THE ECONOMIC LEGACY OF PARTITION

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The economic legacy of partition (and charting a way forward)

In his examination of the main motivations for cross-border cooperation between firms at a local level, Stephen Roper (2006: 1-4) identifies a number of characteristics that the Irish border shares with comparable areas in southeast Europe, i.e. the Balkan region. Firstly, the recent history of the Irish border reflects the continuing tension between economic and supranational pressures towards integration, on the one hand, and North-South political tensions, concentrated mainly in the North, on the other. One might add that the current administration in the South has deprioritised North-South co-operation and taken a hands off approach to the Good Friday Agreement, except when it presents opportunities to attack Sinn Féin. Secondly, border areas tend to be peripheral to a region's economic core, geographically distant from the main urban centres (Belfast, Dublin and London) and the institutions of economic and political decision-making. A third, related feature of these border regions is relatively poor infrastructure and low levels of investment in infrastructure projects. Fourthly, there is the problem of discontinuity in regulatory, fiscal and social welfare systems. Fifthly, borders come with the potential for trade restrictions, which tend to distort markets and negatively affect firms' locational decisions. Finally, there is the continued negative impacts of the prolonged ethnic conflict on cross-border trade and investment,. All of these characteristics have frustrated efforts at economic cooperation and collaboration and have had a detrimental social impact in the form of increased polarisation between and within communities in the border counties.

From the earliest years of the two Irish states, attempts at even the most functional measures of cross-border cooperation have been fraught with difficulties. Even before the onset of the Troubles, ideology and political tensions frequently triumphed over economic pragmatism. The promise of inter-governmental agreements on schemes such as the Erne hydroelectric project, the Great Northern Railway Board, and the Foyle Fisheries Commission went largely unfulfilled due to intractable disputes on the national question and the Unionist administration's hostility to anything that resembled a step towards a united Ireland (Kennedy, 2000: 92-156). That Seán Lemass became the first Taoiseach to meet his counterpart Terence O'Neill at Stormont in 1963, and that it caused such a furore, is symbolic of the sensitive nature of North-South relations and extent to which politics at a macro level informed everything else.

Economic regulations, which intersected with distinct notions of nationhood and citizenship, have limited the capacity of aliens – non-citizens of varying residency statuses – to participate in the economic life of both states. For example, in pursuance of self-sufficiency and indigenous industrialisation, the Fianna Fáil government of the 1930s and 1940s enacted a series of measures that upheld the Sinn Féin tenet of Irish ownership of Irish resources. Notable among these were the Control of Manufactures Acts (1932 & 1934), promoted by Lemass as a means of guaranteeing that at a majority of shareholders and directors of a manufacturing company would be Irish nationals, while other relevant acts and regulations placed restrictions on non-Irish proprietorship or involvement in agriculture, shipping and transport. Paradoxically, these measures advanced a Free State conception of nationhood, thus excluding nationalists and Unionists of the six counties equally. In the North, there were surprisingly few legal barriers to employment or enterprise up until the Second World War. The war generated a significant upsurge in industrial production and a sharp rise in the demand for labour, which precipitated an influx of southern workers. However, the scale of this Éireann infiltration of the northern labour market was soon perceived as a security threat and, in some quarters, as a threat to the Protestant Ascendancy. The Safeguarding of Employment Act (1947) restricted employment and apprenticeship to persons born in Northern Ireland unless a special permit was obtained for a specific post with a specific employer. This act remained intact until negotiations for membership of the EEC commenced in the early 1970s (Daly, 2001: 392; Meehan, 2006: 4-10).

Where restrictive legislation became diluted or proved ineffective, extended labour markets provided Protestant workers with another safeguard against competition from the South. Based on patronage, familial links and communal solidarity, these informal employment practices were prevalent in key industries such as shipbuilding, particularly as deindustrialisation began to set in. They were strong demonstrations of the interaction between economic interests and ethnic identity during the conflict, and had the intended effect of providing a section of the Protestant population with ease of access to employment opportunities while denying the same opportunities to their Catholic counterparts. By virtue of their exclusion of Catholics, extended labour markets acted as a disincentive to southerners who might have otherwise sought employment in northern industry (Ó Murchú, 2005). This exclusionary culture is emblematic of the anomalous nature of the northern state during the Troubles. It undermined the prospect of greater levels of labour mobility and served to perpetuate ethnic divisions at the expense of the pronounced class antagonisms that characterise 'normal' bourgeois states.

A number of authors have acknowledged the role of the Europeanisation and European integration on social and economic relations along the Irish border. For Meehan (2000) the EU has not only promoted economic integration but has also facilitated a redefinition of previously antagonistic identities. Hayward (2004a, 2004b) sees the EU as a positive agent in conflict transformation and emphasises its enabling impact on community development in a cross-border context. But in contrast to Meehan, she points to the limits of EU intervention: although it has helped create a framework for ending the conflict, the peace process has, and will continue to, rely upon the 'goodwill' of local actors as well as the support of the British and Irish governments. It could be argued that this goes no deeper than acceptance of political settlement's framework rather than a genuine coalition based on recognition of past military/political failure and a different way forward. Hayward rejects the idea that nationalist and Unionist identities will give way for a shared European identity and thus sees the EU's role as less political than economic and structural. Similarly, Tonge (2005) sees the EU's function as underwriting the Good Friday Agreement, particularly its all island-dimension, with institutional and financial support. Peace I, II and III programmes, including those administered by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), are illustrative of the EU's commitment to underpinning the peace process with sustained funding. Bodies such as Cooperation-Ireland[1] and the Centre for Cross-Border Studies[2] are tasked with monitoring and evaluating the practice of cross-border cooperation and with identifying pertinent research topics and areas of mutual interest for third sector organisations.

One of the consequences of globalisation and the negotiations that led to Britain and Ireland's membership of the EEC has been a relaxation of economic mobility between the two jurisdictions. The Anglo-Irish Trade Agreement (1948) was followed by the southern government's publication of the *Economic Development* White Paper in 1958 and the resulting *First Programme for Economic Development*, which Lemass adopted as government policy after succeeding de Valera as Taoiseach in 1959. Along with the Industrial Development Act (1958), which dismantled crucial parts of the Control of Manufactures Acts, an expansion of the Industrial Development Authority (IDA)'s scope for attracting foreign capital, and the introduction of substantial tax breaks on repatriated profits, these two documents signalled an acceleration of the shift towards freer trade. These moves, accompanied by a fundamental reappraisal of citizenship, helped paved the way for Ireland's admission into the EEC in 1973. Pressure from European officials and the British government, meanwhile, ensured that the Safeguarding of Employment Act was phased out in practice before its eventual repeal in 1981. However, public sector opportunities for

[1] http://www.cooperationireland.org/.
[2] http://www.crossborder.ie/.

Irish and Commonwealth nationals would remain legally and politically problematic into the immediate post-Good Friday Agreement period (Meehan, 2006: 10-14).

Arguably the key milestone in Britain and Ireland's rapid shift towards economic liberalisation was the enactment of the Single Market Act (1992), which had at its core the free movement of capital and peoples between member states of the EU. The European Commission acknowledged that the collective drive towards a single European market (SEM) posed a threat to the development of peripheral regions but envisaged that targeted infrastructural improvements and financial support would enable local authorities and businesses to maximise their potential through cross-border cooperation. EU regional policy was therefore adjusted to compensate for the difficulties that the poorer regions were expected to encounter (Tannam, 1999). Strand Two of the Good Friday Agreement, which established six North-South implementation bodies covering competencies including health, education, tourism, agriculture, transport and sport, was strongly linked to European strategies for achieving social cohesion and economic competitiveness. The 1994-1999 round of EU Structural Funds was directed at strengthening existing and newly established political and administrative cross-border relationships in conjunction with the ongoing process of economic liberalisation (Hayward, 2005).

As O'Dowd et al. (2006: 5) have highlighted, it is regrettable that the structural and political changes accompanying European integration have not been underpinned by greater investment in cross-border projects. Only 15 percent of Peace I & II funding was allocated to the cross-border dimension, while most of the projects in receipt of funding have worked within the confines of the two separate Irish polities. Moreover, the resources directed to cross-border initiatives since the Good Friday Agreement constitutes a small fraction of public expenditure in both jurisdictions. The specific cross-border focus of Peace III and SEUPB projects in particular indicates that the EU is alive to this reality. Tannam (2004) and Smyth (2005) both recognise that the political climate fostered by elected representatives has proved immensely important as regards the resources directed towards, or withheld from, projects that advance cross-border cooperation. Whilst the impact of administrative cooperation and the embedding of the North-South Ministerial Council have been fundamentally positive in terms of promoting dialogue at the level of high politics, the ideological reservations of Unionist ministers have inhibited the Ministerial Council and the all-island implementation bodies from functioning to their full potential. Ultimately, as Bradley (2006: 19-20) has stated, political isolation has its corollary in divergent strategies (*Strategy 2010*; *Enterprise 2010*) for improving competitiveness and specialisation in the two states, which, he contends, goes against geographical and economic logic.

