

The people have spoken

By JOHN MACVICAR

It has been said over and over again that politics and the people of Northern Ireland have faced a number of watersheds in the lifetime of our Province. There are those political analysts who will spend days, weeks and months pouring over the results of the 2009 European Elections. They will no doubt come up with all sorts of twists and turns to explain the outcome of Monday June 7th 2009. The simple fact of the matter is 58% of the voting population could not be bothered turning up at their polling station to cast their vote and unfortunately for the Unionist family the lions share of that 58% came from the Unionist community and is a sad reflection on the state of politics in Northern Ireland.

Of the two constituencies that straddle the Shankill, North Belfast polled a 40.98% turnout and West Belfast polled a 46.6% turnout and by the end of Friday it was being confidently reported that Sinn Fein would top the poll and that the DUP vote across Northern Ireland had been decimated. By 5pm on Monday the facts were staring everyone in the face, Sinn Fein were elected on the first count, Jim Nicholson was elected on the third count, Diane Dodds was elected at the third count without achieving the

quota and the DUP were stung by the fact Jim Allister had defied his critics by taking almost 70,000 votes at their expense.

So what happened? Peter Robinson made two significant comments in the wake of the disastrous results. The first made during an interview with the BBC when he commented that they (the DUP) were busy governing the country and had taken their eye off the ball and the second more significant when he referred to a blog comment that Sinn Fein could learn from the DUP about

governance and that the DUP could learn from Sinn Fein about connecting with their people.

Ed Curran of the Belfast Telegraph best summed up the political malaise with the 3 D's - Dismay, Disappointment and Dissillusionment.

Dismay - quite simply the ordinary man and woman on the street have been dismayed at the arrogance and in many cases greed of Westminster MP's including some of our own from Northern Ireland as the scandal of claimed expenses has been exposed. For many in our community £24,000 a year in mortgage interest payments is just unimaginable, £30,000 for food allowances is unthinkable and £6,000 a year to fly your partner and children back and forward to London has no relevance whatsoever to the democratic process.

Disappointment - at the lack lustre performance of the Northern Ireland Assembly and

the Executive. Despite everything that the spin doctors say and even taking into account a worldwide recession we are still faced with rising unemployment, water charges in the offing, an ill health service that is still in reactive mode, an education service in disarray with a Nelson like Minister at the helm who thinks everything in the educational garden is rosy, increasing levels of crime and a police force that is scheduled to downsize.

Disillusionment - Reflected in the fact that only 42% of those eligible to vote in the European election actually bothered to do so should be the biggest wake up call to all the political parties. The ordinary man and woman on the street is sick sore and tired of reading about more snouts in the trough, the bleating by those who have been well and truly caught abusing the system of Parliamentary allowances with headlines about non existent mortgages, 'flipping' second

homes to maximise allowances, plasma televisions, swimming pools, chandeliers, whirlpool baths, hot tubs and bags of horse manure?

Listening to comments made by people on the Shankill as they go about their daily business the 3 D's have been reinforced over and over again and most certainly there was an overwhelming number of people saying that our political representatives in government at Stormont are out of touch with their electorate and for some within the community and voluntary organizations that serve the Greater Shankill and beyond there is a feeling that politically our community is disconnected. **Reflecting on the comment made by Peter Robinson about connecting with the people what he and his party colleagues need to understand is that the people have spoken. The question is will he listen?**

The Results

Bairbre de Brun (SF) 126,184 elected on 1st count
 Jim Nicholson (UCUNF) 132,227 elected on 3rd count
 Diane Dodds (DUP) 115,722 elected without achieving the quota on 3rd count
 Those eliminated were Alban Maginness (SDLP) 78489, Ian Parsley (AP) 26,699, Steven Agnew (GRN) 15,764, Jim Allister (TUV) 70,481

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