I have been a self-employed businessman for the past 40 years. In that, I necessarily observed certain failings in our society, which had very large consequence in terms of income and poverty, generally.

It is a matter of discontent generally that the MLAs and other politicians continue to receive their full pay and allowances, even while they, personally in several cases, are responsible for the current debacle. To recap on events of last year, consequent on the Renewable Heating Initiative becoming a public scandal, and on the DUP adopting a hard line response to all criticism, including antagonising part of the electorate, Sinn Fein were seen initially as ‘wrong-footed’ on the (or both) issue(s). However, when the DUP’s Paul Givan, Minister for Communities, offered a ‘coat dragging’ insult in withdrawing funding from the Líofa Gaeltacht Bursary Scheme enabling 100 people a year to attend summer Irish language classes (£55,000, a minuscule amount, considering context), then their partners in government, Sinn Fein, felt suitably offended and withdrew from government, with consequent collapse of same.

The dynamic of these ‘partners in government’ is of a set of vaudeville performers, or maybe Larry, Moe and Curly as they perform these little courtship dances; where the courted party is the electorate, who, in terms of who they vote for, are quite amenable to the dance. (I'm presuming reference to Whitehall farces would be too 'British' for some) Sinn Fein and the DUP have both prospered from this farce. A suspicious mind might wonder at there being a level of collusion, un-minuted and nothing said, but somehow satisfactory for both parties.

(1) To break this, one small initial action would be to reduce MLA salaries and allowances by 50% with immediate effect. The (non-party) civil service staff of Stormont could and should be retained, possibly with temporary redeployment. This course could be planned for 12 months, after which their salaries and allowances should reduce to zero

(2) A second action that would concentrate minds, is the examination by Westminster PAC of where liability lay, in using the legislation previously used against Liverpool and later Westminster councils, where councillors were judged personally liable for mis-spent funds. (Hansard, 1996)

I realise that committees in general are comfortable with a bureaucratic approach and don't like slightly radical suggestions of hurting a politicians income (that may seem extreme), but consider the damage to the weakest sections of this society by these politicians failure to govern.
Underlying our current problem is the structure set up by the Blair government, primarily this compulsory government, where opposition barely exists.

(3) The D'Hondt system is part of that problem, (4) 'Petition of Concern' is another, (5) unpublished and secret party money contributions another. All those should be changed. We probably are mature enough to live with real politics instead of playacting, at least at the level of a sufficient percentage of this electorate to effect change. (In a good direction)

19 December 2017