

# The Economic State We're in

By David Vance

It was Ronald Reagan who quipped: "The most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the government and I'm here to help." Reading the fantastical spending plans our local political elite were proposing in order to "help" the Northern Ireland economy prior to the General Election made me give thanks for the Assembly being frozen in aspic!

Any consideration of the optimum way forward for Northern Ireland's economy necessitates a careful review of the current state in which it finds itself. I think any fair-minded observer would agree that the economy shows sustained improvement over previous decades, with GDP demonstrating the greatest year on year increases of any region within the United Kingdom.

Indeed with unemployment at a 25-year low and with a growth level significantly above the EU average, NI plc could be said to be finally emerging from the shadows of a three-decade long terrorist blitzkrieg. Just as importantly, the great enemy of any successful economy, inflation, has been kept to a modest 1.6% thanks to the sterling work, (so to speak) of the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee.

Not that everything is rosy. Manufacturing shows sustained decline, having shrunk by an amazing 40% over the past three decades and having hemorrhaged thousands of jobs in the process, farming is in a subsidised mess, and the reliance on a bloated unproductive non wealth-generating public sector is profoundly unhealthy.

So, how can we stop-change the Northern Irish economy? Well, as a unionist, I think that a careful look at the Republic of Ireland would be a good starting point! The Work for All think-tank has conducted some very interesting research into the comparative growth performances between the Irish and Belgium economies. There are some startling conclusions from this analysis which we in Northern Ireland could benefit from understanding.

In 1985, Ireland's economical situation was dramatic, and much worse than Belgium's: excessive budgets deficits, weak growth performances, and a wealth that amounted to only 65% of the Belgian level. In addition, Irish unemployment was 17% compared to the Belgian 10%, almost double. Until 1985 both countries followed similar Keynesian policies and let government spending derail. In 1983 Belgian public spending exceeded 50% of the GDP... and then Ireland made a dramatic change by applying the simple economic lesson that a significant lowering of the tax burden starts a virtuous circle that brings great success.

This in turn led to a situation by the late 1980's where government spending was CUT by 20%. This is a truly remarkable figure and one that puts the alleged hard-line monetarism of the Thatcher government in the UK to shame! The result of all this was that Ireland entered a period of explosive GNP growth, averaging 5.6% from 1985 to 2002. This boom went hand in hand with the creation of new jobs, the benefits of which are still there to be enjoyed. Shrinking taxation and reduced Government spending were the twin keys that set the Celtic Tiger free.

So, we need to find a way to create an attractive low tax regime in Northern Ireland that will bring substantial multinational business and establish step-changing economic growth. The Westminster Parliament will be reluctant to entertain this but I would propose a simple swap. We accept that the Barnett formula is scrapped with the massive saving that would provide to the UK Exchequer and in exchange they let us establish a 12% corporate tax rate in Northern Ireland – one half of one percent lower than that in Switzerland and the Republic of Ireland.

At the moment, Northern Ireland suffers from the grotesque 30% corporate tax rate. By dropping that rate by more than half and thus creating a really meaningful incentive, investment will flow in as companies evaluate the attractions of being sited within the UK sterling zone but with unique access to both the UK mainland and Euro markets at mouth-watering tax rates!

The next thing we need to do is help our farming industry by applying precisely the same principles as New Zealand did twenty years ago. This may shock some people - but New Zealand agriculture is profitable without subsidies. Yet, alone among developed countries of the world, New Zealand has virtually the same percentage of its population employed in agriculture today as it did 30 years ago, and the same number of people living in rural areas as it did in 1920! How did this happen?

New Zealanders realized that subsidies caused resentment among farmers, some of who felt that the subsidies were applied unfairly. Ring any bells? These subsidies also engendered deep resentment amongst non-farmers, who paid for the system once in the form of taxes and then a second time in the form of higher food prices. A double-tax whammy is hardly an elegant economic solution! The fact that most subsidy money passed quickly from farmers to farm suppliers, processors, and other related sectors, was also seen to negate the intended effect of supporting farmers.

Of course there were additional market distortions, such as the inflation of land values based on production incentives or cheap loans. That was not to mention various bureaucratic insanities, such as paying farmers to install conservation measures like hedgerows and wetlands - after having paid them to rip them out a generation ago, while those farmers who have maintained such landscape and wildlife features all along get nothing. Removing ALL subsidies, on the other hand, forced farmers and farm-related industries to become more efficient, to diversify, to follow and anticipate the market. It gave farmers more independence, and gained them more respect. Our farmers deserve no more or less – though I imagine that a few of the subsidy junkies here will squeal like pigs when we stop treating them like sheep.

And then there is the substantial matter of the bloated public sector in Northern Ireland – the client group of Government whose votes are closely aligned to the largesse of its political masters. The required solution here is to ruthlessly excise every area of Big Government. Northern Ireland could set a great example of this at the highest level by closing down the pantomime Assembly and its attendant bureaucratic circus. The consequential savings would be a first step in restoring some degree of financial probity in this area.

One replacement model of limited Government which would retain strong local economic accountability, involves the 18 Northern Ireland MP's solely taking decisions concerning NI affairs at Westminster. Not only would this ensure best value for money from them but would also neatly provide a solution to the "West Lothian" question

insofar as NI MP's would not then be able to vote on matters relating to Scottish, Welsh or English particularities! The axe would need also to be taken to those great statist "untouchables" – the NHS and State Education. We should provide choice to patients and parents alike by breaking up these vast inefficient monolithic monopolies and allowing free competition

Reinventing Northern Ireland as a world class low tax region with small non-intrusive government will yield a rich influx of multinational companies bringing quality employment whilst the inefficient public sector shrinks and is replaced by the productive entrepreneurialism of the private sector.

Chester Bowles once said that "There can be no real individual freedom in the presence of economic insecurity." Perhaps he could have added that a free economy provides the best security for all.

## **The Northern Ireland economy**

By Tommy McKearney

The economy of Northern Ireland is different to other regions of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, if only for the basic reason that it is now recovering from the effects of a protracted and damaging civil conflict. It goes without saying that the detrimental consequences of this conflict are deep running and may well take a lengthy period of time to overcome. Nevertheless, the current state of the Northern Irish economy is not entirely shaped by the fallout from the conflict, but arguably has been moulded to an even greater extent by powerful global economic influences. It is the combination of these factors, the local and the global, that we have to analyse when commenting on our local economy.

