes that data on the number of people in third level education with dyslexia ought to be collected centrally so that government can address any shortcoming in relation to support for such students.

The hearing impaired deserve greater focus on the development of sign language services. In Northern Ireland while Irish medium education is prioritised, sign language provision has stalled.

In Scotland the British Sign Language Bill requires Ministers to develop a national plan for BSL and places an obligation on public-sector bodies to prepare and publish their own plans with the aim of increasing awareness of BSL (British Sign Language) and its use in the delivery of services.

TUV believes that some of the money currently squandered on Irish should be invested in investigating the need for such legislation in Northern Ireland and the feasibility of implementing it.

Suicide awareness

In February the Office of National Statistics released figures which showed that Northern Ireland continues to have the highest rate of suicide in the UK.

In 2014 there were 16.5 suicides per 100,000 in Northern Ireland compared with 14.5 in Scotland, 10.3 in England and 9.2 in Wales.

The DHSSPS allocated over £7 m annually to suicide prevention in Northern Ireland which, it claims, is more per head than other regions of the UK. However, it clear that more needs to be done to tackle this problem. The work of charities and the community is key in this regard.

A Northern Ireland Helicopter Emergency Medical Service

TUV has led the way in the campaign for a Northern Ireland HEMS. The tragic death of Dr John Hinds robbed Northern Ireland not only of a skilled medical professional but someone who was deeply passionate about improving health care provision in our Province. Shortly before his death, TUV leader Jim Allister arranged a meeting between Dr Hinds and the Health Minister to press the need for an air ambulance.

TUV's involvement in the campaign did not end with the meeting last June. In September 2015 Jim Allister handed over a petition containing over 80,000 signatures calling for the establishment of the service. On 12th October 2015 TUV hosted an event at Stormont which was introduced by the late Dr Hinds' partner, Dr Janet Acheson, and which was addressed by Dr Brian Burns from Sydney, Australia, a world expert in HEMS provision.



It was striking that Dr Burns as part of his presentation showed a slide displaying air ambulance provision across the British Isles. Northern Ireland was the only black spot, with no provision.

The sum of money required to fund such a service is a mere pittance when compared to the savings which would result from better outcomes for patients.

The cost of operating such a service is estimated by DHSSPS at just £1.8 million. £1.8m is not a significant sum when people's lives are at stake, particularly given the sums which are found to squander on other less worthy causes.

For example, the cost of spin doctors in Stormont departments is £5m per year, and it is less than the £2m per year spent on Special Advisers!

TUV greatly welcomes the commitment obtained to a medically-led HEMS and will keep up the pressure for full delivery. There is no more fitting tribute to the marvelous work of Dr John Hinds than the fulfilment of his dream of a physician-led HEMS service.

Protection for the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

TUV believes that the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service should be considered a frontline service and therefore should have its budget protected.

Stormont's decision to slash its budget from £81.6m to £69.7m in the last four years is totally unacceptable. Yet rather than addressing this funding crisis the latest budget would see yet further biting cuts into this vital service.

Older People

TUV recognises the invaluable contribution which our senior citizens have made and continue to make to Northern Ireland. TUV is committed to the retention of free public transport for pensioners.

Many older people are concerned about the future of statutory residential care homes. TUV has always maintained that the key issue is the lifting of the ban on new admissions. This cynical policy is designed to run the homes down over time so that it can be claimed that they are no longer safe to run. The argument that this is up to the Trusts is completely phoney. The ban could and should be lifted by the Minister.

We note that while there is increasing talk in political circles about care in the community for older people in practice the support services are often sadly lacking. There are countless cases across Northern Ireland of family members caring for loved ones. We believe that that love and dedication to family and loved ones should be recognised. It should be much easier for people who care for an elderly person to organise cover on those occasions when they want to get away for a break.



Housing

Social housing is vital in any society and demands adequate investment. A safe and warm home has huge benefits, not least when it comes to health.

The future of public housing is in a state of flux, with DUP ministers contemplating dismantling the Housing Executive. Wholesale transfer of public housing stock to Housing Associations, which habitually charge higher rents, is not advisable, particularly if it involves overriding the views and wishes of tenants.

With the growth of Housing Associations there is an urgent need for an independent Housing Regulator. This is necessary to build confidence among both tenants and investors in the sector. Rent levels should, therefore, be controlled by the regulator.