To borrow the words of the Chinese communist and eminent statesman Zhou Enlai, it is too early to tell whether Peace III projects and initiatives such as the North-South Ministerial Council's 'Border People' resource[3] have had a significant impact on the border economy and labour mobility between the two Irish jurisdictions. We can nonetheless begin to build up a picture of the economic health of the border region and the overall pattern of labour migration by drawing attention to some of the key trends that have transpired in recent decades. In light of the extraordinary level of attention given to institutional relationships and macro-economic indicators, it is especially important to critically assess the models of economic development adopted in the two states and scrutinise their effects on the people of the border counties.

Migration and labour mobility across the Irish border

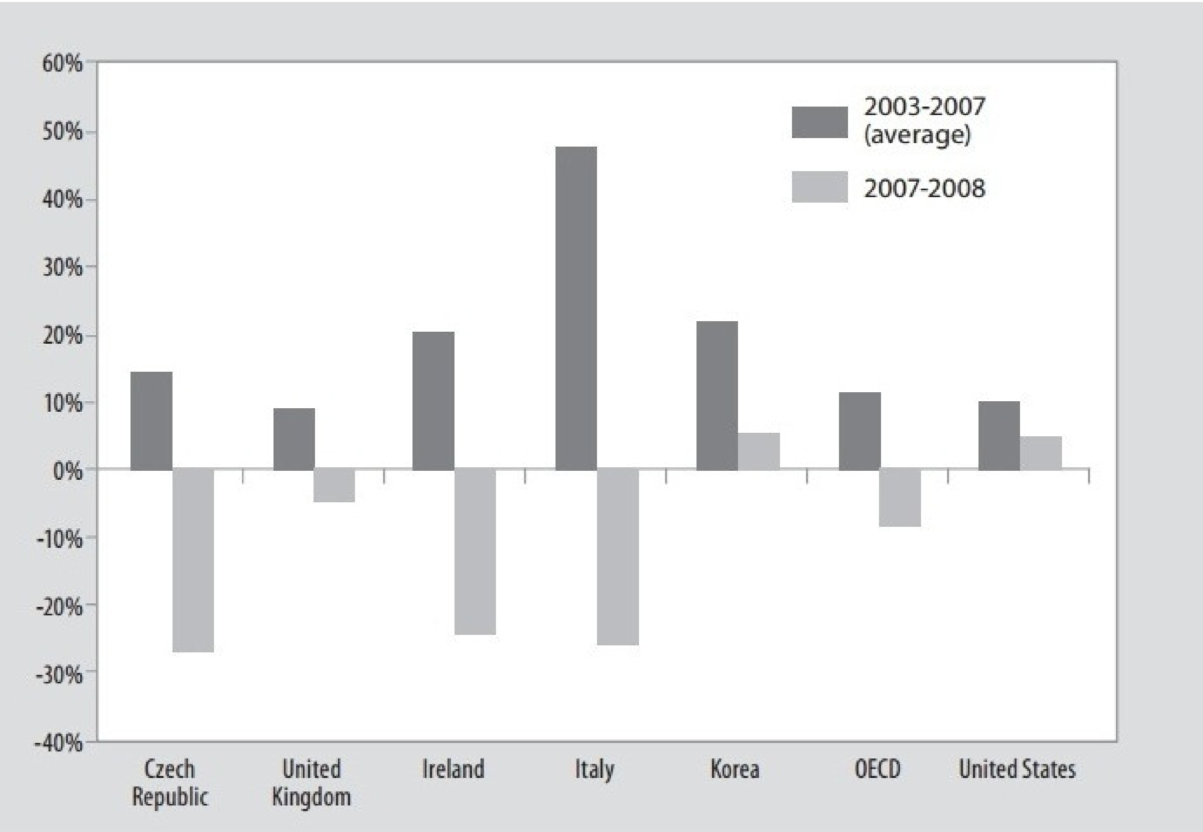
A PricewaterhouseCooper (PwC) (2002) study of barriers to cross-border mobility, conducted on behalf of the North-South Ministerial Council, notes some changes in the objective conditions that have enabled greater movement of people between the two jurisdictions. Notable among these changes are those relating to European and national legislation, the mutual recognition of qualifications and the transformation of the political climate. The available evidence reveals that the North witnessed a net inflow of people from the South in the years following the ceasefires, including those moving north to study and in search of employment. The PwC report (2002) also claims that the official statistics underestimate the number of 'frontier' workers, i.e. those commuting across the border. These tentative conclusions are reinforced by Harvey et al. (2005: 52-54), who attempt with some success to quantify labour mobility in post-conflict Ireland and suggest that commuting is highest on the Dundalk-Newry

[3] http://www.borderpeople.info/.

and Letterkenny-Derry axes and weaker in the rural parts of Ulster, reflecting the infrastructure, transport links and overall level of investment enjoyed/suffered by the urban areas.

Extant research appears to chime in part with Tannam's (1999, 2004) assertion that economic factors have a significant bearing on cross-border cooperation, migration and labour mobility. Perhaps the starkest demonstration of this is the dramatic reversal of migration flows in the South following the spectacular collapse of the Celtic Tiger.

Figure 1. Change in international migrant flows, 2003-2008 (Source: Angelov & Vankova, 2011)



In combination with political stability, the health of a country's economy has a positive impact on labour migration. For the five years prior to 2007 – the period regarded as the high point of the Celtic Tiger – the migration flow to southern Ireland increased annually by approximately 20 percent. Between 2007 and 2008, immediately after the wheels came off the Irish economic 'miracle', inward migration declined by 25 percent. On one level, this is indicative of the effect of the economic crisis on the movement of people into developed countries. In fact, we see that the reversal of migration flows during and in the immediate aftermath of the financial and property market crash of 2007/08 was most pronounced in two of the PIIGS (Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece and Spain) countries (Angelov & Vankova, 2011: 30-32). On another level, it is a consequence of Irish government policy responses both to increased immigration during the Celtic Tiger and the economic crisis that followed. Firstly, to curb asylum applications, the government created a list of safe countries of origin and began to prioritise applications accordingly. Secondly, between 2003 and 2005, Ireland's laws were changed to eliminate an Irish-born child's right to citizenship when the parents are not Irish nationals. Finally, Ireland moved away from its liberal work permit system as it sought to meet its low-skilled labour needs within the enlarged EU (Ruhs & Quinn, 2009). Even in financially straightened times, these measures represent a backward step in terms of their negative impact on mobility and moves towards societal diversity. They also ensure that negative stereotypes of international migrants are fed into public discourse through the state, which creates the space for those looking to identify scapegoats and exploit the anger and frustration of Irish-born citizens for narrow right-wing and openly fascist ends. In the estimation of Michael O'Flynn and colleagues (2014), scapegoating 'serves a dual-purpose: on the one hand it deflects blame from the government and the class interests that it is prioritising: on the other hand it serves to rationalise and normalise attacks on those that it has been decided must bear the costs' of economic crisis and austerity.

By contrast, Northern Ireland has transformed into a region of inward migration. International migration has been a central feature of the northern state for many decades, leading to the establishment of vibrant Chinese and Indian communities. More recently, since the accession of eight central and eastern European (A8) countries in 2004, the North has welcomed a disproportionate number of A8 immigrants compared with the UK. The vast majority of these migrants are well-educated, 'underemployed' and are seeking or are in work, and their arrival has brought the cultural enrichment and diversity, not to mention substantial economic benefits, to various parts of the North, particularly the western and south-western counties (Bell, 2012; Russell, 2011).

One useful, albeit imperfect, measure of North-South labour mobility is the number of Personal Public Service (PPS) numbers allocated to Northern Ireland domiciles. Similarly, we can begin to build up a picture of South-North labour mobility by documenting the number of southern domiciles that have applied for and received National Insurance numbers (NINos) from local authorities in the North. That the most common reasons for migration are to commence employment, to look for employment or to study strongly indicates that these figures are broadly commensurate with medium-to-long term labour mobility trends. Because there is a strong link between unemployment and migration in Ireland (PwC, 2002: 40), it is reasonable to suggest that persistence of high unemployment (12-15%) since the financial crash has rendered the South a distinctly unattractive proposition for Northern Ireland domiciles – that is, insofar as it was an attractive proposition in years gone by. This, combined with the Fine Gael-led government's relentless assault on social services and social welfare provisions, has led to a toxic situation whereby northern workers have, with the exception of a spike in 2011, turned away from the South as a realistic option for long-term employment and residence (Table 1). If this pattern continues, the number of northerners receiving PPS numbers will decay to a negligible level within a few years.