Until relatively recently the Northern Irish economy was powered by a limited number of traditional industries. The region was well known for heavy engineering, textile manufacturing and agricultural production. More like the north of England than other parts of Ireland, the economy featured large-scale enterprises providing employment, on occasions, for entire communities. Ship building in Belfast, garment making in Derry, for example, provided an income for thousands of families. In rural parts, mixed farming sustained a significant number of households living on and off the land.

Looking back to a time when the above-mentioned industries employed the bulk of the local workforce, it is important to be clear-headed and realistic. For the most part, the income gained by a majority of those working was certainly not handsome and by today's standards the average worker or small farmer lived a frugal existence. There never were halcyon days of wine and roses for ordinary working people in this region.

However, where employment was available, people at least had a living and were able to provide for their families. The value of this cannot be underestimated, at a time when social welfare was far from adequate (if available at all) and where unemployment usually led to either emigration or starvation.

In many ways, this grim reality lay at the heart of one of the great scars on the economy of Northern Ireland – the structural discrimination experienced by one section of the community. Such was the desperation for employment that it became possible for the captains of industry and commerce to secure competitive advantage through favouring one community over the other. This unfortunate part of our history didn't just have social and political consequences. It led to structural distortions in so far as it created a sense of complacency that discouraged many people from developing alternative technical and entrepreneurial skills.

In light of the above, it is plain to see that the traditional economic structures are largely gone or have changed beyond recognition.

Agriculture has been rationalised to an incredible extent. Global production trends and the impact of the European Union have led to a situation where the minimum economic holding is increasing in size all the time. Half-a-century ago, it was usually possible to provide a family with the then average standard of living from a fifty-acre farm. To do so today, would probably only be possible on a holding three times that size. The enlargement of the European Union with the recent addition of the accession states, Poland in particular, with large-scale agricultural production ensures that downward pressure on agricultural prices/income will continue. The farming family will not disappear overnight but agriculture – with the exception of specialised markets - will continue to decline as a major source of employment in Northern Ireland.

To a similar extent, heavy industry and garment manufacturing are disappearing from the local scene. Shipbuilding and other heavy engineering works have been moving away from Western Europe in search of cheaper labour since the end of the Second World War. This movement was slowed somewhat by geo-political factors during the Cold War, when it was deemed strategically important to retain a certain engineering/manufacturing capacity within the British Isles. With the collapse of the Soviet block, there is no longer the same imperative to retain a working manufacturing base in Northern Ireland and thus we have witnessed the closure of entire plants. There is little prospect that this trend will be reversed and, therefore, not only does a large section of the community find itself unemployed, but a very large reservoir of labour skills have become redundant and obsolete in the local context.

Garment manufacturing has had a broadly similar experience to that of agriculture. Non-unionised, low waged economies are proving much more attractive to garment producers than our local, albeit modestly paid, workforce. Again, it is difficult to envisage how this particular industry would return to this part of the world in the foreseeable future.

The decline in these, the traditional sectors, has been offset though not overcome through the past quarter century by an expansion of the public sector. Northern Ireland has quite a high ratio of public to private sector employment and, paradoxically, the troubles have actually generated a significant amount of public sector employment within policing/army and the judicial process. Beyond the immediate conflict-related employment, there has been an understanding that Northern Ireland received a relatively generous Treasury allocation for investment in housing and public amenities, which created employment in the construction industry. Over the past ten years there has too, been a very significant increase in the number of people employed within the community/voluntary sector.

Much of this government created employment was an aberration created by the widespread civil strife. There is every indication that London is no longer willing to treat Northern Ireland as a special case. John Speller's recently announced plan to introduce water charges is surely indicative of a much wider intent. Moreover, the community/voluntary sector will almost certainly be reduced in size as European Union Peace and Reconciliation funding gradually comes to an end and it requires little imagination to see a time when police and army numbers will be much lower than the current abnormally high level.

Over the past number of years there has also been the creation of a low wage sector where foreign nationals are being invited here to work in jobs paying the minimum wage. It is wrong to suggest that these generally hard working immigrants are taking work from local people. For the most part locals do not care to work for these rates of pay and in these positions. However, building a low wage economy, under whatever circumstances, is hardly something that progressive people should aim for.

In an overall context, the Northern Irish economy has no firm and constant dynamic. Certainly the region is not experiencing widespread deprivation and/or mass unemployment, in spite of the fact that both of these elements are present in unacceptably high degrees in too many working class areas. Nevertheless, much of current employment is government funded and therefore subject to the vagaries of Westminster politics or overt prejudice. Moreover, building a low wage sector is only inviting us to join in “a race to the bottom” that we know only too well will be won eventually by creating a third world economy in Ireland.

The option is to develop a qualitatively different economic model. The alternative to gaining competitive advantage through low wages is to do so through additional marketable skills. This can best be done through a combination of complementary actions involving the education system, a fundamental review of social welfare and a widely accepted consensus about the best way to move forward.

People would have to understand that they are in a changing climate and that none of the old ways will be returning. There needs to be a willingness to undergo a widespread process of re-skilling and re-training. But that will only realistically come about if people are guaranteed full employment at acceptable wages while the process is taking place.

Unfortunately, there doesn't appear to be either the will or imagination locally to demand the necessary changes, nor is there a political administration in place willing to implement the required policy changes. In the meantime, events will drift - probably downwards.

## The blight of the so-called Black Economy

By Terry Johnston

The term itself, “black market”, conjures up visions of people surviving as best they can in conditions of abject poverty and minimal opportunity by selling on little knick knacks to the better off - be it to tourists or more affluent members of their own society.

There is a romantic imagery and air of innocence about it all: mental pictures of the little downtrodden man living on his wits and managing to survive against all odds, and, if not exactly beating the system, at least striking a blow against an established order determined to keep him in his place.

There are many places around the world where this is indeed the case and where the existence of a black economy does mean the difference between starvation and survival for many, many people. However, in these parts, if they exist at all those circumstances are few and far between. In both parts of Ireland there is a thriving and growing black economy, but it would be difficult if not impossible to make any sort of case in favour of its existence. And certainly not on the grounds of endemic poverty, or lack of educational and employment opportunities or state welfare provision.

Poverty and deprivation are, of course, relative concepts, but by any measure, living standards for the populations of Ireland, both north and south, can be reasonably said to be affluent. So who are the chief beneficiaries of our black economy? Is it the people who get to buy items cheaper than they normally might? On the face of it, this would seem to be the case. There is no shortage of customers for the cheap cigarettes, CDs, DVDs, liquor and fuel on offer from the black marketeers.