NIHE has many faults but jumping into the unknown is not desirable. Political meddling in housing, such as seen with the brazen attempt to coerce the NIHE Board over the Red Sky scandal, is not healthy. Nor were the exaggerated and unjustified claims by the minister of £18m of overcharging by four contractors an edifying episode. Such politicking needs to be kept out of housing.

An adequate supply of social housing is essential and tenants need and deserve reliable maintenance and repairs. TUV supports legislation to help landlords deal with anti-social tenants.

TUV supports measures to encourage and facilitate shared occupancy where that is the means appropriate to ensure owner occupation. The financial institutions must play their part with responsibility.



Crime and Punishment

TUV believes that the courts should take a robust but fair approach to dealing with criminals.

Public confidence in the rule of law in Northern Ireland has been badly shaken. The perverse political arrangements which have seen criminals elevated to the heart of government have played a part in this. The whole OTR scandal and the disproportionate reaction to the flag protests has added to the lack of confidence in the criminal justice system.

However, it reached a new low when people saw Pastor McConnell – a man in his eighth decade with a clean record - dragged before the courts for comments made in his own pulpit about Islam and a family run business brought to court because of their refusal to ice a message on a cake.

TUV believes that the courts should be used to bring criminals to justice and keep the public safe.

TUV supports the introduction of legislation to strengthen the law against the glorification of terrorism so that events such as the IRA parade in Castleberg or the naming of a play park after a notorious Republican terrorist cannot be repeated.

Victims

In Stormont TUV has greatly raised the profile in favour of innocent victims. Ann's Law was a stunning success for this sector, giving them, for the first time an enhanced say in legislation over who could serve as a Special Adviser. Also, it was Jim Allister who introduced to Stormont the marking of European Day for the Innocent Victims of Terrorism, something which is now cherished by all affected. In helping defeat the Maze Shrine Project, another victory was achieved for innocent victims.

Much remains to be done, such as correcting the perverse definition of 'victim' and redressing the balance in terms of necessary inquiries into terrorist atrocities and the skullduggery which shaped 'the peace process'.

The scandal surrounding letters given to Republican OTRs exposed how innocent victims have been forgotten by successive Westminster governments.

The reaction of the DUP showed that while some Unionists talk tough they will not follow through on their demands. Remember – if the DUP had kept their promise to leave the Executive unless the names of recipients of OTR letters were published we would have had this election much sooner!

TUV wants to change the perverse definition of victim – which equates the terrorist with innocent victims. Those who accepted devolution before this issue was resolved must bear responsibility for the current situation.

TUV supports the creation of a pension for those seriously injured as a result of terrorist actions in Northern Ireland. We are robustly opposed to any suggestion that those injured while engaged in terrorism or members of illegal organisations should be eligible for such payments.

TUV was the first party to give its backing to A Covenant for and with Innocent Victims of Terrorism. The principles of that Covenant will continue to inform our policy when it comes to victims.

We are appalled by the fact that the so-called Fresh Start deal contains a fresh insult for victims.

The deal gives preferential treatment to terrorists who disabled themselves by their own hand and in so doing place them on a par with their innocent victims. Thus a bomber who injures himself will be gifted the extra welfare points to guarantee him no loss of benefits.

It is utterly perverse that the victim of a road traffic accident will be treated less favourably than a convicted terrorist under the new system. Someone injured in a road traffic accident may only get four benefit points and lose their benefits, but a self-injured terrorist will be gifted an extra four points to preserve his benefits.



In reality, the outworkings of the latest agreement mark another step on the road towards the distinction between terrorist and victim being obliterated in the eyes of the law in Northern Ireland. While currently “on hold”, it is clear that the architecture of the Stormont House Agreement is still forming the basis of discussions about dealing with victims’ issues. Critically there is no suggestion of a departure from the obscene definition of ‘victim’. In consequence, the entire proposals on the past are tainted and flawed.

Sinn Fein/IRA succeeded in its demand that ‘legacy inquests’ should continue separately from the new and inferior Historical Investigations Unit (HIU). Thus the republican pursuit of the security forces can continue unabated and their attempts to re-write history are aided. The HIU will be overseen by Sinn Fein/IRA members of the Policing Board.

Moreover, the ICIR can conceal any information it wishes because it will be immune from FOI requirements. Under the operation of the ICIR, terrorists supplying information will have immunity in that nothing they tell can ever be used against them. Indeed, whether they even tell the truth seems impossible of verification.