Table 1. Allocation of Personal Public Service numbers, Northern Ireland domiciles in the South **(Source: Department of Social Protection)**

2006	2,907
2007	2,491
2008	2,405
2009	1,925
2010	1,747
2011	2,003
2012	1,486
2013	861

Of course, the North is not without its own serious economic problems, both structural and Westminster-enforced. But with unemployment peaking at 8.5% in 2012 and the existing social security framework remaining largely intact for the meantime, it is easy to comprehend why the period since 2006/07 has seen a marked and constant increase in the number of southerners applying for National Insurance numbers (Table 2). In terms of labour mobility, this is a positive development. At the same time, the flow of workers and jobseekers in a predominantly South-North direction poses a number of problems. Cognisant of the pressures that are brought to bear on regional services and the labour market by cross-border migration and inward migration from A8 countries, it appears that the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has made a political decision to limit and indeed reduce the number of approved National Insurance number applications to a more sustainable level. Table 2 shows most clearly that the allocation of National Insurance numbers to southern domiciles has failed to rise in proportion to the number of applications. In fact, since 2011 this number has declined both in absolute terms and as a percentage of applications. Regardless of whether this indicator of South-North labour mobility levels off or continues to fall, recent trends must be regarded as a serious concern by local, national and European policymakers interested in promoting the movement of people between the two Irish jurisdictions in particular.

Table 2. Applications for and allocation of National Insurance Numbers, southern domiciles in Northern Ireland (Source: NISRA)

	Applications	Allocation	Success rate
2006/07	2,070	934	45%
2007/08	2,350	876	37%
2008/09	2,570	923	35%
2009/10	2,720	975	36%
2010/11	2,840	1,123	39%
2011/12	2,960	1,116	38%
2012/13	3,240	1,027	32%

As regards frontier workers, one study conducted by the Centre for Cross Border Studies on behalf of the EURES Cross-Border Partnership (2010) has found that there is a high rate of Donegal workers who commute across the border to their place of employment and that in some local areas 10 percent of the population were commuting to Derry. The 2011 census results show that a total of 14,800 persons regularly commuted across the border for work or study: 6,500 from North to South and 8,300 in the opposite direction. For the first time, the CSO and NISRA have coded data on cross-border commuting to a local geographic area, and their findings strongly corroborate those of the Centre for Cross Border Studies. The majority of those commuting from the South were resident in the border areas of Donegal, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth; their primary destinations were Belfast and Derry as well as Newry, Armagh, Craigavon, Dungannon, Enniskillen, Omagh, Limavady, Strabane and Coleraine. The origin of commuters from Northern Ireland is more widely spread, with their destination concentrated mainly in Dublin, Letterkenny, Drogheda, Dundalk, Cavan and Monaghan. Given the level of importance attached to health and education, it comes as no surprise that professionals account for the greatest proportion of frontier workers. The overall impression garnered from the latest figures is that although there is some mobility across the border and into the main cities, the levels of Northern Ireland residents (0.4%) and Southern domiciles (0.2%) commuting between jurisdictions to work or study remain miniscule (CSO/NISRA, 2014: 59-64). It will require further research to determine whether this is an economic or logistical problem, or whether this section of the working age population is continues to be influenced by political, cultural, historical or psychological hang-ups regarding the border.

The aforementioned PwC report (2002: 37-38) notes that students have traditionally displayed greater levels of mobility than other groups. Yet, in recent years, the numbers enrolling in higher education courses across the border gives advocates of greater mobility cause for concern.

Table 3. Northern Ireland students enrolled on higher education courses at southern institutions (Source: DEL)

	First degree	Total
2006/07	875	1,135
2007/08	780	1,060
2008/09	730	1,040
2009/10	760	1,165

2010/2011	675	1,035
2011/2012	665	965

Table 4. Southern students enrolled on higher education courses in the North (Source: DEL)

	First degree	Total
2006/07	1,665	3,165
2007/08	1,465	3,290
2008/09	1,265	3,240
2009/10	1,185	3,800
2010/2011	1,215	4,285
2011/2012	1,140	3,520

Despite comparatively lower tuition fees in the South, the availability to all EU citizens of the Free Fees Initiative, and the arrangement whereby the Department of Employment & Learning (DEL) pays students' contribution to fees, northern students have been increasingly reluctant to cross the border in search of higher education opportunities. It is arguable achievement of political stability and relative peace has diminished the effect of these considerable incentives, while the magnitude of the economic crisis in the South would have done little to attract northern students. These objective conditions, coupled with persistent barriers associated with qualifications, provide one possible explanation for these trends. The impact of cultural barriers, meanwhile, is under-researched and deserving of greater attention, but it is conceivable that the insular character of northern higher education institutions and its graduates has some bearing on these figures.

The picture is slightly less clear-cut in Northern Ireland, where the total number of southern student enrolments has fluctuated annually but remained at a sufficiently high level to produce a net influx year after year. The choice of postgraduate and vocational courses on offer in the North, combined with the effect of economic recession in the South, have helped to sustain these numbers. Continued financial support from county councils in the form of maintenance grants, though reduced in recent years, has also influenced the uptake of northern postgraduate courses by southern domiciles. At the same time, first year enrolments have almost halved, from 2,041 in 1995/96 to 1,140 in 2011/12, which indicates that young people considering leaving the southern jurisdiction do not see the North as an attractive proposition.

More needs to be done to encourage student mobility, particularly from North to South, and to reverse the persistent decline of first year students crossing the border in both directions. Institutions such as Dublin City University (DCU) and Trinity College have attempted to redress this problem with recognition of A Level qualifications, while NUI Galway has introduced special programmes to target northern students and compensate for the downgrading of the value of an A since the introduction of an A* to northern qualifications. However, as Paul Nolan notes in the latest *Peace Monitoring Report* (2014: 100), Northern Ireland students are much more likely to enrol at universities in England and Scotland than southern Ireland. Even more worrying is the fact that Northern Ireland domiciles are increasingly unlikely to return home following graduation. Of 2,470 students who had gone to England, Scotland or Wales to study, 1,550 did not return in 2011/12 – just under two-thirds of those who went away. This is 1 percent less than in 2010/11 and 3 percent less than in 2009/10. Notwithstanding the cultural barriers preventing some young people from leaving these shores to pursue educational opportunities, living standards and employment prospects clearly have a significant bearing on 1) Northern Ireland students' choice of location and institution; and 2) whether they return to the North upon completion of their studies in Britain. This is borne out by the latest figures released by the CSO and ONS, which point to a significant and steady increase in emigration over the past few years, with most of those leaving aged between 15 and 44 (Campbell, 2014; O'Toole, 2014).

The development of a long-term economic strategy to the benefit of young people is necessary to curb emigration, promote all-island mobility and prevent a 'brain drain'. Higher education and research establishments as well as firms can play a significant role in economic development, innovation and mobility within the cross-border area. The main barriers for cross-border linkages among research and technology centres and with companies include the lack of information on the potential available on the other side of the border, and the weak internal incentives for cross-border collaboration. For universities, differences in arrangements for intellectual property, technology transfer management and the organisation of academic studies remain important hurdles for cross-border co-operation in technology transfer and education. The limited degree of openness of innovation-active companies further hampers the development of cross-border partnerships for innovation.

Overcoming these barriers is dependent as much on political will as on economic resources, and it is unfortunate that sections of political Unionism continue to demonstrate ideological opposition to cross-border projects. In a recent Assembly exchange with DEL Minister Stephen Farry, the anti-Agreement Unionist Jim Allister complained about the level of financial support provided to southern students in the North and to northern students enrolling on courses in the South. Whilst acknowledging the economic pressures brought to bear on the North by the one-way flow of students, Farry responded that it is important to encourage student mobility in both directions (NI Assembly, 2013). One might add that there has been no appraisal of the level of finance entering northern institutions for students from the South on postgraduate programmes. Farry's support for sustaining and improving cross-border mobility in education is crucial, particularly as there is evidence from elsewhere that schemes to promote mutual understanding and cooperation through student and teacher exchange can take a generation or more to bear fruit. Drawing on the experience of France and Germany after the Second World War, Pollak (2006) has argued strongly that existing projects such as Wider Horizons deserve to be treated as long-term, inter-generational initiatives requiring patience and secure funding. Otherwise, the short-term achievements identified by evaluations of the same projects will quickly become undone.