But besides the heightened dangers to health from, in particular, illegal cigarettes and liquor and to the mechanical wellbeing of vehicles running on illegal fuel, there are other, broader aspects, to be considered. In the longer term, how beneficial is it to the community at large to have, by way of tax avoidance, an increasing amount of money diverted from the wider economy and, following from that, how large an industry does the black market have to become before this begins to impact on government ability to deliver properly on health care, education, roads provision and maintenance, and so on?

And, besides that, is it really in the interests of the wider communities for us to be financing organised criminality in this way? For, irrespective of the seeming financial status of those individuals we deal with at the point of delivery or whatever political flag of convenience they choose to masquerade under, there is no doubt that by far and away the major beneficiaries of black marketeering in Ireland are the organised criminal gangs.

Neither should we console ourselves with the notion that the commodities listed above are the only ones they deal in. Drugs, prostitution and the illegal dumping of waste are just a few of their other less popular little earners. Even worse than that by far, is their illegal trade in men, women and children particularly, in recent times, from Eastern Europe. This booming black industry supplies a steady stream of victims to be exploited as cheap labour, used by paedophiles, or forced into prostitution.

We have only to think back to the poor unfortunates drowned at Morecambe beach last year while gathering shellfish for 60-pence an hour, or BBC exposure of mushroom pickers working in South Armagh for a similar pittance to realise that, in this part of the world at least, black marketeers are a blight on society. It is they, with the millionaire lifestyles, who are the exploiters and their victims often the ones struggling in misery and abject poverty to survive. In truth, there is nothing at all romantic about it.

## Does he take sugar?

by Kevin Rafferty

I was speaking to a friend of long-standing a couple of days ago; expressing my growing frustration, and sometimes anger, at the attitude of a lot of individuals that I come into contact with, as I move about in society. I should state now that, as the result of a serious gunshot wound to my head, I am wheelchair-bound and have some problems with my speech.

It seems to me that people are nervous in my presence, and steer clear of dealing with me directly if I am seeking advice or service. It makes life much easier for them, if there is someone behind the wheelchair to clear up any misunderstanding as quickly as possible and then get me out of the shop/café/office or wherever I happen to be.

In the world of people with serious mobility or other physical difficulties, we call this behaviour, the “Does-he-take-sugar, syndrome”.

Seeing a broken or bent body, they immediately conclude that our minds are in a like-state and that, alone, we are unable to make any decisions in our everyday lives such as, do WE take sugar in our coffee or tea. My friend would be one of the precious few exceptions to this rule and we have regular discussions on the problems that able-bodied people suffer.

During a recent conversation he said to me: “Caoimhin, in life, for most people perception is reality and facts are negotiable”. It must have been obvious by the look on my face that he had lost me.

“Right”, he went on “When I look at you, I see a friend that I have known for 30 years. You are intelligent, witty and a bit watery in your politics, but you always have been, and I forgive you that. The only difference between the present day and the time before you were shot, is that you sit more and it takes you a wee bit longer to get across the same argument that you tried and failed to convince me with all those years ago”

My friend went on to explain that his attitude to me was shaped by long years of knowing me in good times and bad. The people I meet for the first time in a shop or office, and even within the “caring professions”, are seeing me for the first time and their attitude and subsequent behaviour is shaped by first sight/impressions. Unfortunately the first impressions are more often wrong than right, and therefore their behaviour is at best naive and at worst insulting.

Legislation and other measures to address the problems that “able-bodied” people have with people like me, have not been effective. One wonders if things will ever change.

My only wish would be, that those people with disabled mindsets would wise up and realise that we are normal individuals who, for one reason or another, are not as nimble or articulate as we would like to be. But our brains are functioning okay and our hearing is normal. Let us make up our own minds: speak to me, not the wheelchair - and PLEASE, don't shout!

Kevin Rafferty was shot in the head by the UVF over twenty years ago. He is confronted daily with ignorance and/or hostility from “able-bodied” people.

He took part with others, in putting together a booklet describing their everyday experiences. At present, the booklet is being sent to as many state and other bodies as is possible, in order to highlight the fact that, despite legislation to protect and assist those with mobility and other physical challenges, nothing of substance has really changed.

## **The saga of Navan: A case history with its own lessons**

By John Nixon

It is an irony, of sorts, that as I compose this article the award winning Armagh Navan Centre, which is about 5 minutes from my home, is being prepared for re-opening. Painters and cleaners are in, educational programmes are being revised, the car/bus park is being demarcated again, and so on. A lot of activity, but it's all so cosmetic.

The Navan Centre closed down at the height of the tourist/marching season in June 2001. Jobs were lost where, over a decade, £5.18 million had been invested. A Northern Ireland Audit Office report states that "it found it disproportionately difficult to retrieve full details of Departmental and other funding for this body due to the complexity of the funding arrangements". In short, they couldn't account for all of the monies received. Is this a case of corporate racketeering?

Initial projections of 160,000 visitors per annum proved to have been ambitious, to say the least. In actual fact, over eight years, the centre averaged about 30,000 per annum. A downward spiral from the outset, yet no heed was taken. DCAL (Dept. of Culture, Arts and Leisure) offered a further £50,000 in May 2001. The trustees refused the offer and the centre closed with liabilities totalling £125,000. The trustees blamed political instability - as if this was never the case. No doubt it was a big factor, but there was more.

The Navan Centre was as much a tourist baby as it was a political one. Both unionists and nationalists, though more so the latter, as well as various cultural and heritage groups all had a stake in it. It was the jewel in the local council's tourist crown. And in many ways epitomized the hopes and aspirations for Armagh's tourist future. It is a case history that cannot go unheeded and therein lies lessons for all future tourist enterprises. The same can be said for the Ulster Park in Tyrone (now closed) which also failed despite grants and funding.

What galled people in Armagh City, though, was the fact that millions was poured into Navan like water into a barrel of sawdust and little money or effort was spent on attracting inward investment. For years, local people paid exorbitant rates. The commercial heart of Armagh was decimated (though is now recovering well). For over thirty years traditional industries declined while the council fiddled. Now, there is not a single factory in Armagh city.