Of course, there is no compulsion on any terrorist group to cooperate with the ICIR. As the Stormont House proposals demonstrate, with the victim - makers in government, their victims are set for a raw deal.

Time for Justice
for Victims

ENOUGH
is
ENOUGH

Time to Vote TUV

5th May - Your day of Opportunity

Vote
TUV

Armed Forces Covenant

Public support for the Armed Forces across the UK is incredibly high and there is almost universal support for the Armed Forces Covenant. The Covenant attempts to “redress the disadvantages that the armed forces community faces in comparison to other citizens and to recognize the sacrifices that they have made”.

It was published in May 2011 and, according to the MoD website, Government, partner charities and the devolved administrations “have been very busy” delivering it.

Sadly, one devolved administration, Northern Ireland, has been found lacking with regards to implementing the Covenant. Former NIO Minister Mike Penning told the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in June that members of the Stormont Executive failed to even respond to an invitation to discuss how to help veterans and their families.

TUV strongly supports the extension of the Armed Forces Covenant to Northern Ireland. Due to our flawed form of devolution this has proved impossible to date.

TUV is the only Unionist party which is serious about making the changes to devolution in Northern Ireland which will make it possible to deliver the same pledges to our armed forces which they can expect in other parts of the United Kingdom.



East Londonderry candidate, **Jordan Armstrong**, during his service in Afghanistan. Jordan is a strong campaigner for the Military Covenant.

Culture

Parading

Since the introduction of Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act 1998, and the creation of the Parades Commission, there has been continuous dissatisfaction at the discrimination and bias of the Parades Commission and the legislation it sought to enforce against the Unionist community.

Traditional Unionist Voice reaffirms its desire to protect Civil and Religious Liberty for the citizens of Northern Ireland. The right to freedom of peaceful assembly is protected in the European Convention of Human Rights.

TUV wants to see the Parades Commission abolished. However, this should not be seen as an end in itself. Replacing the Parades Commission with another quango which makes the same decisions leaves us no further forward.

The proposals which came out of the Stormont House talks on the parading issue are totally unacceptable. They make it clear that “meaningful and sustained local dialogue” will be at the heart of any new regulatory system, thereby delivering a veto to orchestrated objectors.

TUV believes that the starting point of any legislation ought to be a statutory affirmation and protection that the right to freedom of peaceful assembly is paramount, thereby giving primacy to this fundamental human right in any balancing exercise necessary in determining between competing rights, with the resulting onus on those wishing to displace the fundamental right.

Legislation ought to specifically declare that where a parading route is historically traditional such will be a strong material consideration in reaching any determination. Likewise, in pursuit of the concept of shared space, the legislation should specify that arterial routes, which are substantially non-residential, should carry a statutory presumption in favour of parading.



Flags

Recent events show that there is a concerted attempt by Republicans to strip Northern Ireland of its Britishness. Unfettered by coalition with Sinn Fein, Unionists can be assured that TUV will not roll over.

TUV strongly believes that the Union Flag should fly from Parliament Buildings all year round. This is in line with the advice issued following the publication of the green paper, The Governance of Britain, in July 2007 after which Government Departments were encouraged to fly the Union Flag all year round and not just on designated days.

The current designated days policy adopted by Stormont is inadequate. TUV believes that, in common with the practice at the Welsh Assembly and the Houses of Parliament, the Union Flag should fly from Parliament Buildings 365 days a year.

Equality?

The mask slipped when Gerry Adams described equality as “the Trojan horse of the entire Republican strategy”.

Equality has become a code word for attacks on the Britishness of Northern Ireland.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary went in the name of equality.

Orange marches are stopped in the name of equality.

The Union Flag was removed from Belfast City Hall in the name of equality.

Even democracy – which means that we have the right to vote a party out of government and the right to an Opposition – has been dispensed with in Northern Ireland in the name of equality. Understandably this one-way process has built resentment within the Unionist community as they see symbols of Northern Ireland’s place in the United Kingdom pushed to the margins or consigned to the history books.

TUV will continue to lead the opposition to this agenda. Even a Christian bakery is being persecuted for refusing to promote same sex marriage. We are opposed to YOUR money being used to persecute people with genuinely held beliefs.

TUV proposed a vote on slashing the budget of the Equality Commission which has brought the case against Ashers Bakery. Shamefully all other parties in the Assembly – including the DUP – voted against the TUV proposal. The case against Ashers is being funded by the Equality Commission. Remember the Equality Commission is funded by your taxes through the Office of the First and deputy First Minister. It is irrational to say that you oppose the needless action of the Equality Commission and yet oppose reducing their budget.