Economic conditions and the politico-legal framework of the two states have therefore had a significant bearing on the levels of labour and student mobility across the Irish border, which have declined or at best stagnated since around 2005. Due to the absence of hate crime legislation in the South, it is difficult to establish a correlation between mobility trends and sectarianism. Figures released by the PSNI show that sectarian incidents and crimes have fallen steadily since 2005. Only in 2009/10, when Ardoyne in particular experienced intense sectarian rioting, has Northern Ireland witnessed a marked spike in sectarianism.

Table 5. Sectarian incidents and crimes in Northern Ireland (Source: PSNI)

	Sectarian incidents	Sectarian crimes
2005/06	1,701	1,470
2006/07	1,695	1,217
2007/08	1,584	1,056
2008/09	1,595	1,017
2009/10	1,840	1,264
2010/11	1,437	995
2011/12	1,344	885
2012/13	1,372	889
2013/14	1,284	961

Two main trends stand out. The first is that the relative absence of violence has been accompanied by the decline of overt forms of sectarianism. The second is that the police districts with some of the lowest incidences of sectarianism, particularly E District (Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon, and Newry & Mourne) and F District (Cookstown, Dungannon & South Tyrone, Fermanagh, and Omagh), are located in the border region. On the face of it, then, the grand narrative of relative peace and declining sectarianism has fostered a climate in which southern workers are more likely to enter the North in search of employment.

At the same time, extant research shows that sectarian harassment poses a serious problem in the workplace and in communities, particularly in segregated and territorialised 'catchment areas' (Nolan & Trademark Belfast, 2012). Jim Quinn, a veteran trade union organiser from Enniskillen, elucidates the less visible form of sectarianism that pertains in Fermanagh and its surrounding areas:

> Fermanagh sectarianism is a special type of sectarianism. It's more subtle, more polite. It wouldn't be as much in your face … Bars would be a lot more mixed

> than they used to be. But that doesn't necessarily mean that people are mixing. They go out with their own crowds and keep to their own drinking circles. You go out in a certain company and come home in the same company. Some people wouldn't get that. The pub is a slightly different version of what existed during the Troubles. They give the impression of being mixed but aren't necessarily as mixed as they should be. It's a different type of segregation to that in Belfast or Derry … I'd suspect it's a lot worse in some of the villages. But even here you'd have people who shop in certain places on the basis of religion or politics. I don't take that view of the world, but some people do.[4]

Police statistics therefore paint a deceptive picture of relative cohesion in the border counties and across Northern Ireland. Although rural Ulster lacks the physical barriers that weave their way through parts of Belfast and Derry, it is clear that backgrounds, mindsets and patterns of social behaviour influence and are influenced by sectarian dynamics and 'chill factors'. This cycle of religious division inhibits mobility within and between local communities and frustrates efforts towards integration (Bell, Jarman & Harvey, 2010). Further research is required to establish whether there is a direct correlation between sectarianism and labour mobility.

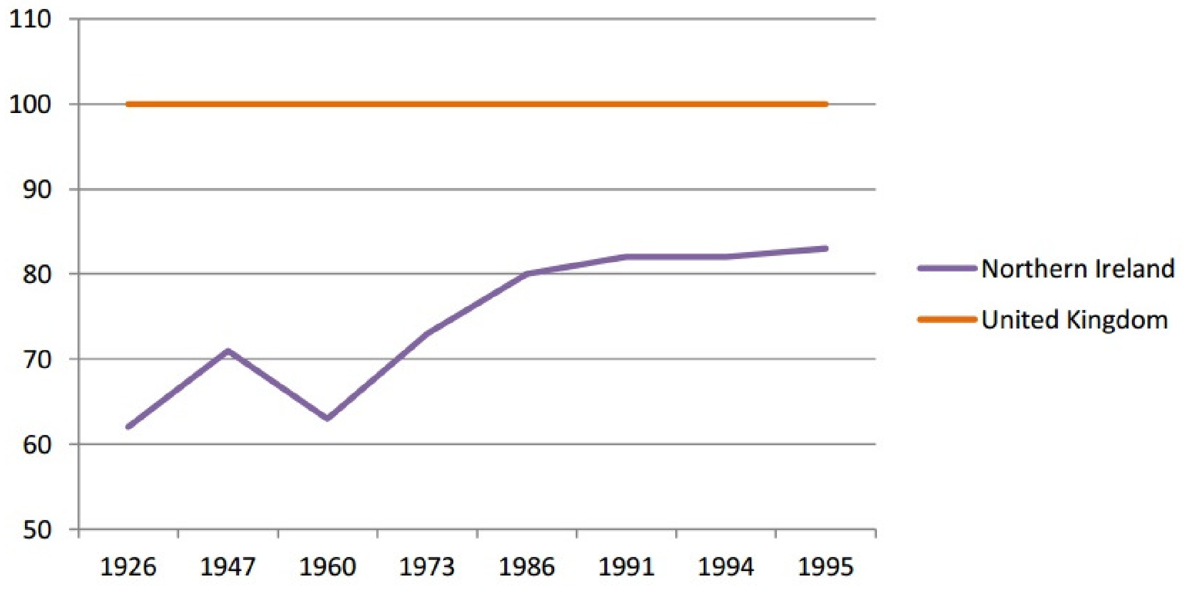
Deprivation and the border economy

Few economic histories of Ireland have produced a convincing all-island analysis that moves seamlessly between the pre- and post-partition dispensations. The division of the island into two states with unique political, economic and legal structures renders this an immensely difficult task. Scholars who have come close in recent years include Maurice Coakley (2012), whose ambitious study examines centuries of Ireland's underdevelopment under the political and economic subservience of England, Britain and finally the US and EU, and Gerard McCann (2011), who pays close attention to the anomalies of partition. For McCann, territorial division of the island has served both states badly and has lead to disinvestment and deprivation in the border counties. The neoclassical economist John Bradley (2006) attributes this to the North's peripheral position within the UK, the border region's peripheral position to the urban centres of regional and national policy-making, and the absence of an all-island economic strategy with deep North-South supply-side links.

[4] Interview with the author, 24 April 2014.

It is possible to grasp something of the scale of Northern Ireland's economic problems by looking at the region's output, competitiveness and living standards, which by any definition have consistently lagged behind the rest of the UK since 1945 (Brownlow, 2012). By way of illustration, Figure 1 illustrates the estimated gap in GDP since the formation of the state, which shows no sign of convergence.

Figure 1. Estimated GDP/output per capita **(Source: Murphy, 2012)**



Despite a high growth rate during and after the Second World War, Northern Ireland was soon beset with a number of economic difficulties: deindustrialisation involving the sharp decline of linen, textiles and shipbuilding, its staple industries; the oil crisis of 1973; and the onset of the Troubles. These difficulties were compounded by the failings of an economic and political elite to seek out ways of breaking parity with Britain and of negotiating changes in the global economy by diversifying and altering the fundamental structures of the regional economy. Consequently, Northern Ireland relies to a greater or lesser degree on the public sector and the fiscal transfer from London to keep step with the UK's richest and most developed regions (Murphy, 2012).

The North's economic problems are many, varied and worse than most UK regions. According to a report by the New Policy Institute and Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2014), the economic downturn saw the poorest families in Northern Ireland experience a dramatic fall in incomes, which have deteriorated at a faster rate than in England, Scotland and Wales. Only one-fifth of the Northern Ireland population earn the living wage of £7.20 (Harper & NICVA, 2014), while the levels of personal debt are 20 percent higher than in the UK (Fleming, 2014). The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS, 2014) predicts that absolute and relative poverty in Northern Ireland will continue to grow over the next decade, with the already sizeable gap between these families and their counterparts across the Irish Sea opening up. NICVA (2013) expects that incomes will diminish even further with the full introduction of welfare reforms to Northern Ireland. In the list of worst-hit areas across the UK, Northern Ireland local government districts (LGDs) occupy three of the top four spots, seven out of the top twenty, and eleven of the top fifty. Of these eleven Northern Ireland districts, six are located on or close to the border: Derry, Strabane, Omagh, Newry & Mourne, Cookstown, and Down. These are areas with high levels of deprivation, heavily dependent on the public sector and with limited opportunities for economic development in the short to medium term.