There has been an agenda at work since the 60s to create a dormer or residential/tourist town and the reality is that it has failed miserably. Locals did not really support Navan. Many Unionists felt they were outside its cultural/heritage loop. Most visitors (as opposed to pure tourists) came from the south, usually on one-day excursions and usually well before or after Drumcree 1, 2, and 3. Even if there had been an upsurge in visitors/tourists, no infrastructure existed to cater for them. They ate their sandwiches on Armagh's Georgian Mall or on their buses and returned, always before dark, to the "safety" of the south. Only in recent years did Armagh get its first new hotel. Before this, there was only Armagh's 18th century Charlemont Hotel whose façade remains

despairingly dour and drab with foreboding steel mesh covering the windows. It looks uninhabitable. The food is great, but the facade needs to be changed, It's all a sad and sorry saga, but lessons must be learned. A decade of peace, however, has presented new windows of opportunity for tourism. International perceptions are slowly changing.

Against a backdrop of industrial and agricultural decline, political instability and jobs heading East, many tourist partnerships have sprung up in the hope of making up the deficit. Local councils continue to budget millions for tourism and government and EU monies still pour in. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board informs us, all too regularly, that visitor numbers are increasing. Maybe so, but most jobs created by tourism are specialized. New initiatives are cashing in on the peace, and rightfully so. In South Armagh, especially in Newry & Mourne, tourism is dispelling myths and misconceptions created over three decades of conflict. South Armagh is now being seen for what it always was: a unique cultural entity complimented by outstanding natural beauty.

A recent initiative in West Belfast has seen shops, bars and restaurants catering for the Euro currency. Euro-zones have existed in border areas from day one. West Belfast will tap into the Euro tourist trade as southern visitors in general, and Americans in particular, are ever-conscious of the strength of sterling. Community or "Troubles" tourism is realizing its potential and allowing the communities of East and West Belfast to interpret and tell their own unique stories and experiences. Eventually it will lead to greater co-operation and cross community interaction and, of course, all for each others' mutual benefit. Hopefully visitors/tourists will feel much safer to get off the red buses and stop making everyone feel like they are living in a goldfish bowl. Belfast, as they say, is on the up and hopefully our arguments and divisions will, once again, find a forum at Speakers Corner.

## Welcome to the Jungle

By Terry Johnston

John A Murphy, writing in the Sunday Independent, described the general election in Northern Ireland as “a circus in a vacuum ... where voters bore no responsibility for electing a government or to a large extent, for giving their verdict on local issues”. There can be no arguing with that. Despite noises of protest from people on all sides about water charges, hospital closures, education and all of the rest, this election, like all that have gone before it, was never about bread-and-butter issues.

Besides, there was no discernible difference in the positions of any of the political parties on any such matters seeing as they had all attached themselves to every populist issue going? Never having to manage a budget or take awkward decisions about allocation of resources and, of course, never having to explain such decisions on the doorstep allows our political representatives to jump on every passing bandwagon, complain about everything and take responsibility for nothing.

The luxury of perpetual opposition suits them to a tee. Though that isn't entirely their fault - try getting yourself listened to never mind elected in Northern Ireland, without first laying out your position on “the constitutional issue”. Dr Kieran Deeney's success in the last assembly, where he campaigned solely on opposition to the closure of Omagh hospital, was an exception that proves the rule rather than any portent of change to come. Certainly, bread-and-butter issues matter to the electorate here, but not nearly as much as signalling allegiance to a favourite strand of nationalism, whether British or Irish. And so it proved again this time (in spades) as the majority of the electorate on both sides voted for the more hard-line parties, Sinn Fein and the DUP.

Within unionism, the DUP swept aside their more moderate rivals in the Ulster Unionist Party taking 9 Westminster seats, including that of Upper Bann, held previously by UUP leader David Trimble. In fact, so extensive was the victory that Lady Sylvia Hermon was the only sitting Ulster Unionist MP who managed to retain a seat, albeit in the traditionally independently-minded constituency of North Down. Within nationalism, the outcome wasn't quite so stark. By winning 3 seats, the SDLP managed to at least delay somewhat the upward trajectory of Sinn Fein. But with Alasdair McDonnell sure to lose his seat in South Belfast to the DUP next time around and Eddie McGrady certain not to stand again, it may be more a case of false dawn than rebirth.

The local government elections produced more of the same, with Sinn Fein and the DUP clearly in the ascendant in all but a few areas.

So where does it all leave us? Well, I think, clearly further away from a final settlement than ever. Sinn Fein has shown no indication thus far in the peace process, that it is interested in helping create political stability in Northern Ireland. If anything, the opposite is the case. If they had been interested in doing so, there was ample opportunity when David Trimble and his UUP were the lead unionist party. But, instead of working

in good faith with Trimble, they helped destroy him and his party. The only possible reason they might offer more to Ian Paisley than they did David Trimble is if they fear they are going to suffer at the hands of the electorate, either here or in the Republic, for failing to deliver on past commitments and there are no real signs of that yet.

If Sinn Fein was so inclined, the DUP would find it virtually impossible to reciprocate, even if they wanted to. Unionism has placed the DUP in electoral pole position – not to do a deal with Sinn Fein, but to resist one. The critical mass within unionism, given experience to date, is now opposed to devolution and on May 5 voted instead for direct rule from Westminster.

God knows what confidence building measures the Provisionals would have to undertake to convince the unionist electorate to take a chance on them again. That, in stark terms, is the result of the recent Westminster and local government elections: stalemate as far into the future as is even remotely predictable. The only game in town from now on will be the blame game.

Each hard-line party pretending they want a settlement and trying to land the other with the blame for not reaching what neither actually wants.

## **No Victory More Sweet**

By Anthony McIntyre

'Some people believe football is a matter of life and death ... it is much, much more important than that.' -

Bill Shankly

From I first watched Liverpool FC beat Linfield 3-1 at Windsor Park while still a child, I have had a sentimental attachment to both the team and the city that hosts them. When Liverpool became champions of Europe for the fifth time after a gargantuan struggle to overcome all the odds against AC Milan, I experienced a surge of joy I am no longer used to drawing from sporting events.

The club's victory put to rest the terrible ghost of failure and defeat that haunted the Kop from 1989 when it snatched defeat from the jaws of victory in the very last minute of the season by allowing Arsenal to walk off with the league championship. If ever there was a team that should have been willing to give all for its fans and an appropriate time for them to do that, it was the Liverpool team in 1988-1989.

