

POWER SHARING GOVERNMENT HAS PROBLEMS

In May 2007, Ian Paisley agreed to join with Sinn Féin in a power sharing government. For one year Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness jointly led the Northern Ireland Executive. History was made.

Upon Paisley's resignation in May 2008, the DUP chose Peter Robinson as their party leader and joint leader of the Executive with Martin McGuinness. But the DUP under Robinson refused to agree an agenda for the Executive that included items other than their own. For example, they would not agree on including Policing & Justice and the transfer of powers.

The lack of true power sharing led to a stalemate and talk of a major breakdown in the government. Indeed, the Executive failed to meet for 5 months, as the DUP tried to dictate an agenda devoid of issues other than their own. Through painstaking but determined work by Sinn Féin the DUP finally agreed an agenda. The stalemate ended in August, 2008, but the issue of power sharing, true power sharing, remains a concern.

POLICING

The issue of Policing has seen some progress. The Northern Ireland Policing Board, which oversees the Northern Ireland Police Service, is now up and functioning. Sinn Féin's Alex Maskey and Martina Anderson both sit on the board and have begun an active and constructive role with regard to policing. Sinn Féin is also represented on the various District Policing Partnerships (DPP's) throughout the north. These DPP's engage with their local council, police commander and community to monitor and improve policing in the community.

While actual control of the police service has not yet been devolved from London to the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive, significant progress has been made. Indeed, the necessary legislation for the transfer has passed the Westminster Parliament. This leaves the matter in the hands of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive which we expect will trigger the devolution of policing and justice before the end of the year.

The recent killings of soldiers and a police officer has been widely condemned and rejected. Gerry Adams said: "The attacks were an attack on the peace process. They were wrong and counter productive. Those responsible have no support and no strategy to achieve a united Ireland. We support the police in the apprehension of those involved."