Not only is Northern Ireland worse off than the UK in almost every respect, but there are a number of localities suffering particular economic problems. Various indicators of poverty, social exclusion and deprivation support the contention that border areas are among the most economically deprived parts of the North and the island. The most comprehensive study of deprivation in Northern Ireland paints a bleak picture of life in a number of LGDs in the border region.

Table 6. Local government district summary measures of deprivation (Source: NISRA)

Local Government District	Extent Score, % (rank)	Income Deprived Scale (rank)	Percentage of total population income deprived (rank)	Employment Deprived Scale (rank)	Percentage of working age population employment deprived (rank)
Antrim	5 (20)	9,328 (20)	18 (24)	3,368 (18)	11 (21)
Ards	7 (18)	14,005 (10)	18 (22)	4,944 (8)	11 (19)
Armagh	5 (19)	12,695 (14)	22 (15)	4,117 (11)	12 (11)
Ballymena	12 (11)	11,844 (15)	19 (20)	3,744 (16)	10 (23)
Ballymoney	2 (25)	7,162 (23)	24 (11)	2,303 (24)	13 (10)
Banbridge	4 (23)	8,758 (22)	19 (21)	3,272 (19)	12 (15)
Belfast	46 (1)	93,511 (1)	35 (3)	26,095 (1)	16 (3)
Carrickfergus	10 (14)	7,153 (24)	18 (23)	2,543 (23)	11 (20)
Castlereagh	5 (21)	10,040 (17)	15 (25)	3,524 (17)	9 (25)
Coleraine	12 (10)	13,550 (12)	24 (12)	3,974 (13)	12 (14)
Cookstown	10 (15)	9,536 (18)	27 (7)	3,023 (22)	14 (5)
Craigavon	21 (4)	22,808 (5)	25 (10)	7,385 (5)	14 (9)
Derry	43 (3)	41,487 (2)	38 (1)	11,884 (2)	18 (2)
Down	8 (16)	15,276 (7)	22 (14)	5,002 (6)	12 (13)
Dungannon	11 (12)	14,002 (11)	25 (9)	4,074 (12)	12 (12)
Fermanagh	4 (22)	14,214 (9)	23 (13)	3,845 (15)	11 (22)
Larne	11 (13)	6,348 (25)	20 (18)	2,112 (25)	12 (17)
Limavady	16 (7)	9,522 (19)	28 (5)	3,158 (20)	15 (4)
Lisburn	18 (6)	24,729 (4)	22 (16)	7,531 (4)	11 (18)
Magherafelt	2 (26)	9,314 (21)	21 (17)	3,052 (21)	12 (16)
Moyle	12 (9)	4,682 (26)	28 (6)	1,353 (26)	14 (6)
Newry and Mourne	19 (5)	28,156 (3)	29 (4)	7,864 (3)	14 (7)
Newtownabbey	13 (8)	15,818 (6)	19 (19)	4,990 (7)	10 (24)
North Down	3 (24)	11,433 (16)	14 (26)	3,903 (14)	9 (26)
Omagh	7 (17)	13,291 (13)	26 (8)	4,285 (10)	14 (8)
Strabane	44 (2)	14,394 (8)	36 (2)	4,603 (9)	20 (1)

Outside of Belfast, the LGDs that stand out as the most deprived overall are Derry, Newry & Mourne, and Strabane, while Cookstown, Down and Omagh are not without problems on the income and employment fronts. If we drill down further to local super output areas (SOAs), we see that the most deprived rural area is Castlederg (Strabane LGD); the second and third are Crossmaglen (Newry & Mourne) and Glenderg (Strabane). Seven of the twenty most deprived rural areas are in Strabane LGD, and three are in Newry & Mourne (NISRA, 2010: 38).

It is not surprising that Derry (35%) and Strabane (32%) rank 4th and 14th respectively in the End Child Poverty campaign's (2013) map of child poverty across the UK. They are on a par with the industrial north-east of England, Glasgow and the most deprived parts of London. Additionally, the figures for Newry & Mourne (25%) and Omagh (22%) sit above the UK average of 20.2 percent. Claimant count figures for 2013 show that Derry (8.6%), Strabane (7.7%) and Newry & Mourne (5.5%) suffer some of the highest rates of unemployment in Northern Ireland. Along with Down (5.3%), Fermanagh (5.2%), Omagh (5.1%) and Armagh (4.8%), these LGDS have in common a claimant count rate that is far in excess of the UK average, which has consistently remained below 4 percent despite the considerable economic difficulties faced by Britain. At £12,500, the West and South of Northern Ireland has the lowest gross disposable household income per capita, while the South Western region has the highest skill gap recorded by companies (Stennett, 2014).

It is clear from the available evidence that Northern Ireland's economic problems are regional and sub-regional. The socialist economist Michael Burke (2014) has put forward a strong case for disaggregating data from the UK in order to facilitate analysis and the development and monitoring of economic policy. Burke also asserts that it makes economic sense to develop the tools for data gathering and dissemination on an island-wide basis. Some progress has been made in the first regard, with the introduction of the Northern Ireland Composite Economic Index as the closest approximate measurement for regional GDP, though this is problematic in that it excludes data on the increasingly prevalent finance and insurance sectors. On the second front, NISRA and the CSO (2014) have combined to produce a joint report on the latest census results. Elsewhere, a group of academics have developed a prototype all-island deprivation index with the aim of assisting policymakers and researchers specialising in cross-border studies.[5] However, much work remains to be done in terms of encouraging the British government to display greater transparency on the Northern Ireland economy and of standardising economic indicators for the island of Ireland.

One innovative cross-border study finds that the rural parts of Ireland and, by definition, the border areas suffer neglect and are affected negatively by the relative absence of integration between public agencies and their policies (Walsh, 2010). These

[5] http://trutzhaase.eu/deprivation-index/all-island-deprivation-index/.

areas face isolation, limited access to services, limited employment opportunities, a higher cost of living, more pronounced fuel poverty, and are home to a number of groups that are at increased risk of poverty and social exclusion. A more recent CSO quality of life report (2013) contains a number of significant findings regarding counties just south of the border:

- Donegal has the lowest disposable income per capita, amounting to 83% of the national average. Monaghan (84.4% of the national average) has the third lowest disposable income per capita.
- The Border region (Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo) in 2010 had the lowest Gross Value Added (GVA) per person at €17,770. The national average was €30, 917. Between 2005 and 2010, the per capita GVA generated in the Border region fell from 70.5 percent to 57.5 percent of the state average.
- Whereas in 2012 Dublin had the highest employment rate (61.9%), the Border region had the lowest (51.8%).
- Nearly half of those aged eighteen and over in the Mid-West have private health insurance, compared with 29 percent in the Border region.
- In 2011, the Border region had the highest vacancy rates with 21.9 percent of dwellings vacant. Of the border counties, Leitrim (30.5 %) and Donegal (28.6%) had the highest vacancy rates.
- At 4.4 percent, Monaghan has the lowest proportion of people in the social class professional workers.
- As a percentage of those aged 15-64, the West (19.7%) and Border (19.5%) regions have the highest proportion of persons aged sixty-five and over compared with a national proportion of 17.4 percent. At 54.4 percent, the Border region has the highest combined age dependency ratio.
- In 2011, nearly four out of five (78.5%) households in the Mid-East region owned a PC compared to just over two-thirds (67.7%) in the Border region.
- In 2011, of the persons whose full-time education had ceased, 20.3 percent in the Border region had only primary or no formal education compared with 12.7

percent in the Mid-East region. In 2012, the Border (11.5%) region had the second highest percentage of early school leavers.

Although various health indicators for the Border region are more positive, particularly when compared to regions such as Dublin, the border counties have suffered disproportionately from the economic downturn and now face acute challenges in keeping pace with the rest of the country. These problems are of a different scale in the South. For example, while in Northern Ireland one in five young people are categorised as 'not in employment, education or training' (NEETs), the highest proportion in the UK, the respective figure for Donegal is 49 percent, which is on a par with Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain (Nolan, 2014: 88). However, this does not detract from the reality that, in relative terms, within a British and Irish context, the border counties are the worst off in a number of respects.