In April of that season 96 fans were crushed to death in Sheffield during the semi-final of the FA Cup. It was a terrible moment which ruptured the emotions and ripped the joy from being a spectator. When the players failed to wear the shirt with the solemn determination expected of them, the loss of those lives seemed all the more meaningless. The passion of the fans was not returned in kind by performance on the field. The trophy did not belong to the players but the fans. The players let it go.

Each time I am in Liverpool, whether to watch a match or not, I visit the shrine to the dead fans at the back of Anfield. It is always poignant, bringing out the same emotions experienced when attending the resting places of dead republican comrades. As a result of the defeat at the hands of Arsenal, there is always a feeling of unfinished business. Next time I visit the shrine, and silently whisper 'rest in peace', I will come away thinking I have made a statement of fact rather than giving vent to a mere wish.

The business of bringing back Spartan resolve to Anfield was completed on a Turkish football field by the Liverpool team of 2005.

## **Violence, Victims and Politics: What Image Does Northern Ireland Portray?**

by Michael Potter

Anthony McIntyre's support of the family of murdered Belfast man Robert McCartney, (Issue 20), highlights a feature of conflict and victimhood that has repercussions beyond the circumstances of the individual case. Like it or not, the events taking place in this privileged, affluent, land, with international media focus, carry messages around the globe.

There is nothing new in a man being struck down by members of a paramilitary organisation for defying their authority. It is this form of social control – the use or threat of summary violence – that maintains power in communities in contexts of conflict. It is a phenomenon as recognisable here as it is in Jaffna, Mogadishu or a refugee camp in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The difference is that the sisters and partner of Robert McCartney are articulate, intelligent women who have local support and are being heard – not just here, but internationally.

That difference has come about because of timing. Such activities are no longer officially condoned by the Republican movement, so this particular one is deemed as wrong. The activities themselves, however, are not condemned. Just as every time 'dissident' Republicans carry out activities, they are told they should desist and disband: the Omagh bombing was 'wrong', but bombings of town centres as a strategy are not denounced. To suggest that such activities themselves were wrong per se, would be to say that paramilitary operations and the use of violence for political ends is wrong. It would be a normative, universal statement, instead of a contextual exception.

The arguments for politically motivated violence are well known. If a people are suffering oppression or significant discrimination, then there is a right to physical force when other options prove inadequate. For Marxists, social revolution is the solution to a system that due to its very nature cannot be reformed and the only route to equality is its overthrow, by force if necessary. Franz Fanon has advocated the use of violence for the oppressed to overcome the oppressor, because freedom is something to be taken by right, not something to be negotiated or bargained for. Those participating in that fight are bonded by it and earn their freedom through blood sacrifice, an echo of the philosophy of Padraig Pearse.

The driving force in the Irish conflict is that nations exist and they have a right to be free. That right to freedom includes a right to fight for that freedom, which requires the formation of a mechanism to do so, that is, an armed force to undertake the 'armed struggle'. That force is, in theory, one that is motivated by high ideals and pursues goals that will lead to the establishment of a free, egalitarian nation, where all will be happy, or at least, happier than in their current (presumably 'oppressed') state.

But, writes Anthony Smith, nations require myths to define themselves. Academics have had the opportunity to challenge some of these myths in the context of a free society where information can be researched and analysed in depth. So W E

Vaughan has challenged the myth of 'downtrodden tenants' and 'oppressive landlords' in Victorian Ireland; Tom Reilly suggests Cromwell may have not been as ruthless as he is traditionally thought to have been; and Peter Hart has exposed the supposed highly principled IRA of the 1920's as partial, sectarian gangsters, at least in Cork, his area of study. Dismissed as 'revisionists' by some, such writers have become more common as avenues of investigation become more possible and more acceptable politically.

Myths contribute to the notion that the oppressed nation needs to be liberated and also dictate by whom. Jean-Louis Briquet indicates that 'clientelism' creates a situation where self-defined elites take control of a population by voicing and emphasising its fears and offering protection from those deemed to be capable of inflicting harm. These 'solutions' often result in social control and a licence to administer summary 'justice'. Those oppressed by outsiders become oppressed by their own. Little wonder, then, that the Provisional IRA has been condemned in the past for causing more harm to those it claims to protect, either directly through violence, or, indirectly, through bringing down retribution on the host population from those outside it they have caused harm.

The fact, also, is that ideas transfer to other contexts. Others use violence to further political aims and justify their actions by drawing parallels. Basque separatists have used the methods of the Provisional IRA, as has the FARC in Colombia. The Corsican nationalist leader Jean-Guy Talamoni has claimed links with the Irish Republican movement (though this was denied by a member of Sinn Fein when asked last year). Not only has Talamoni noted the benefits of the tactical use of violence, but direct comparisons can be made between the conduct of conflict in Corsica and that in Northern Ireland. If violence as a mechanism is an acceptable format for political change, it is more difficult to persuade Al Qaeda, Congolese militias or indeed dissident Republicans that their contexts for violence are more or less unjustified.

If structural oppression were a cause for violent response, women would be justified in engaging in killing sprees around the world. If discrimination permitted the discriminated against to form armed movements, then older people in our society would be roaming the streets with assault rifles. Nationalism has a solid ideological base, it appears, and nations – whether states or not – need armies. If that were so, then every ethnic or national group has the right to take up arms and fight whoever claimed the territory they inhabit – and nations and territories invariably overlap. That philosophy requires perpetual conflict among neighbours. Besides, any ideology has flaws. If there are flaws, there cannot be a premise for killing people.

Non-violent methods have precedents. If Gandhi could bring about independence through 'soul force' against the same power that Irish nationalism claims to be fighting, then it is surely possible here. Civil disobedience was tried in Northern Ireland, but in conjunction with violence so was unsuccessful. Gandhi stopped every time violence was used. The use of civil disobedience also says something about the entity being challenged. John Rawls indicates that the tactic only works where the government being challenged is at least partly driven by moral concerns. If non-violence was successful against colonial Britain, there must be very few circumstances where violence can be reasonably justified.

The major advantage of non-violent methods is that the situation of armed groups dominating populations is dispensed with. The people who think they can rule through

threat and force, such as those who perpetrated the murder of Robert McCartney, cannot justify their position. They are part of a counter-productive philosophy.

