

The DUP wrote the book on vote-splitting

In a recent interview Mr Robinson talked of Unionist splits, conveniently ignoring the fact the fact that it was the DUP themselves who, in a huge tactical blunder, weakened and divided Unionism back in the 1970s, and saw to it that we punched well below our weight for nearly three decades. The DUP is in no position to lecture anyone about splitting the Unionist vote. They wrote the book on it.

Perhaps the most serious charge which can be levelled against the DUP is the disastrous attempt to re-negotiate the Belfast Agreement at St Andrews which has resulted in the First Minister's position being gifted as of right to the largest Party, not the largest Designation as had previously been the case.

As a result of the DUP's ineptitude, if the recent European Election results are replicated in the next Assembly Elections in 2011 and three broadly similar-sized unionist parties emerge, it is highly likely that Sinn Fein would be the largest party, and therefore take the First Minister's post.

Under the arrangements negotiated by the Ulster Unionist Party in 1998 that would not have happened, as the combined strength of the Unionist vote would be reflected in Unionism being the largest designation. Unfortunately for Unionism, under the arrangements negotiated by the DUP at St Andrews – designed for the short-term benefit of the DUP not the long-term interests of Unionism - it is the largest Party, not largest designation which takes the First Minister's post, paving the way for a Sinn Fein First Minister.

Faced with a collapse in the DUP vote in the European Election, a resurgent Ulster Unionist Party, and a buoyant TUV, Mr Robinson has chosen to re-shuffle his Ministerial team. Unfortunately for him, the Unionist Electorate has seen through the DUP. I am confident that once the Unionist people fully understand what the DUP did in the selfish pursuit of short-term Party advantage at St Andrews, at the expense of the interests of Northern Ireland and the Union itself, the DUP will find that their current electoral difficulties have only started.