The inadequacy of the Equality Commission is illustrated by its conduct in relation to Raymond McCreesh Park in Newry. In spite of several years of correspondence with the local council, the Commission chose to ultimately take no action against the council and its decision to name a child's play park after an IRA gunman. Clearly a Christian bakery is an easier target than a Republican council!

Sport

The success of our football team and our golfers has demonstrated that sports men and women from Northern Ireland can compete with the best on the international stage.

Sadly, however, all is not positive when it comes to sport in Northern Ireland. As any football fan knows, the Belfast Agreement has led to a situation where the Republic of Ireland have been able to poach many of our most promising footballers. However, when it comes to other sports young men and women do not have the right to choose which national flag they compete under.

TUV will fight for the right of athletes from Northern Ireland in all sports to compete on the international stage for the United Kingdom.

TUV is opposed to the creation of an all-Ireland football team.

In November 2012 TUV ensured that the issue of sectarianism in boxing reached the floor of the Northern Ireland Assembly when Jim Allister proposed an amendment to a motion about Belfast City Council's Boxing Strategy.

A report which flowed from the Sandy Row case highlighted the fact that boxers from Northern Ireland cannot compete under the Union Flag at the Olympics. They agreed that "the nationality issue in the Olympics is a nettle that needs to be grasped", not just when it comes to boxing but also in relation to other sports.

TUV will fight to ensure that sports men and women from Northern Ireland have the right to represent the UK on the world's biggest stage and to represent Northern Ireland at all levels of international competition.

TUV will continue to highlight inequality in funding for sporting organisations. We oppose preferential treatment to the GAA while other sporting bodies are left comparatively with a pittance.

Tourism

Northern Ireland has many unique selling points when it comes to tourism. The Giant's Causeway, superb golf courses which have helped foster the talent of world class golfers, unique cultural attractions such as the Twelfth and Scarva as well as our great industrial heritage which is at long last being celebrated at the Titanic Centre.

However, Northern Ireland is being held back and prevented from making the most of these selling points. On the international market Ireland is being marketed as a single destination by the cross border body Tourism Ireland. This has hampered the development of tourism in Northern Ireland.

The former head of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board Alan Clarke summed up the problem:

"We (Northern Ireland) are putting a third of the money in (to Tourism Ireland) and we get around 10 to 11 per cent of the holidaymakers coming to the island so Northern Ireland is paying beyond its share".

TUV believes that we need to break free from the shackles of Tourism Ireland and promote Northern Ireland as destination in its own right. A large number of Northern Ireland visitors come from mainland UK. TUV is committed to maintaining our port and airport links to ensure that this increases.

Moral issues

Abortion Law

TUV does not believe that the unborn child should be denied his or her fundamental human rights.

Though there is a superficial plausibility within the promotion of abortion in cases of potentially fatal abnormalities, the experience of the 1967 Act in Great Britain is a salutary warning against such glib assurance. Although the 1967 Act appears to permit abortion only in restricted circumstances, in reality it swung open the door to abortion on demand. Who on reading the supposed restraints of Section 1 of the 1967 Act could imagine that under it over 8,000,000 babies would have been terminated!

It is also important to stress that the current law of Northern Ireland is not an absolute bar to abortion in, for example, a case of severe anencephaly. As the Bourne test makes clear, and as amplified by Girvan LJ in the 2009 Judicial Review, lawful termination is possible where there is a real and serious risk to a woman's physical or mental health, which is either long term or permanent. Thus, the mother whose mental health is so damaged by carrying a child with fatal foetal abnormality can at present avail of lawful termination within Northern Ireland.

In our view this is sufficient. TUV will not be waiting for a "working party" to report after the election.

With TUV you know we will be a strong voice for the unborn before you vote.

Same Sex Marriage

It is noteworthy that when the civil partnership legislation was being debated back in 2004, the Minister in charge, Jackie Smith, told the Commons: "The whole point, however, is that civil partnership is not civil marriage, for a variety of reasons, such as the traditions and history—religious and otherwise—that accompany marriage. It is not marriage" (Hansard, 9th November 2004).

Yet, as many predicted, civil partnership became a stepping stone to full "marriage". TUV will oppose any redefinition of marriage and defend traditional family values as outlined in the founding principles of the party, believing that that is the bedrock for the success of society.



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