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Climate change evidence laid bare

IT IS now evident that there will be no escape from the severe impacts of global warming. This week's international scientific conference on climate change, hosted by the University of Copenhagen, heard the latest alarming prediction from some of the world's leading scientists that sea levels could rise by one metre or more by the end of this century. Their estimate nearly doubles the figures for sea level rise projected by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change just two years ago, and is based on mounting evidence that the Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets are melting much faster than anticipated. All low-lying coastal areas, including many cities throughout the world, would be threatened by catastrophic flooding if the scientists are right.

Much of the Netherlands lies below current sea level, so the potential casualties obviously include Amsterdam and Rotterdam. But other parts of the world would also be prone to catastrophic flooding. Neither would Ireland be immune; all of our coastal cities, particularly Dublin and Cork, would be on the frontline.

A rise of one metre or more in global sea levels would be quite disastrous in itself. But research on climate change over the past 20 years, confirmed by the increasing frequency and severity of "extreme weather events", shows that ever-increasing surface temperatures will lead to more intense gales and hurricanes. These, in turn, will produce massive storm surges, magnifying the effect of higher sea levels. And with more and more people moving to coastal areas, the number affected by flooding disasters will run to many millions; it has been estimated that at least 10 per cent of the world's population - about 600 million people - live in the most vulnerable areas.

The real irony, of course, is that the people least responsible for the greenhouse gas emissions causing climate change will suffer the most. Commenting on the new scientific research presented in Copenhagen, Oxfam International said the "startling new predictions" on sea level rise "spell disaster for millions of the world's poorest people". And it called on the developed countries to accept their responsibility to make deep cuts in emissions "to prevent these cataclysmic predictions becoming a reality". Even if the United States and other developed countries heeded this call, we may still need to resort to engineering solutions to "refreeze" the polar ice caps, for example.

It is likely that the economic downturn will bring down carbon emissions worldwide, particularly if it persists for a number of years. But governments cannot be complacent and must work towards a low-carbon recovery to ensure that emissions do not resume an upward trajectory once economic growth resumes. Politicians everywhere need to show real leadership by "stepping up to the plate" in Copenhagen next December at the 15th UN conference on climate change. If we are to maintain a safe climate for life on Earth, it is vital that this conference produces a global agreement to steer every country on the path to environmentally-sustainable economic development in the coming decades.

Problems at GM

B AILOUT OR bankruptcy: these unsavoury options seem the only ones open to General Motors and, in turn, European governments faced with rescuing its operations here. The automotive giant is currently dependent on multi-billion dollar US government bailouts to keep it afloat. With an estimated one in ten US jobs linked to the motor industry, the closure of GM would seem to be too frightening a prospect for an already crippled US economy to contemplate.

Yet even with this support, the firm's future remains uncertain. A viability plan, submitted to the US treasury last month, was based on an annual US new car market of at least 11.5 million vehicles. Actual sales for the first two months suggest the reality may be as low as 9.3 million this year. GM's auditors, Deloitte and Touche, last week expressed "substantial doubt" about its ability to

Letters to the Editor

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Murders by dissident republicans

Madam, - I read with horror the comments by Sinn Féin's Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin that the murders of the two British Army soldiers "were wrong because they were in breach of a peace process entered into in good faith by Irish Republicans" (*The Irish Times*, March 12th).

This is like saying the murders of fellow humans were wrong because someone forgot to fill in a form correctly or apply for a permit which would have authorised or justified their actions.

The simple fact is that the murders were wrong because they were immoral, unlawful and contrary to all that normal decent people hold to be right.

The same goes for the murders that IRA/Sinn Féin supported, condoned and indeed encouraged over the past 40 years. What is wrong today was wrong then.

When will Mr Ó Caoláin and his fellow-travellers in Sinn Féin realise the blatant immoral hypocrisy of their position. Until they admit that what they supported was wrong they cannot have any moral standing in any of their mealy-mouthed pronouncements on the latest unjustifiable atrocities. - Yours, etc,

JAMES STAINES,
St Alphonsus Road,
Drumcondra,
Dublin 9.

Madam, - Martin McGuinness has condemned the murderers in the North as "traitors to the island of Ireland" with absolutely no mandate from the people.

Of course, he is correct.