The family of Robert McCartney has created a potential watershed. It is now for others to challenge the hegemony of armed groups. Also, conflicts are not 'resolved', they are transformed. Part of the transformation of conflict requires the participation of others than the traditional combatants. Conflict elites need to be bypassed by a wider participation in society and politics. Part of this wider participation is the involvement of women. UN Resolution 1325 indicates that women and a gender focus should be an integral part of all operations in contexts of post-conflict transition. It is therefore significant that women are challenging those who practice the ways of the conflict. The visibility of women is a sign that times are changing.

The reality of conflict is that ordinary people going about their ordinary business are affected. The families of those killed or those affected by indiscriminate – or indeed discriminate – acts of violence make up a significant proportion of the population of Northern Ireland.

The question is, whether a model of heroism is of a man setting a timing device on a bomb and slipping away to avoid detection, or of a woman going shopping or to work every day in town centres despite the constant threat of bombing to sustain some semblance of family stability and welfare. To commit violence for political purposes is a choice that a minority makes to influence a majority. To be a victim of violence requires no element of choice or qualification. Violence takes a moment to commit. Victims of violence are left to pick up the pieces long after the political context for it taking place has passed.

The world's media watches Northern Ireland. There are opportunities for the image of this land to be changed from one of conflict to one where the lessons of post-conflict reconstruction can be showcased. Instead of the techniques of and justification for violence being disseminated across the globe, the many reconciliation and peace building initiatives being carried out in communities here - mostly by women - can be used as models of good practice. The killers of Robert McCartney belong to the past. His family demanding justice and those working to move this society beyond conflict belong to the future.

To demonstrate this, those responsible for creating the ideology that says it is acceptable to have killed Mr McCartney in circumstances other than this have to say, not only that the killing was wrong, but that it is always wrong, and as much so in the past as it would be now or in the future.

Otherwise, the circumstances that led to this event will occur again and will continue to replicate in other contexts where the acts of those using violence for political ends are emulated. In the meantime, the family of Robert McCartney needs to be supported, and any like them who come along in the future.

## **Fair Trade: The new Fashion Accessory?**

By Dawn Purvis

Of late, fashionable celebrities have become promoters of Fair Trade products ranging from coffee to clothes. Names such as Ewan McGregor, Minnie Driver and Madonna are drinking Fair Trade coffee and wearing Fair Trade labels. They are allowing themselves to be used to highlight the difficulties endured by producers and growers in developing countries in the face of global capitalism. Towns and cities are now vying for position in the promotion stakes.

The Fair Trade Foundation designated Bristol, with its scores of shops, cafes and restaurants selling products that have been ethically traded, as one of the UK's largest Fair Trade zones. But is this "all for a good cause" just another fashion accessory for the celebs?

On the longest day of the year, June 21, travellers on the London Eye will get an eyeful inside their pod, as well as outside, with 1,920 lucky ticket holders being treated to a half-hour performance for just £21. Each of the 32 pods will host a different act by a musician, artist, dance troupe or acting company all highlighting the campaign for Fair Trade. Members of Blur and Gorillaz have already signed up, as well as the comedian Arthur Smith. Café Direct is organising the event to promote their 5065 instant coffee which is sourced from growers in developing countries.

Coffee is one thing, clothes another. Most of the clothes we wear are made in developing countries. China, for example, supplies 70% of clothes sold in the West. Asian countries supply our growing number of "Chavs" with their trainers, tracksuits, baseball caps and hoodies. But do any of them stop to think where their clothes are produced and under what conditions?

In August last year, factory workers from eight Asian countries gathered in Bangkok for a one-day Workers Olympics to raise awareness about working conditions in sportswear factories across the region. They reported on a litany of abuses, including 77-hour working weeks, bans on unions and conditions so dangerous that colleagues have lost limbs through crush injuries. All this, in the name of Nike or Adidas.

Boycott is not the answer, and Fair Trade campaigners have known this for many years. Not buying a particular product does a great deal of harm. The worker in Bangladesh, for example, needs you to buy the product so he/she can continue to have an income. What these workers really need the consumer to do is lobby the multinationals for better wages, working conditions and proper health and safety standards.

Fair Trade sportswear is a new initiative where trainers and tracksuits are produced in factories where workers do have rights, good working conditions and a decent wage. But will it become fashionable? I can't picture Beckham accrediting his prowess (albeit sublimely) to boots with a black dot, instead of tick.

To be fair, some Fair Trade clothes labels have taken off. People Tree source clothes mostly from Bangladesh, and have attracted wearers like Sienna Miller and Chris Martin. Again, the celebs are doing their bit to promote a good cause. Forgive me if I

sound just a bit cynical about the celebrity promotion of a good cause, but they also use it to promote themselves.

I am reminded of a campaign years ago against the fur trade where advertisements everywhere featured famous supermodels “preferring their own skin” to animal skin in an effort to highlight the unnecessary suffering of animals killed in the pursuit of fashion. At one televised event, campaigners threw paint at models wearing fur. It became totally unfashionable to have anything to do with the fur trade, never mind wear the awful stuff.

In recent times, animal conditions must have improved and the fur farmers found new methods of breeding and killing animals that doesn't involve abusing or causing them pain, because those who rallied to the cause, including Naomi Campbell, are wearing fur again. Will Fair Trade end up like the fur trade – just another fashion accessory? We will soon know if the celebs start drinking Nescafe and wearing Gap dungarees again.

## **Review : Blanketmen By Richard O’Rawe** **An untold story of the H-Block hunger strike**

By David Adams

In *Blanketmen*, Richard O’Rawe claims the IRA leadership in the Maze Prison was prepared to accept a substantive offer from the British Government that would have brought an early end to the 1981 hunger strike. Supposedly, that offer was made before a fifth hunger-striker died - Joe McDonnell - but the IRA Army Council overruled the prison leadership and the strike continued.

A decision that, according to O’Rawe, led to McDonnell and a further five republican inmates needlessly starving themselves to death before, finally, the protest ended in disarray. The prisoners never did win a formal granting of political status, though their other less-contentious demands were introduced over a relatively short period of time after the protest ended. This latest account directly challenges the republican and, until now, almost universally accepted historical narrative of that period.

O’Rawe’s thinly disguised charge is that, although initially opposed to the strike, the IRA Army Council and specifically Gerry Adams deliberately let it continue beyond the British offer and until it could no longer be sustained because, after witnessing public reaction to the death of Bobby Sands, they realised it handed them a glorious opportunity to garner worldwide sympathy for the republican cause and strike a massive propaganda blow against the British. After Bobby Sands and other hunger-strikers were elected to the British and Irish parliaments, republicans needed time, as well, to properly harness that unexpectedly high level of public support and use it to build an electoral base for Sinn Fein in both Northern Ireland and the Republic.

