

Thank you Mr Speaker.

"I don't think an election will hasten the day the protocol is sorted out. But it is a matter for the Government

The local parties are not at the table to negotiate.

Those are some of Jeffrey Donaldson's words from yesterday. We all agree with you. We also all agree that your continued strike will also not hasten the day that the protocol is sorted out either. That is a matter for the UK Government and the EU to resolve. Both have agreed to work to resolve the issue...

From when the DUP walked out last February, we've seen a steady decline and mounting circumstances that ordinary people are now living through.

A grown up party of government doesn't behave like this.

I want to tell you all about a family in Lagan Valley that I dealt with recently. One of many. A typical family, like many in all of our constituents. This is Paul & Esther's story from Lisburn.

Paul works full time and earns £24,000 a year. Esther has had to go part time due to the cost of child care, and so works hours around their two children. They both work hard and their world is their two kids in the home they purchased several years ago. A young family, with young children, with their whole future ahead of them. From the outside, a young family full of potential.

Yet Paul and Esther are really struggling. Really struggling. During covid they took a holiday mortgage to help get by, this now has to be paid back. Paul drives in his job and has seen his fuel costs massively increased.

Like many families their mortgage deal has expired and now have a higher monthly mortgage payment, they are struggling to pay the bills, to heat their home and feed their kids.

Here they were calling for help ... in tears ... embarrassed ... broken. At their wits end.

They aren't entitled to a payment of Universal Credit.

Ok they'll get the £400 payment sometime on their electric and then £100 oil payment. Such little support at a time when they need it most.

Now is the time when this House should be coming together to provide stability, direction, tailored help for our people. This is why we are elected.

This is the very point of this devolved assembly.

Paul doesn't know how he will get to work in the in next few weeks. Does he fill his car to get to work? does he continue to pay the mortgage, heat his home or does he feed his family? These are the real choices that working people are having to make. This is 2022.

I have to say, we are really fortunate in Lagan Valley to have the support from an incredible team in local Foodbank in Lisburn, who are dealing with cases like this every day – but with 50% more in October alone.

Paul and Esther are hard working people. They got through Covid and now being broken by this crisis.

With this assembly not functioning or being able to offer help, or give direction, it's ordinary people like Paul & Esther that you are hurting. These are the people caught up in your ransom political.

In Lagan Valley during the summer I met with the local PSNI. We chatted about crime rates in the area – and I was shocked at the PSNI stat, one I still can't quite get over – in Lisburn – Stealing Food from supermarkets and shops is up 53%. This has become the highest crime in the area.

It's time to end Ransom Politics, where the rest of us sit here powerless to get financial support to very people that need it most. No one should be left behind.

These are our neighbours, our friends, our family.

A shocking statistic was reported yesterday in the Belfast Telegraph, that Northern Ireland is now the poorest region of the UK.

I read another stat recently that we were one of the poorest regions in the entire EU & UK. Just think about that!

But Northern Ireland now has the lowest disposable household income in the entire UK.

The recent data shows spending power here has fallen by a record 28.7% year on year as families struggle to cope with rising energy and grocery costs.

And before Member's across from me, start on with a lazy answer blaming the Protocol. The reason is our households are being impacted as our spending is more heavily concentrated in high inflation categories such as food, energy, and motor fuels.

Our spending power is also being affected by weaker income growth.

This is explained by the country's labour market composition, we have a weaker employment rate, and higher inactivity rates

We've a greater share of employees earning below the living wage, and a larger share of employment in the public sector which has now seen pay growth outstripped by the public sector for 17 consecutive months.

Yet here we are Going into the winter, when 70% of our population will suffer from Fuel Poverty. 6-months after an election we were elected to help deal with these issues. To show leadership.

Shamelessly, DUP members sit there nodding along, but the elephant in the room :- I suspect the majority of you don't even agree with the decision your leadership has inflicted on our people.

How could you?

It's disgusting at a time like this.

It's shameless.

It's embarrassing.

Please think of your constituents, call your strike off, and get on with the job your paid to do. Let's get this place working.

Thank you Mr Speaker.