



HOT SEATS:
Jim Allister's
TUV is flying
high with
14 per cent
support in a
LucidTalk poll
but would
translate
to assembly
seats in an
election?

Political unionism right now is just like a sheep in wolf's clothing

NAME me a member of the Traditional Unionist Voice whom you have heard or seen in the media who isn't Jim Allister.

Go on, I'll wait.

It has been suggested that the TUV polling numbers of 14 per cent in last weekend's LucidTalk poll could translate to a win of six seats for the party in the Assembly elections in May 2022.

The only difficulty is no-one knows who it is the party would run, as it appears to consist solely of Jim Allister.

Given that Jolene Bunting resigned in 2017 with "a heavy heart" after failing to be selected for re-election to Belfast City Council, there are no other high-profile candidates out there to draw upon.

The party's elected representatives are predominantly found in one geographic area. In the 2019 local government elections, the TUV took 6 seats – one in North Down and Ards and five in Mid and East Antrim, which consists of the towns of Ballymena, Larne and Carrickfergus and surrounding areas.

The LucidTalk poll is made up of a sampling across all constituencies, but without a party machine or recognisable candidates outside of the areas above, it's hard to see how the number of Assembly seats such an overall percentage share might suggest will materialise.

The only place the TUV has polled in double digit percentages is in the North Antrim constituency where Jim Allister holds his seat as a member of the Assembly.

Even in that constituency in 2010, the polls had Jim Allister 8 per cent behind Ian Paisley, but in the end, Paisley won by 30 per cent.

The party did not run a single candidate in the Westminster general election of 2019, giving the DUP a free run, which is surprising when you consider that Jim Allister would not be known for either practising or preaching unionist unity.

It's also interesting to note that despite all of the DUP strife of the past

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year, the TUV could not attract one single notable defector into its ranks – not even Jim Wells, who was cast out by Arlene Foster.

I wonder in rare moments of reflection whether Jim Allister ever ponders just how little he has travelled in all this time, from one futile protest after another to sharing a stage with a boy on a wheelie bin.

Opinion polls are best thought of as a way of giving political parties a bit of a shake-up, but when the time comes to cast the ballot in the polling booth, voters tend to be less rebellious.

Unionism in its three-way split has been clutching its pearls at the prospect of a Sinn Féin first minister.

It's a hell of a fall from 28 per cent of votes in the assembly election of 2017 to 13 per cent in this poll for the DUP, and scaremongering

by Jeffrey Donaldson that the world might end if Michelle O'Neill were to be first minister may not be enough to claw back the party's votes. They tried that once before with Martin McGuinness, but that trick isn't likely to work again.

On the prospect of a Sinn Féin first minister, Jim Allister tweeted: "Before SF acolytes in press and elsewhere get carried away, they need to remember there could only ever be a SF first minister if they can find a stooge unionist party to serve as deputy."

The prospect of pre or post-election unionist unity evaporates right there as the spectre of a modern-day Lundy is conjured up, oblivious of the reality that it will be unionism's political leaders' inability to change with the times that have caused an electoral shift to come about.

Political unionism right now is like a sheep in wolf's clothing. The DUP lack direction, the TUV lack resources and the Ulster Unionist Party can only maintain the "Beattie bounce" for so long unless the new leader has full buy-in for change from the party's executive. Just ask Mike Nesbitt about the challenges of dragging the UUP into the 20th century.

Unionism has a long-standing insecurity that they will be left behind by Britain. At the time of partition, Belfast was a thriving industrial city and the loyal sons had marched dutifully towards the Somme and could be counted on to go into battle again when they were needed. Those conditions don't exist any more, though.

Flag waving and a deep distrust or dislike of other cultures and traditions by some unionists is the outworking of not being confident in their own identity. In the last number of years, we have seen the evolution of a distinct Ulster British identity that has been shaped by living on this island yet feeling a sense of belonging to the United Kingdom.

The unionist party which acknowledges that reality and works within it for the benefit of its supporters is the one, I suspect, which will ultimately capture the majority of votes.

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ON THIS DAY

SEPTEMBER 2 1921

Troops Restore Peace

BELFAST was quiet yesterday and only two unpleasant incidents occurred to mar the otherwise peaceful condition of affairs that prevailed from early morning to Curfew hour. Military pickets were stationed at points all along the affected areas while military and police lorries toured the districts.

Further detachments of military, including Scottish regiments, arrived. With the death of Walter Campbell (16), shot in Brown Square, a total of 17 persons were killed in this week's outbreak.

While Catholic workers were proceeding to Gallaher's tobacco factory in York Street shortly before 8 a.m., a large mob of Orangemen attacked them near Grove Street. Shots were fired at workers, the majority of whom were women and girls, but, fortunately, no one was injured. Many of the poor people were unable to reach the factory and had to return home.

IRA Chief Blames 'Orange Mobs'

COMMANDER O'Duffy, Liaison Officer for the Northern Counties and, as such, formally recognised by the British Government, states: "The situation in Belfast is far from satisfactory."

Sniping is going on in various parts of the city. The military are on the streets but results show that they are not in sufficient numbers in the disturbed areas to be effective. It is quite patent that the Orange mobs are very little concerned with the presence of the military...

"The IRA are rigidly adhering to my order – 'Cease Fire' – and are at present entirely engaged in intelligence work. At any moment it may be necessary to call them into action again."

Death of Belfast Entrepreneur

THE death of Mr John Robb, chairman of the old established and progressive firm of Messrs John Robb and Co., general drapers and warehousemen, Castle Place, removes an outstanding personality in the business life of Belfast.

The eldest son of the late Mr John Robb, founder of the great firm, Mr Robb was educated at Royal Belfast Academical Institution and entered the business which his father had established in 1857.

Devoting himself entirely to commerce, Mr Robb took no part in public affairs but confined his energies to the development of the firm as well as the Grand Central Hotel.

By his employees he was always looked upon not only as a model employer, but as a friend, always ready and willing to help them in every way.

(As James Craig's fledgling government was still denied control over law and order by Whitehall, the Dublin Castle authorities decide to deploy troops on the streets in strength. This quickly quenched the violence which was widely viewed in the British press as an organised sectarian attack on the city's Catholic minority.)

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