A positive by-product of this, in O’Rawe’s opinion, is that the electoral dividend has allowed Gerry Adams and Sinn Fein to lead republicans away from violence and direct them towards seeking to achieve their aims by purely political means. Irregardless of that, though, if O’Rawe is correct, then a cynical and carefully constructed mythology has been built around the hunger strike and sustained by the republican movement not merely for exploitation - but of absolute necessity.

Such concealment may not have been as difficult to manage as one might imagine. By this account, the only prisoners made aware of the British offer were O’Rawe and Bik MacFarlane (prison OC during the protest), and, whether deliberately or not, the distinct possibility is also raised that Adams and another person, “Liam Og” - both part of a small group tasked by the IRA to oversee all external aspects of the protest - didn’t make the Army Council immediately aware that the prisoners had indeed signalled their willingness to accept the offer.

It is possible, that only at some later date was the leadership in its entirety brought up to speed. So, if a secret had to be kept, the task would have been made a lot easier by the fact that, from the outset, it was a secret known only to a few people. The motivation for this book is made clear by the author from almost the outset: Richard O’Rawe is seeking a measure of redemption and the lifting of a burden he carries. He feels if he hadn’t acquiesced so readily in the IRA Army Council’s decision, it might have helped

save the lives of at least some of the remaining six hunger strikers who went on to die after the British offer was rejected. Convinced he wasn't forceful enough in trying to encourage Adams and the rest of the IRA Army Council to accept that offer, he has carried his guilt since 1981.

There is no way of telling, definitively, if what O'Rawe claims is true and little prospect of ever being able to do so. With such carefully crafted and high profile reputations at stake; so few people completely aware of everything that took place; and the personal risks involved in undermining the accepted, and heavily propagated, history of something as totemic as the hunger strike - it is highly unlikely that anyone will come forward to substantiate his account.

Following the publication of *Blanketmen*, Bik MacFarlane has strenuously denied that any substantive offer was made, much less accepted on behalf of the prisoners by himself and O'Rawe.

Whatever the orthodoxy, dissenters invariably plough a lonely furrow. If O'Rawe is mistaken, it is hard to imagine anything other than confused thinking motivating him to make these claims.

Neither, I suppose, in the absence of any corroboration, should that possibility be dismissed out of hand. Even in the best of circumstances, it can be very difficult to keep track (particularly in a chronological sense) when several different strands of negotiation are operating simultaneously, as was the case during the hunger strike. More so again, when one considers the emotional turmoil and added stress that must have come with being part of a prison leadership during a hunger strike. There is, as well, another possibility that lies somewhere between the two starkly differing accounts of what actually took place and why. The prisoners had gone on hunger strike the previous year, 1980, but that protest was brought to an ignoble end when abandoned on a promise of government concessions that never materialised.

In that context, it is hardly surprising, then, that the IRA Army Council would be loathe to sanction another in 1981. According to O'Rawe, it was only after fierce lobbying by Bobby Sands, the prison OC, that the external leadership eventually agreed it could go ahead.

If a substantive British offer was made and accepted by the prisoners, but turned down by the IRA leadership, the previous year's experience might go some way towards explaining why that happened. The IRA Army Council, having only reluctantly given the go ahead for a second hunger strike, would, I imagine, be determined that the 1981 strike wouldn't end like the previous one: on promises that weren't in the public domain or subject to witness by mutually agreed intermediaries or, for that matter, even relayed in writing, and, therefore, could so easily be reneged upon. Or, they might just genuinely have considered the offer O'Rawe refers to as being either too vague or not going far enough, or both

The potential damage to republicanism, inside as well as outside the movement, contained in the scenario of a second protest collapsing early after loss of life but without substantive and non-retractable gains to point to, takes little to imagine. Having said all of that, O'Rawe's account is compelling: not least because, clearly, he is no malcontent with an axe to grind. If anything, he comes across as something of a zealot who finds it extremely difficult to question, much less criticise, anything or anyone connected with republicanism. And, hardly surprising, that is where *Blanketmen* grates most with

someone from my unionist background. O’Rawe, a man of undoubted intelligence, has brought himself to publicly undermine, at least partially, the most venerated of modern-day republican narratives but is immune, it seems, to other more obviously flawed republican myths and worldviews. These he happily perpetuates throughout *Blanketmen*. Not least, are his straight-faced repetitions of “the party line” on sectarianism and his seeking, often, to justify the unjustifiable.

In a book like this, the reader might reasonably have expected him to at least acknowledge the most strikingly obvious feature and one of the many common failings all our paramilitary groupings have in common: the gaping chasm that invariably exists between high-flown rhetoric and the stark reality of attitudes and actions where it really matters, on the ground. Perhaps that is by way of deliberate or, even, unconscious over-compensation for the other claims he makes, but it is telling nonetheless. Also, his constant drawing of parallels between the prisoners, in their suffering and sacrifice, and Jesus Christ - all but claiming, at one point, Bobby Sands to be a direct reincarnation - is, to say the least, stretching it a bit. Admittedly I am no theologian, but I think I can safely claim that even Jesus would have found it extremely difficult to find much commonality between His own philosophy, lifestyle and actions, and those of the Provisional IRA or most of the rest of us.

In the epilogue to *Blanketmen* - via various apologies, acknowledgements and explanations - O’Rawe continues his veneration of the IRA and, indeed, Gerry Adams but sticks (though, on occasion, one suspects he isn’t going to) to his original contention: that the IRA Army Council and Adams made a wrong call that needlessly cost the lives of six hunger strikers. Another view of his, aired in the epilogue, is that British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher and the British State bear ultimate responsibility for the deaths of the 10 hunger-strikers. By definition, that runs directly counter to the central claim he makes in his book. According to *Blanketmen*, Bobby Sands forced the issue of hunger strike against wiser counsel and, early in the protest, that same counsel refused to accept a good deal when it was on offer. Despite those reservations, I consider *Blanketmen* an excellent addition to the growing library of “insider” accounts of the conflict (far better than most, in fact). Even aside from the contentious claims, it provides an invaluable insight into life on the H Blocks during those turbulent years as well as some of the thinking and the decision-making processes within the republican movement at that time. O’Rawe is a fine writer and a man who, quite obviously and for many years, has been torn between his loyalty to the republican movement and his conscience: his decision to publish is, by any standards, a courageous one.