Among the social and economic problems that demand redress is the black economy or shadow economy, which runs at about €20m, is prevalent along the border and has thrived in recession hit Ireland (Gill, 2013; Gurdgiev, 2013). Sensationalist, journalistic accounts of Thomas 'Slab' Murphy's alleged fuel laundering operation in South Armagh and those of other cross-border criminals are popular (Harnden, 1999), but there is a serious point to be made about the income lost to the Exchequer and the failure of the surrounding areas to benefit from such enterprises (Donnan & Wilson, 1999; Grant Thorton, 2013). Sinn Féin spokespersons have consistently argued that the answer to this lies in adopting a common approach to fuel tariffs, for example, which they claim would remove the incentive for illegal trade and restrict the opportunities open to criminal gangs. This makes perfect economic sense. The problem is that it is a fiercely contested political issue and that the Unionist parties of Northern Ireland will instinctively resist moves towards greater all-island integration. This explains the position of DUP MLA Paul Girvan, chair of the Justice Committee in the Northern Ireland Assembly, who has continued to place the emphasis on maximising cooperation between policing and justice agencies.

The outcome of the Scottish independence referendum and the Tory government's promise of another on EU membership contain the potential for transforming the constitutional and economic arrangements of these islands. The proposals offered by economists as to how best develop the Irish economy are therefore tentative at best, but merit consideration in the short term. John Bradley (2006: 19) claims that whereas Northern Ireland 'is likely to remain economically peripheral to Britain … there is less geographical or economic logic to Northern Ireland remaining peripheral within the island of Ireland'. Bradley and his colleague Professor Michael Best (2012, 2013) are critical of government departments and public agencies responsible for economic policy, and have recommended that the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) explores a number of opportunities for greater cross-border cooperation. Firstly, equipping local and regional councils with the expertise and resources to implement effective regional strategies. Secondly, encouraging state agencies on both sides of the border to recognise the benefits of cooperation and to move away from competitive, 'negative sum game' thinking. Thirdly, revisiting the remit of InterTrade Ireland with a view to achieving a greater focus on the border region and on policymaking processes that are tied to outcomes. Fourthly, supporting the growth of small businesses and establishing 'local centres of excellence'. Finally, the adoption of a strategic, all-island approach to tourism, which the authors describe as 'crucial' to the Irish economy.

Following the work of Padraic White, former Managing Director of the Industrial Development Authority (IDA), Bradley and Best (2012) support the establishment of a border development zone. As part of this, they propose a three-pronged approach to economic development in the region: a spatial dimension which targets the twin problems of peripherality and border policy 'fault lines'; a sectoral dimension which identifies a range of sectors that are suitable and adaptable for promotion; and an institutional dimension which identifies the necessary types of cooperative policy frameworks for the development zone. To this end, Centre for Cross-Border Studies has launched Towards a Border Development Zone, an action research project that aims to explore, through a series of scoping studies, the potential of a joint economic development approach across the border region. Ultimately, it is hoped that the implementation plan arising out of this project will receive the necessary practical and financial support as part of the 2014-2020 EU INTERREG programme.[6]

Other economists go further in presenting Irish reunification as a route to prosperity and sustainable development. Michael Burke (2010, 2013), for example, has noted that output per capita in the South has gradually caught up with and eventually surpassed that of the UK, while at the same time going into decline in Northern Ireland. The North has suffered an erosion of its industrial base and a growing detachment from the global economy. Excluding its trade with Britain, a former great power and economic powerhouse in retreat, the region's exports to the outside world are negligible. From a purely pragmatic economic perspective, Burke suggests that there is a pressing need to exhaust debates on the island's future constitutional arrangements, including the possibility of territorial unification. He concedes that there are a number of unknowns that demand clarification and serious analysis, but insists that these must not preclude efforts to transform the economic conditions and social relations pertaining across the island.

A major bone of contention is the size of the northern fiscal deficit, and the extent to which the North is dependent on British government funding. Figures released by the Northern Ireland Department of Finance (DFP) in March 2014 puts public expenditure at £23.8bn and aggregate revenue at £14.1bn, producing a negative net fiscal balance of just over £9.6bn. This is the figure bandied about by commentators and Unionist politicians, including the Finance Minister, often with the seemingly deliberate intention of muddying the waters and obstructing debate on the North's economic relationship with Britain. Increasingly, the methodology for arriving at the £9.6bn figure is coming under scrutiny by economists and political activists alike.

Burke, for example, argues that the current measures of economic activity in the North are insufficient to enable policymakers to address the complex challenges of the modern era and that 'the need for robust economic data in Northern Ireland is pressing given its background of long-term economic decline' (2014: 4). In addition to

6 http://www.crossborder.ie/?p=3639.

identifying significant gaps in the data underpinning the *Northern Ireland Economic Strategy*, he makes a number of crucial points in relation to public finances and the block grant. One of his main concerns is that the UK Treasury classifies a proportion of locally-financed expenditure as central government spending, which means there is a discrepancy between the £23.8bn figure attributed to Northern Ireland and the total spent locally by Executive departments. A related problem is that Treasury categorises public spending as 'identifiable' and 'non-identifiable'. The latter expenditures, Burke notes, may well be identifiable but are not identified precisely because they are not expended in Northern Ireland. Finally, there is the issue of tax revenues generated locally but accumulated in the United Kingdom Consolidated Fund. The lack of information on corporation tax, VAT and other tax revenues not only creates barriers to economic planning but also causes one to question the transparency of the British government's management of the Northern Ireland economy, thus undermining the very position that Unionists wish to sustain.

What does this mean in practical terms? Tom Healy (2015a), director of the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI), has examined the breakdown of northern finances provided by DFP and notes that if we exclude non-identifiable spending (British defence spending, Bank of England debt service costs etc.) then the net fiscal deficit or transfer for Northern Ireland in 2011 was closer to £5.2bn, not the £10.5bn quoted by Unionist parties and the British Treasury. Healy's alternative analysis is echoed by Sinn Féin, which has begun to place scrutiny on Northern Ireland's liability for elements of the fiscal deficit and argue, as part of its campaign for a border poll and a new, 'agreed Ireland', that any debate on the economic reorganisation of the North must proceed on the basis of transparency and a more accurate estimate of the real deficit figure. The SNP made a similar point during its campaign for a Yes vote in the Scottish independence referendum, with the Better Together camp throwing around alarming yet questionable figures relating to trade, economic output, North Sea oil, tax revenues and financial services. Even the *Financial Times* (Dickie & Fray, 2014) cast doubt on the Unionists' claims and instead argued for a viable independent Scotland.

There are, however, a number of problems with this focus on whittling away the fiscal deficit. Firstly, it could be argued that this approach actually runs contrary to the claim that the North is not a viable economic entity. In fact, rather than helping Sinn Féin build the case for a united Ireland, the achievement of a net fiscal balance of ≥ 0 could put wind in the sails of those advocating an independent Northern Ireland or federal autonomy within the Union as a long-term settlement. A second problem is that while there may be an appetite within nationalist communities for a break with the British armed forces and, by extension, British defence spending, 'the troops' are a source of great pride for many within the 'PUL' community. This attachment to the British Army is historical, cultural, emotional, ideological, and arguably sits outside the bounds of rational economic debate in the current political climate. Similarly, albeit to a lesser extent, Unionists may regard British civil servants in the Home Office, Cabinet Office and perhaps even the Northern Ireland Office, despite its less than stellar reputation in some Unionist circles, as serving a positive purpose in the North. This leads to a consideration of the wider political, cultural, historical and psychological barriers to Irish reunification. Put simply, the republican movement will ultimately have to win the support of Northern Ireland's Protestant population in order to build a new, viable republic, and a border poll in the next Assembly term is unlikely to repair the movement's adverse relationship with large sections of that constituency. In fact, attempts to strong-arm Unionists into an Ireland for which they have no appetite is likely to drive them further from that eventuality, just as thirty years of sectarian conflict did before.

