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Many unionists still singing from same bitter hymnbook

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By Susan McKay

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It didn't take long. Less than 48 hours after its leader Peter Robinson stood beside Martin McGuinness and Sir

Hugh Orde to declare, in the most impressive speech of his career, that "this is not a time to raise the flag of

narrow interests”, the DUP was back to its old sniping ways. First Gregory Campbell then Diane Dodds came out belittling Sinn Fein for its support for the police in the aftermath of last week’s murders and bragging that it had only done so as a result of pressure from the DUP.

People will be looking to see the fine words backed up by actions, they said.

People will indeed. They’ll be looking to see if the first minister and his executive colleagues really have it in them to emerge changed from the “moment of truth” that Robinson spoke of and to work towards the “shared society” that was, he said, the political project from which “we are not turning back”. Signs are that Dodds and Campbell and their ilk are still stuck in ‘sackcloth and ashes’ mode. They think – if that is not too big a word – that their best strategy at this time is to try to humiliate their partner in government.

Dodds is running for Europe and feels she has to outdo puffed-up Jim Allister, who was entirely predictable last week in his lamentations about the dire outcome of allowing the party that represents the majority of the north’s nationalists into government.

(Well, OK, he didn’t put it quite like that but that was the gist of it.)

Campbell just has the simple mindset of those for whom ‘no surrender’ was always a sufficient politics.

They are unembarrassed by the fact that they are singing from the same bitter hymnbook as those republicans whose reaction to McGuinness’s use of the word ‘traitors’ in relation to the killers of Constable Carroll was to denounce it as the ultimate treachery.

Their relentless negativity has its match among these bleak souls.

We heard again from Ruairi O Bradaigh, still sitting by the range in Roscommon after all these years, declaring that the killings were inevitable and warning that Catholics who joined the PSNI were putting themselves “in harm’s way”.

There are plenty of republicans who regard the set-up at Stormont as a poor return for 30 years of ‘armed struggle’ against the British. There are likewise many unionists who feel betrayed over the abandonment of assurances that their beloved ‘province’ was as British as Finchley and that those who tried to destroy it would never be allowed to govern in it. Some among them have accepted defeat and moved on constructively with their lives.

Both Sinn Fein and the DUP were still using ancient rhetoric to rally their people until the last possible moment, when Ian Paisley and McGuinness did the unthinkable and became the Chuckle Brothers. The regime the two parties have presided over has been very far from inspiring and has delivered little in the way of

progressive politics.

Under Robinson the DUP has appeared to go out of its way to obstruct Sinn Fein and by doing so has, in effect, obstructed government.

Last week, we seemed for a moment to have witnessed something new. Robinson acted like a statesman. McGuinness faced down the past. Both acknowledged that the people who voted them into power wanted democracy to work. For a moment we were no longer 'the two communities'. We were one community, united against the killers.

Together we deplored men who, as well as killing the two soldiers, tried to murder a Polish pizza courier as a 'collaborator' and we deplored those who chose to terrify a mother and her children in order to lure a policeman to his death.

Together we dismissed their grandiose claims to high republican ideals. Together we said we could not bear a return to violent conflict.

Robinson and McGuinness will seek to impress President Barack Obama of their unity of purpose but the statements issued in his absence are a warning that the first minister needs to lead his party into genuine power-sharing for more than just one powerful moment.

The Stormont assembly has to deliver and economic circumstances have already made that extremely difficult.

All of the politicians need to remember what Kate Carroll said about the murder of her husband.

"A good husband has been taken away from me and my life has been destroyed," she said. "And what for? A piece of land that my husband is only going to get six feet of."


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