

Cian O'Neill on the latest fashions in the glamorous world of politics.

# Election fashion week

Well, the future waits and the polity have spoken – better yet, have bothered to vote. Not all of them alive, it must be allowed, but those excepted all good republicans entitled to cast their postal ballot nonetheless. So as to stun the very world, the ladies and gentlemen of Ulster have elected the most hardline politicians available. All the same depressing faces are back. The Prawn Eyed Man for one – nice to know that Jeffrey will not be mapping his life out in accordance with the panto schedules just yet. The continued presence of his smooth hair is as reassuring as rainfall on a windowpane.

The stolid Ian Paisley bespored a hilarious selection of ties throughout his campaign – each of which acted as a mimetic of some awful unnameable holiday camp lounge carpet once glimpsed on Saturday evening ITV. Perhaps the oddest thing is how Paisley has suddenly decided that he would best represent the solid, virtuous and Christian politics of Unionism by donning a fedora and looking like some long-lost gangster. The mind wanders over the reasons why – perhaps vanitas, perhaps he finally got wise to Peter Robinson's hip edge [black blazer and black tie? Ouch!], perhaps he just Felt Like A Change. One wonders whether or not he is going to turn heel on his former self and, ignoring the supernumerary jeremiads he has dispensed with over the decades, work with ex-terrorist Sinn Fein. Perhaps he should speak to Phillip Treacy instead?

Messrs Adams and McGuinness long ago put aside the traditional West Belfast weekend attire of bomber jacket and badly fitting light blue denim. Adams has for a while resembled a somewhat self-satisfied Jordanstown lecturer [of course, he is not radical enough to ever teach at UUU]. Martin is something else – he does not 'own' his suits – one ever expects him not to speak as a free man, but merely respond, as if to a chargesheet.

Robert MacCartney's Napoleonic multiple seat run having fallen flat, we are to be deprived of the useful tutorials he has previously granted in use of the Half-Glasses. Noone uses glasses well in politics anymore – think Kissinger or Enoch Powell's Harry Palmer-eque jamjar efforts. Much is surface in politics and so at least we deserve good surface. Peter Hain is a superficial character, yet even he does not convince, sartorially. After all, he

has the plastic blood of generations of Estate Agents running through his veins. Politicians should have gravitas and be useful, or they should amuse. They should not look, as the NI Secretary does, as if they are modelling new season Blue Harbour of Marks and Spencers.

Nigel Dodds has survived the Election, to scare new generations of children with his paving-stone pre-molars. His wife Diane lost her seat, but really, will you miss her hair? The woman just Had to go. Come to think of it, only Iris 'Alleycat' Robinson brought the merest frisson of Golf Club pulchritude to NI politics. Sammy Wilson is back with a huge majority and a tie worn, as ever, just short of his belt. He is quite wonderful, really, reminding us that politics can offer opportunity to the aesthetically impaired which the priesthood, say, would not allow. Sammy does also possess the gift of perpetual scruffiness, managing to always look like the boy behind the bikesheds telling dirty jokes. Look carefully – are his shirttails out? No, but they look as if they are. Sometimes, that is enough.

Mark Durkan didn't do enough this time round [has he ever?] and really one has to ask whether or not a man who seems perfectly electable, as the local Rotary Club treasurer and nothing else, should be leading a political party. He simply fades into the background. There is a war of attrition being waged in Ulster politics and it is conducted in the clothes. Clothes send messages. For example, in her press photo, the DUP's Arlene Foster looks like a fertility expert from Cold War-era Romania. What this communicates about her I have not the slightest idea, but my God, did she get planning permission for those lapels? And lilac on royal blue?! It is to be seriously wondered whether or not one could entrust to such a person quasi-governmental synthetic hedging strategy and, well, all that kind of stuff.

That bright young thing of SF, Daithi McKay, looks like he knows about lots of

stuff. He got his driving licence three years ago and he has not been asked for proof-of-age in a nightclub since, like, ages ago. He has extremely short hair and uses gel. This is not in general terms a boon for Ulster, however he is at least less nauseating of visage than the young William Hague. Anna Lo of the Alliance Party has also been on the hair glue, and boy does she look invigorated. Apart from that you can't but be glad that we can all forget entirely about David Alderdice and his turn-it-any-way-and-it-looks-the-same head, which ever gave this writer a sense of vertigo, much like looking down from atop the bloodied bar into the imploring eyes of the constabulary.

Suffice it to say that they are a sorry lot, really, and should ask a gay friend [if any of them live in Upper Bann, Lagan Valley etc.] for advice. Peter Hain [and this is written with but a moiety of irony] makes them all look like cheap hustlers and whores, brittle preachers and hollow men. Which they are, of course, but they could at least make a proper effort and not rube the electorate clad in rubber-soled shoes and Easy-Press shirts from Burtons. Margaret Thatcher was a better-dressed man than most of them, and, you know, she only wore boring and matronly skirts to make room for her huge balls. Do any of these politicians have the balls to make N. Ireland work? That does rather remain to be seen.



■ PRE-FEDORA PAISLEY