Another question that advocates of economic and constitutional unity must address is 'At what cost?' Speaking at a Uniting Ireland conference in 2010, Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams included among his party's proposals for a united Ireland 'a common VAT regime, a harmonised income tax and corporation tax'. The Stormont House Agreement and the Corporation Tax (Northern Ireland) Bill has paved the way for devolution of corporation tax, causing the North's neoliberals and gombeen men (the DUP) to lick their lips at the prospect of reducing the headline rate to the 12.5 percent that prevails in the South. Support for a reduction in corporation tax has come under intense scrutiny by Michael Burke, the respected tax experts Andrew Baker and

Richard Murphy, Donagh Brennan of *Irish Left Review*, all of whom conclude that the costs are likely to massively outweigh any benefits that a low-tax regime may bring to the region. It appears that these warnings, combined with trade union opposition and sea-change political realignments in the South, have dampened Sinn Féin's enthusiasm for cutting corporation tax, meaning that any such proposal may yet fail to make it through the Executive.[7]

The people of Northern Ireland can be thankful for small mercies. Critics of post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction in Northern Ireland (Horgan, 2006; Kelly, 2012; Nagle, 2009; O'Hearn, 2008) argue that the majority of local politicians and agencies such as the Strategic Investment Board and Invest NI have come to regard neoliberalism as a panacea for decades of poverty, deprivation and physical dereliction. Few lessons, it seems, have been garnered from the get-rich-quick Celtic Tiger model or from the disastrous outcomes of PFI/PPP schemes introduced during the New Labour years, which placed a heavy burden on the taxpayer and for little discernible improvement in the quality of public services. Trademark Belfast and Conor McCabe (2012) describe this process as the 'double transition' from conflict and social democracy to peace and neoliberalism, involving a turn towards finance, insurance and real estate (FIRE) – in short, speculative, finance-led and unproductive capitalism. They also share the view that privatisation and profit does not necessarily lead to greater social cohesion and lasting peace. Quite the opposite in fact: to dismantle and sell off what the people of Northern Ireland hold in common – its health, housing, education and infrastructure networks – is to risk intensifying social exclusion and the conditions in which conflict can thrive. This is the simple yet profound point made by Volker Berghahn (2006) in his influential study of the two world wars and the types of economies built in their aftermath.

The promise of a 'peace dividend' to accompany the Good Friday Agreement and devolved institutions was, in O'Dowd's (2014) words, 'Northern Ireland's big lie'. Despite, or because of, the uncritical adoption of neoliberal policies, economic living standards are deteriorating and inequality is rising; the threat of sectarian conflict

[7] See Seán Byers, 'Ideology, corporation tax and the construction of neoliberal Northern Ireland', *Irish Left Review* (Forthcoming).

continues to loom large. It is deeply worrying, therefore, that the Stormont House Agreement bears all the hallmarks of neoliberalism: an austerity budget for 2015/16; 'cost reductions' (public sector cuts), a plan to 'realise the value of [Executive] capital assets' (privatisation) and 'revenue raising measures' (toll-booth public services); and a role for the OECD in taking forward public sector 'reform'.[8] Unfortunately, the level of debate around future economic models has proven superficial and complacent on the one hand, dangerously ideological on the other. A case study demonstration of this is the purchase of NAMA's Northern Ireland portfolio by the American vulture fund Cerberus Capital Management. Valued at £4.5bn, this portfolio of office blocks, hotels and development land is believed to have gone for the knockdown price of £1.3bn (Whelan, 2014). This adds to Cerberus' already sizeable stake the Irish property market and represents an added insult to taxpayers, north and south. And which 'expert' did BBC News approach for commentary on this development? None other than Ross Davidson, a lawyer whose specialism is to advise venture funds on the acquisition of land and commercial property.[9] Formerly a partner in Arthur Cox, a rentier capitalist law firm that sells Ireland as a conduit for tax avoidance and offers services to facilitate this process, Davidson put an extremely positive spin on the sale without actually explaining how it would benefit citizens of the state. He was then parroted by First Minister Peter Robinson, who described it as 'excellent news for the Northern Ireland economy' (Campbell, 2014). It is more than problematic that, in the search for models of economic development, policymakers, politicians and the media are turning to the architects of the financial crisis for advice and inspiration.

The two Irish economies are showing signs of convergence, though this may not necessarily be a good thing if those in power continue to move in the direction of rentier capitalism to compensate for Northern Ireland's various economic anomalies and the collapse of manufacturing, the productive economy. If we are serious about building a new Ireland encompassing an island economy, it is vital that we avoid creating system that reproduces inequality and fosters social discord on thirty-two

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[8] The envisaged role for the OECD in taking forward public sector reform is a real cause for concern, particularly in the light of its active promotion of privatisation in member states since 1992. See OECD, *Privatising Public Enterprises: An Overview of Policies and Practices in OECD Countries* (Paris, 2003), Annex 1.
[9] http://www.rwdavidson.com/about/about-the-practice/.

county basis. The warnings issued by ICTU (Bunting, 2013), an organisation that represents the interests of 734,824 working people across the island of Ireland and speaks for the interests of thousands of workers who are denied union rights, ought to be heeded. Similarly, the voices of Conor McCabe, Michael Taft and others working for, or on behalf of, the labour movement deserve to be heard. McCabe has analysed (2011) and continues to analyse the decisions of politicians and policymakers in the Free State, exploring the notions of economic class and power and demonstrating most clearly that the southern Irish economy has not been developed for the benefit of the majority. Taft, a research officer with UNITE the Union, routinely exposes the nature of the Fine Gael-led government's class war, how the austerity measures introduced by the current administration are designed to shaft the least well off in the interest of shifting wealth upwards to the 1 percent.[10] Most notable among these is the incredible decision to make the bankers' debt of €64bn a sovereign debt, which now weighs heavily on the shoulders of the Irish people. In the face of a neoliberal consensus, McCabe, Taft and their colleagues on the left of the labour movement continue to offer robust critiques of the rentier capitalist economic model. In so doing, they shine a spotlight on the structures that support economic class power in Ireland and demonstrate how *not* to build a society that delivers equality of opportunity and outcome for citizens.

Any discussion of potential forms of economic development must take account of these critiques whilst rejecting TINA (There Is No Alternative). It is simply not an option to weld together two failed states and two failed economies under the rubric of neoliberalism. Although this discussion is in its infancy, we could do worse than turn to Tom Healy, who has begun to consider a vision and strategy for Ireland and Europe into the 2040s and beyond. Healy (2015b) advocates recreating Irish society and the economy on the basis of fundamental human rights, social solidarity, cooperation and democratic reform, proceeding on the basis of 'a sound analysis'; 'a clear vision'; and 'a sensible strategy'. Whilst recognising the constraints of working within global capitalism and the EU, its politico-legal corollary, he makes a number of recommendations with a view to enhancing the lives of the majority of citizens over

[10] http://notesonthefront.typepad.com/.

the next twenty or thirty years. Central to Healy's vision is sustainability and the concept of human wellbeing, which eschews the narrow focus of mainstream economics on GDP as an accurate measure of progress and instead addresses an array of social and environmental challenges and human needs. Drawing on the 'Rehn-Meider model' and the Nordic economic projects inspired by it, he advocates 'a stronger role for the state in moderating the impact of markets in regards to income, employment and the distribution of social goods and services' (31). This left Keynesian approach aims for a European public service built on: full employment with a higher proportion of the workforce in high quality and higher paid jobs; sufficient and sustainable investment in physical, human and social capital; dynamic enterprise; and economic and political democracy. Each of these four pillars of the public service are necessary, Healy argues, to reverse some of the effects of neoliberalism and austerity and to ensure that the interests of communities take precedence over the ruthless profit-seeking motives of corporations and global financial capital.

In support of this medium-term vision, Healy proposes a number of substantial economic and political reforms not limited to an overhaul of Ireland's tax and social insurance system. He envisages a strong state promoting indigenous enterprise through, for example, an expansion of existing public enterprise and infrastructure projects; the establishment of a state investment bank within a reformed banking sector; increased investment in research and development; and improvements in the delivery of public services. Investment in renewable sources of energy, insulation and public transport alternatives are proposed, in addition to the imposition of more stringent standards on carbon emissions. Significantly, in light of the problem of underemployment, the proliferation of low-paid jobs resulting in an expanding number of working poor, and the extent of inequality in Ireland, Healy advocates 1) a fundamental reappraisal of the labour market to 'incorporate aspects of a Nordic "flexisecure" pathway for retraining, income protection and work guarantee in exchange for mobility of labour across firms and sectors' (37); and 2) 'raising wages at the bottom towards a collectively bargained, agreed level of wages appropriate to each sector' (40). These measures will, if enhanced by wider notions of income (social services or 'collective goods' such as housing), contribute to the building of a more equitable society in which the problems of poverty and homelessness are alleviated.

It is significant that, in addressing the root causes of the 2008 financial crisis, Healy acknowledges the importance of 'a wider perspective that views the role of global capitalism as inherently unstable and ridden with internal contradictions' (11). Thus, while it could be argued that he underestimates the capacity of capitalism to regenerate over a relatively short period of time, it is because he proceeds from a sound analysis of the balance of forces in Europe and globally – overwhelmingly in favour of finance capital, as SYRIZA has discovered to its detriment – that he does not call for revolutionary change tomorrow, but focuses on a number of eminently attainable goals. Crucially, he understands that any moves to 'reduce inequality, grow enterprise and provide adequate social protection for all residents in a country must be related to how ownership and governance are organised' (39). In other words, workplace democracy and economic democracy in the broader sense must be extended considerably if we are to disturb the structures embodying unequal economic power relations across the island and the EU. This can be achieved through the expanded state he envisages, coupled with aspects of participative/deliberative democracy drawn from Latin America, and the promotion of worker-owned cooperatives as an alternative ownership model (see below).

