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## UUP rejects Tory plea and votes against devolution of policing powers

New justice ministry is created without backing of Conservative allies in Stormont

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- [guardian.co.uk](#), Tuesday 9 March 2010 17.37 GMT
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Ulster Unionist leader Sir Reg Empey walks past a TV monitor displaying the Northern Ireland chamber meeting at Stormont in Belfast today. Photograph: Peter Muhly/AFP/Getty Images

The final part of the [Northern Ireland](#) devolution deal was put in place today, giving the province its first justice minister since the Troubles erupted four decades ago.

Nationalists and unionists in the Stormont parliament voted together to create the new justice ministry, completing the last act of the Good Friday agreement.

But there was discord inside the Stormont parliament after the [Conservatives'](#) allies in Northern Ireland, the Ulster Unionists, and their 18-strong assembly team, voted against the move.

Despite an 11th hour intervention by David Cameron imploring the UUP to vote yes, the party refused to back the historic measure.

The party's stance puts Cameron in a difficult position: he is in favour of the devolution of justice to Belfast, but his electoral pact with the UUP risks exposing him to criticism that a Conservative government could not claim to be an "honest broker" when there are disagreements between the parties at Stormont.

Today's vote came just before 5pm, when 88 assembly members from Sinn Féin and the DUP joined the SDLP and smaller parties to back the transfer of policing and judicial powers to Belfast.

But the UUP resisted pressure – from, among others, [former US president George Bush](#) – to support the measure.

Speaking on the assembly floor, Sir Reg Empey, the UUP leader, said his party had voted no "as a democratic political

party pledged to making power-sharing work in an inclusive manner for all the people of Northern Ireland, and we exercise our rights refusing to bow to the blackmail and bullying to which we have been subjected in recent weeks."

The deputy first minister, Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness, earlier denounced the UUP stance, claiming it was intended to embarrass the DUP.

"The UUP declared last night that they will not support this resolution," McGuinness told the assembly.

"That saddens and disappoints me. They are opposed in my view to the transfer for cynical party political reasons."

In a statement after the vote, Gordon Brown praised the parties which backed the deal. "Today the politics of progress have finally replaced the politics of division in Northern Ireland," the prime minister said. "The completion of devolution, supported by all sections of the community in Northern Ireland, is the final end to decades of strife. It sends the most powerful message to those who would return to violence: that democracy and tolerance will prevail.

"The courage and leadership of the parties who voted to complete devolution at Stormont will be noted around the world."

The Conservatives welcomed the vote, without mentioning the UUP's rejection of the move. A Tory spokesman said: "We welcome the fact that devolution of policing and justice is going to happen. We wanted all four parties to be involved and for it to be decided by local politicians."

But the Liberal Democrats called on Cameron to "clarify the position of his Tory-UUP alliance on the devolution of policing and justice powers".

Alistair Carmichael, their spokesman on Northern Ireland, said: "With the UUP saying one thing, and the Tories saying the complete opposite, voters will struggle to understand what exactly joint Tory-UUP candidates stand for. What we're seeing is the Tories in complete disarray. When it takes George Bush to step in as the voice of reason, it's clear that David Cameron has dug himself a very big hole."

Carmichael added: "This raises serious questions about David Cameron's judgment. If he can't manage to steer a straight course in opposition, how on earth would he cope as prime minister?"

Earlier there was acrimony in the Great Hall at Stormont when a victims' campaigner attempted to serve a civil writ against McGuinness.

Willie Frazer of the group Families Acting for Innocent Relatives threw the legal document in McGuinness's direction after the deputy first minister refused to take it off him. Frazer is taking a civil action in Belfast high court against the Sinn Féin MP because he alleges McGuinness directed the IRA's campaign during the Troubles. The south Armagh unionist's father was shot dead by the IRA.

The FAIR spokesman said he had chosen yesterday because the DUP "had betrayed me and other victims" by agreeing to devolve policing and justice powers. Frazer predicted that Sinn Féin would exercise a major influence over the police and judiciary even though the centrist, non-sectarian Alliance party leader, David Ford, will be the first justice minister.

Frazer said: "I am very disappointed in the DUP because for years they said the things victims wanted to hear and now they have done a complete somersault. All along they told me that Sinn Féin would never get their hands on policing and justice but they have a say. Mr Ford is answerable to the executive and that means the deputy first minister, Martin McGuinness. That is why the only action left to me is a civil action. I feel very let down by a number of DUP people."

The DUP will suffer at the polls for this U-turn, Frazer predicted.

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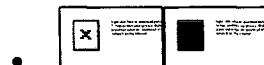
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

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