However, is it not a shame that Mr McGuinness never sought to measure the actions of his IRA comrades by the same standard? - Yours, etc,

BARRY WALSH,
Brooklawn,
Clontarf,
Dublin 3.

'Obscene' comparison to EDA

Madam, - Vincent Browne (Opinion, March 11th) says the European Defence Agency (EDA) "strives to bring coherence to the European armaments industry, to help devise even more efficient and effective means of killing". He compares the EDA with the IRA murderers of two soldiers and a policeman in Northern Ireland in recent days. Presumably the soldiers should not have been there and are therefore fair game for anybody who decides to shoot them since they were trying to "bring coherence" to the security policy of a legitimate Government and Parliament.

By way of reducing the seriousness of the IRA murders he writes that "there is a lot more nonsense that infects minds and that justifies other and even more pervasive killings". This is twisted thinking and is as outrageous as I have no doubt it is meant to be.

The mission statement of the EDA states that the Capabilities Directorate works with participating member-states to develop defence capabilities to support European Security and Defence Policy as it stands now and will evolve in the future, on the basis of a capability development plan; and to pool efforts and resources in the development of transformed, interoperable and cost-effective armed forces.

An objective of the EDA is to meet EU aims of protection for peacekeeping and peacemaking forces by better inter-operability so that the lives of Irish Defence Force members and others are protected when carrying out dangerous, often life-threatening, tasks - not to make them "even more pervasive" killers. For

Madam, - The relatives of the two young soldiers and the PSNI member have suffered a terrible loss and our sincere sympathy is with them. There may, however, be a silver lining to the dark cloud of murder in the North. For the first time, nearly all the people of this island - nationalist, unionist, Catholic and Protestant - are standing shoulder to shoulder in defence of democratic freedom and security.

The murders show there is still an infection, however small, of the political virus of "physical force republicanism". Patrick Pearse was an honourable man, who stood up in uniform to fight for what he believed in. But he created a fantasy Ireland in his head and unfortunately he went to live in it.

For a century after his death, in church, school and political platform, we paid reverence to him and his "physical force" ideology. A taoiseach boasted of having Pearse's picture in his office. A Minister of State, Dr Jimmy Devins, recently saluted Liam Mellows, who fought to subvert our democracy in the Civil War, as a "great champion of Irish freedom".

We do not need to look far for who is to blame. As well as "sneaking-regardism", even in the Dáil, we do not wash our political hands so we now have to cope with a political bug that could develop into a life-threatening MRSA.

If, however, we now admit the part we have played, we can help ensure a safer world for our grandchildren by having the theme of the celebration in 2016 to be thankfulness that we have finally left the dark days of murderous madness behind us. - Yours, etc,

P.D. GOGGIN,
Glenageary Woods,
Dun Laoghaire,
Co Dublin.

Late Late Show when Irish Defence Force members demonstrated their military equipment before they left for Chad, on an EU-led mission with an Irish commander. Some of this equipment is sourced in Ireland.

Before an EU-led force can participate in any peacekeeping or peacemaking mission the unanimous agreement of all EU member-states is required, not just the member states participating.

Presumably Mr Browne's reasoning extends to those who murder people, including their fellow criminals, in Dublin, Limerick and elsewhere every other week. Do they also have as much legitimacy as the EDA? Or are the two IRAs more legitimate than these criminals in Mr Browne's mind?

The second World War occurred because there was no country, institution or agency in Europe capable of keeping or enforcing the peace against the threat of fascism. The EU has built up an interdependence that makes war in Europe among existing member-states unthinkable. However, this does not apply in other parts of the world where the UN expects entities such as the EU to play their part in keeping and enforcing the peace. This in turn obviates the need for the US to play world policeman.

Defence and security are essential prerequisites for the success of democracy; and defence and security forces are accountable to governments and parliaments. To whom do the latest two IRAs account? I have no doubt that the EU, its member-states and its institutions are imperfect but to relate

Facing up to fiscal crisis

Madam, - Myles Duffy (March 10) is right to say the economic crisis must prompt "urgent new thinking, revised priorities and new practical initiatives, beginning with a changed approach to aid and welfare". It is a pity that his argument fails to provide that "new thinking", and simply expresses a rather old-fashioned notion of charity. Essentially, he argues that the needy in Ireland are more "deserving" of aid than the needy elsewhere, and that such aid must come through "charities".

