

## **Shaken Not Stirred – at a Price**

**24/05/2007**

The £750 cocktail has now apparently come to Belfast. Peace means hedonistic lifestyle and spending. Consumer spending in the UK broke through the £1 trillion barrier last year. Foreign holidays, expensive drinks, glossy magazines chronicling the lifestyles of celebrities, all have become an integral part of the good life. It is house prices that really animate people – not a shared future.

Yet incomes in Northern Ireland are lower than the UK average. Last year median income for all employees here was £40 per week less than in the UK and mean earnings were £59 lower. And our distribution of incomes is more unequal than in the rest of the UK.

There is intense public debate about how government spends the Northern Ireland budget but much less debate about who gets what. And we don't talk about the exclusions which vastly increased property prices bring. Or the wealth transfer from the young to the old which this represents. As the smoke of battle clears it is time for new engagements.

**David Stevens**