Some thoughts that remain with me: *Blanketmen*, stripped bare of any sugary romanticism, with its accounts of deliberate brutality and casual courage (often residing in the same person), ill-defined goals and supposed high principles (all confused or forgotten from virtually the sound of the first gunshot, with excuses and lies too often masquerading as explanation) and elites building fame, fortune and careers on the back of so much needless waste of life (comprised, almost entirely, of innocents and cannon-fodder), could be interpreted as the entire conflict writ small. Also, one has always to be certain when seeking release from a burden, that you don’t simply shift an equal weight onto the shoulders of others - in this case the families of the hunger-strikers. Though O’Rawe certainly tries hard not to do that, there is no way of telling whether or not he succeeds.

## Cross-Border Co-Operation

by Ian McCracken

By the time I first saw light - an autumn day near the end of September 1937 - the border was, I assume, well in place. In those days of mainly horse-and-trap transport (or on special occasions, the bus) the border on the way in to Derry was marked by the fairly permanent looking structure of Her Majesty's Customs. On the way out again, it was the wee wooden hut at Molennan, some 20 yards further on the St.Johnston side of the Northern Customs building.

My earliest recollection of the border is from when I was about 10 or 11 years-old and of being taken to Derry by bus. Just before departure my mother would disappear into the bedroom with various items like pounds of butter and bags of sugar, only to reappear some five minutes later adjusting the belt of her overcoat and, apparently, now without the aforesaid items. The border, for me, was the man in uniform entering the bus and walking to the rear, turning and walking back again. Then, 20 yards on up the road, the same procedure but, this time, with people seeming tenser. The bus would then continue on its journey.

On arrival in the Maiden City the first action was to call with friends - for toilet facilities, I was told. The butter and sugar I had seen earlier would reappear on the friend's table. There would then be some shopping - I don't remember for what. On the way home the procedure was the same, only in reverse order. First the nice man at the Northern customs, then the other man at our hut. This time the tension seemed greater here. As the man in uniform left and the bus groaned as it picked up speed, everyone quite suddenly relaxed and became ever so friendly. Smiles and knowing glances were exchanged between people in neighbouring seats: all had something in common. Later motor-cars became the usual form of transport. Now, the driver took a book into the hut to be stamped and initialled. At the Northern house a pass, known, I believe, as a triptych, was shown. For a motorist the border was now a more important frontier than for the pony-and-trap driver. Once across, in either direction, a car could not return unless there was an officer present at the Eire customs to stamp and initial that book. There was no road barrier, but to the car driver there was no crossing the frontier without the rubber stamp.

This state of affairs continued until about 1967. Then the rubber stamp was no longer required. A motorist could cross the border at any time of the day or night in either direction. If the posts were "manned" (in the days before gender equality, "manned" simply meant "manned") one had to stop and declare. Then at one minute to midnight on

31st Dec. 1992 the man at the border post posed the question for the last time “have you any goods liable to duty on board?” .....then he was gone.

I started teaching in Derry

/Londonderry in September 1961 and retired in 1998. For all of those years I was a cross-border worker. As a Donegal Protestant I accepted things as they were.

The border was part of the daily routine. As time went on, the constraints became less and movement between the two countries became easier. The double taxation arrangement in the 1982 budget made the tax burden crippling until it was later eased. The tax on road fuel has varied like a yo-yo on each side of the border. Filling stations on one or other side of the border flourish while their counterparts on the opposite side go out of business. Then, eventually, the pendulum swings back and the roles reverse for a while.

In the higher reaches of government there seems to be a desire to emphasise the border as much as possible. Indeed, I feel that both governments have cheated. We were told of free trade and harmony of taxation systems. It is the ordinary individual, through various test cases in the European courts, that has brought pressure on some of the inconsistencies and extracted change from the powers that be. In all these aspects of the border I am not aware of any difference in attitudes between Protestant and Catholic as to how it has affected them.

In the farming community, prior to the mid-1960s, farming in N. Ireland was more prosperous, and the Donegal Protestant saw the far-off fields as greener. From the mid-60s onward, farming in the Republic has been perceived as providing a better income than for a corresponding farmer in N. Ireland. Yet, because the Northern Protestant farmer is most likely to be Unionist, he does not seem to have any “far-off green fields” envy of his counterpart in Donegal.

However, the last thirty years of conflict has produced a difference in view between the Northern and Donegal Protestant. The Donegal Protestant would see the border as a line that has largely separated us from the physical hurt experienced by our Northern counterparts. The Northern Protestant sees the border as the escape route for terrorists to a safe haven in the Republic. It is also the barrier that prevents them from being absorbed into a United Ireland and enables them to maintain a British identity.

The project for which I work has organised some cross-border conferences where people are asked to exchange views on the border. It is very difficult to persuade the Donegal Protestant to engage in this topic. He/she states quite openly, that they have no interest in that subject. “The border is there and who cares”: is a frequent response. The Northern Protestant has a much greater interest in discussing issues relating to the border as a barrier, be it physical, political, economic or cultural, than his Donegal neighbour.

Derry and Raphoe Action exists to build confidence in and encourage rural Protestants in counties Tyrone, Londonderry and Donegal to participate in community development. I have been privileged to engage with the Donegal Protestant community for the past five years. The work has been interesting and enjoyable. I believe I have been fortunate to be around at a time when there is a growing optimism within the county and within Protestantism. This is expressed in terms of willingness to look to funding bodies for support to improve facilities, and to share these, to some degree, with the whole community. I believe Protestants in the Republic are moving on from being a passive remnant of pre-partition Ireland to an active minority who identify as being Irish.

Our numbers in Donegal, as in the state as a whole, have risen in the ten years since the 1991 census, the first time there has been an increase in the number of Protestant since the Border came into being. Evolution teaches mankind, that chances of timing play an important role in giving new values to what otherwise might be superfluous appendages.

There are numerous examples of organisms with features that developed for one purpose but which later found another, even richer role, in a different environment. Feathers, it is believed, first evolved from reptile scales as an efficient form of heat insulation. Later, much later, feathers were the key characteristic that enabled fast running reptiles to take off and become birds.

In the natural world there are no abrupt edges. Perhaps in the human world the border has a similar role, only we have to see it in a longer timescale.

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