I would contend that a better example of new thinking would be to seek to eradicate the roots of poverty, not the consequences of it. We must begin to think of poverty in terms of denial of fundamental human rights, not simply charity and hand-outs. And we must stop thinking that poor people far away have fewer rights than other poor people.

Cutting the overseas aid budget will do nothing to solve the economic crisis, but it will certainly condemn millions of people to a life in poverty.

Our overseas aid is not "charity", to be turned on when Ireland is feeling "generous", and then turned off when we are feeling the pinch. Rather, our aid is a practical expression of our deep and lasting commitment to fight injustice, oppression and poverty wherever it exists, in times of crisis more than ever. - Yours, etc,

HANS ZOMER,
Director, Dóchas,
Harcourt Street,
Dublin 2.

Madam, - I think I have found the solution to the economic crisis. Many of us ignored the warnings of our political leaders with our negative gabbling about the economy over the past couple of years. Those of us who couldn't shut up about crazy house prices, government overspending, short-term political thinking, lack of accountability and poor leadership are to blame for our current plight.

However, as it seems to have been so easy for us to talk ourselves into recession, I think we gab-gifted Irish should now unite to talk ourselves out of one. In theory it should be just as easy. I suggest we start on St Patrick's Day. - Yours, etc,

KIERAN LENIHAN,
Seapark Drive,
Dublin 3.

Madam, - This morning on FM4 radio we heard that Eamon Gilmore TD visited Elvis Presley's home, Graceland, last year.

His choice of song on the Gareth O'Callaghan show was Elvis's hit *Suspicious Minds*.

He surely has his fingers on the pulse of the Irish public. - Yours, etc,

MAURICE COLGAN,
Mooretown Road,
Swords,
Co Dublin.

Reforming the Oireachtas

Madam, - Fine Gael's proposed overhaul of the Dáil and Seanad doesn't go far enough.

Does anyone still believe that former teachers, lawyers, accountants and career politicians are adequately equipped to run our various government departments? The best and brightest in our society are rarely drawn to the rigours of seeking elected office and therefore the proposals should include provision for an elected taoiseach to nominate ministers

An Ir

Frank McN

ON THE subject of Young coinm term "to dig" (March 5th), Vera H written to ask if the Mississippi-born jaz have had Irish conn have an idea that "t from the Irish verb understand," she sa dtuigeann tu? 'Do y

Well, Vera, had t saxophonist ever b president, I'm sure have had little diffie an ancestor for him case, you're not the to think that one of verbs of the beatnik had roots in Ireland thrilling (though in circles controversi *How the Irish Inve* the Brooklyn acad Cassidy made just t connection - laying behalf of his mothe merely to "dig" but the most popular t American-English until then consider unknown origin.

Even now, the m mainstream source *OED and Brewers' "tuig"* is that it is tl of an older English "to twig", meaning thing. Cassidy wen arguing that, wher to the US, "twig" h leaf called "dig".

Inter alia, he att latter's popularisa another southern j Louis Armstrong, quotes speaking c dead musician: "Tl really missed some digging Black Ben bass drum before l by a prostitute." B Cassidy's typically argument for the v ancestry:

"The *American Slang* says 'dig' de 'Celtic word... twi, 'to understand'. Tl Celtic word twig, t is no 'Celtic langu vernacular 'twig' a both derived from 'tuig'. On the deri process, however, deserted him. He s that "tuig" had be to African-Americ speakers. *But he a that there was a la provenance and ac early history of the*

Controvers

Madam, - I would three points abou Churchill play *Seven dren*, which The decided to stage.

1. The Abbey national theatre, an public service institt rightly held to the l ards, not just technic tically but also in ter impartiality and re like the national bro

2. This play - jud actual text, and n reviews and reports Gaza, since it ignore Hamas, and its se character. You woul to learn that Hamas mitted, in principle, the UN-mandated S (b) to impose a Sh ship on the entire r River Jordan to tl reject negotiation ences, and (d) to wag only answer. No s exist in any Israeli g in any of Israel's poli

3. This play is a ment in the sys growing demonisati in fact, the very title