Yet another trade union voice that ought to be heeded is John McVey (2015), a policy and research officer with NIPSA, who echoes Healy in a number of different respects. Proceeding from the analysis (correct in this author's view) that neoliberalism and austerity are two sides of a capitalist class strategy, McVey too envisages a stronger state that wields control of key utilities and natural resources and reverses the privatisation of public services. This type of public ownership is conceived as the basis of an economy that is run for the benefit of the majority. It would guarantee higher levels of well-paid employment with adequate protections; raise living standards for workers in the public *and* private sectors, thereby reducing inequality; place citizens and workers, not shareholders, at the centre of public service delivery; begin to address the structural discrimination and exclusion suffered by women; and deliver investment in the infrastructural changes necessary to facilitate sustainable economic development in the long term. The shift towards full employment would be facilitated by a social security system that guarantees a minimum income and provides 'wider support frameworks at all levels – childcare, flexible working, pensions and access to free healthcare' (14), and the provision of housing as a fundamental right through a mass house-building programme. The education system, meanwhile, would be that is 'free, accessible, democratic in its governance, comprehensive in its truest sense, multicultural and secular' (14). All of these radical reforms would be underpinned by an overhaul of the tax system involving a clampdown on tax avoidance, an exploration of land ownership and usage, repeal of anti-worker legislation, and moves towards greater citizen engagement and *direct* democracy: linking workplace democracy to wider society, giving the vote to sixteen and seventeen year olds, and democratising the media through legislation and counter-hegemonic activities that challenge the failure of public and private media sources to 'offer a truly diverse range of views' (17).

McVey's vision is, by his own admission, highly ambitious. And it must be if we are to halt the descent into the social order depicted in dystopian tales such as *The Hunger Games* and *Mad Max*. 'Anyone who does not see elements of such a dystopian world already in place around us', writes the Marxist geographer David Harvey, 'is deceiving himself or herself most cruelly' (2014: 264). Parts of the US and South Africa, now the most unequal country in the world, are increasingly characterised by gated communities and what John Kenneth Galbraith (1958) once dubbed the paradox of private wealth and public squalor. Whether we are facing a stark choice between 'socialism or barbarism' is up for debate. What is certain is that Britain and Ireland are moving inexorably towards US/South Africa levels of economic inequality and therefore towards the types of social problems caused by extreme inequality (Oxfam, 2015; TASC, 2015). The economic and policy decisions made at a regional, national and European level over the coming years and decades will determine whether the widening gap between the richest and poorest is closed and whether we secure better outcomes for all.

The key point is this: Britain and Ireland are wealthy countries and, contrary to what neoliberal ideologues and compliant sections of the media would have us believe, there *are* alternative economic systems and forms of political democracy that elites have discounted or ignored. This is partly out of incompetence but also because of an ideological and economic commitment to maintaining the conditions under which their class has benefited. Taking up the issue of democratic reform, which ought to resonate with the majority of citizens, Kirby and Murphy (2011) argue that the Free State has since its formation lacked anything barely reflective of republican values, principal among which is democratic citizen engagement on key social (e.g. abortion) and economic (e.g. the blanket guarantee and subsequent nationalisation of the bank debt) questions. Drawing on the experiences of crises-ridden states across the globe, Kirby and Murphy reach the obvious conclusion that strong governments rooted in popular democracy, an emphasis on the common good, and with the capacity to stand up against market interests, are best placed to resist the pressures of transnational finance capital in the interests of their citizens. Accordingly, they moot a number of electoral and institutional reforms and see the emergence of strong left political bloc as key to underpinning those changes, for without an overhaul of the state's institutions and a shift in political power away from the wealthy minority we will only see a familiar pattern of economic crisis emerge in future generations. A similar argument could be applied to the North, where the 'Orange state' has been replaced with institutionalised sectarianism and where malaise and deadlock is a recurring feature of government.

Of the three main economic systems analysed in the book, Kirby and Murphy only dismiss a status quo ante remedy to the island's recent ills. They see some merit in a developmental social democratic model, entailing greater state involvement through a state investment bank, higher taxes and high levels of social investment. This most closely resembles the model favoured by NERI and ICTU. However, the authors' preferred option is a more ambitious ecological socialist path that rejects continuous growth, addresses the challenges of peak oil and environmental degradation, and promotes lower carbon emissions in the pursuit of sustainable development and a much more equal society where the accumulation of obscene wealth is not encouraged or even countenanced. The problem with this is that it relies less on the nation-state than on international cooperation and the coming to power of like-minded ecological socialist governments across Europe and further afield. Kirby and Murphy's intervention is stronger in diagnosis than prescription; it is by no means a blueprint for the second republic they covet. However, it is an important contribution to the nascent debate on economic alternatives in the Irish context.

The fora for discussing the prospect of creating something anew are gradually materialising. In addition to nationalistic political projects such as Sinn Féin's Uniting Ireland initiative, civil society organisations have come together to build support for a 'new republic', democratic reform, a financial transactions tax and a basic wage.[11] Elsewhere, a special issue of the *Irish Journal of Sociology*, edited incidentally by Kirby and Murphy, has looked at alternatives to and within the capitalist system. Building in the idea of a living wage, Seán Healy and colleagues from Social Justice Ireland (2013) have costed a guaranteed basic income for the entire population of the Free State, to be funded by a financial transactions tax and a radical overhaul of the tax and social welfare systems. Others (Nolan, Perrin Massebiaux & Gorman, 2013) focus on worker buyouts as a first resort to avoid insolvency and/or redundancies in viable businesses that have encountered difficulties. Transforming the ownership of the means of production on the basis of solidarity, community leadership, democratic governance and equality. These cooperatives operate within the constraints of capitalism but distribute the profits equally among workers, thus inverting the power relations found in normal capitalist enterprises. In other words, labour assumes some measure of control over capital. Recognising the tension between cooperative values and the profit motive that dominates the system within which they operate, these authors nonetheless demonstrate that cooperatives have a strong record of aiding economic recovery, generating sustainable jobs and decent wages, transforming social capital and promoting social stability through intra- and inter-community cooperation, and, perhaps most importantly, delivering equitable outcomes. They are commonplace in France, Spain, Italy and even the UK, but almost non-existent in Ireland. In lieu of a radical break with capitalism, there is an argument for strengthening regional and national policy in favour of cooperatives and the solidarity economy more generally.

[11] http://www.claimingourfuture.ie/getinvolved/.

Of course, the realisation of these goals and the durability of such alternatives depends on a strong labour movement occupying the spaces in which neoliberal hegemony has been created and maintained. Just as capital reacted with force following the social democratic reconstruction of Europe post-1945, so it will renew itself once more and adapt the social, cultural, economic and political spheres to its advantage. That is, unless there is a fundamental realignment of economic and political power, one that breaks the stranglehold that finance capital has on the EU and the modern state. Political organisation and struggle are therefore crucial to societal change, and class power is of foremost importance in determining whether any transformation of capitalism is to the long term benefit of the majority. Here, the ideas of social movement unionism and feminist economics are instructive in terms of the methods of agitational organisation and forms of resistance they advocate for the labour movement (McCabe, 2013).

In practice, the Right2Water campaign has drawn tens of thousands into conflict with the Irish establishment and shows no signs of petering out. With the support of various progressive political groupings and individuals, a left caucus of Irish trade unions has emerged to lead the campaign and build an extra-parliamentary opposition in the process. The challenge is to first, defeat the government's plans to introduce water charges, and second, ensure that the unprecedented community mobilisations witnessed in recent months have a far-reaching influence on the economic and political composition of the state. The core principles underpinning a Platform for Renewal developed by the five Right2Water unions, coupled with a political education programme for trade union and community activists, will give the movement the best possible chance of doing so. Similarly, in the North, the trade union movement must move beyond protecting members' interests and start contributing to 'a wider debate about the sort of society we want to live in', articulating and building support for alternatives in the workplace and communities (McVey, 2015: 1). Unite in the Community branches and trades council structures perhaps offer the best route to broadening the base of northern trade unionism and bringing pressure to bear on the dominant political parties. Again, this daunting work must be accompanied by analysis and political education, not simply because ethnonational identities are so resilient, but more broadly because it is essential that working-class communities understand the historical and material roots of their deprived conditions if they are to take action to improve them.

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