



TIPPING POINT: Firefighters try to extinguish the flames on the Greek island of Evia following a massive blaze that has destroyed forests, homes and businesses and sent thousands fleeing
PICTURE: Petros Karadjias/AP

It's a global crisis and unfortunately a clown is in charge

WERE human beings to be wiped off the face of the earth, the planet would immediately begin to recover. That is one of the more reassuring things to ponder as our species grapples with the results of the devastation it has wrought on the world.

In the space of just a couple of hundred years, we have gone from a position of equilibrium with nature to the tipping point – not just for us, but for countless other species which share this planet with us.

Across the world, the impacts of climate change can be seen by all but the most myopic: biblical famines in sub-Saharan Africa, the fires of hell in Greece and north America, downpours here that would have sent Noah to his local timber merchants.

There is not a part of the planet that has been left untouched by the impact of mankind's greed – from the melting ice-caps of the poles, to the deepest reaches of denuded rainforests, the effects can be seen.

And greed it is, for our plight is caused by the wilful exploitation of the earth's natural resources.

Yet there are those who refuse to see: heads of state like former US president Donald Trump who poured oil on the fire during his four years in the White House, Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro allowing his country's rain forests to be systematically destroyed by loggers, and closer to home British Prime Minister Boris Johnson who just last week indicated support for the exploitation of a new oil field at Cambo off the west of Scotland.

Readers of this newspaper will not be surprised to smell a strong whiff of double standards at the mention of Johnson's name.

In just a few short months this advocate of North Sea oil barons hosts the global climate change summit in Glasgow. COP26 is pretty much the last chance saloon for humanity as far as

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climate change is concerned.

If governments across the globe do not take a decisive turn against the use of fossil fuels, we are lost.

That was made clear this week when the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned in the starkest terms that our very survival will be determined by a climate gone rogue because of our Frankenstein-like interference with the natural order.

Rising temperatures will not turn Ballycastle into Benidorm, rather the consequences will be more storms – and more brutal ones at that; drought; famine; floods; heatwaves that turn countries into tinderboxes, and rising sea levels that will consume island nations.

We all have a stake in this – yet we are all in denial.

Developing countries such as India, China, Mexico and South Africa look at the west, made wealthy on unchecked emissions, and say 'why should we not benefit from fossil fuels when you already have?'

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At the same time we in the developed world cannot face sacrificing comforts we have become used to – an extra couple of degrees on the thermostat in winter, another blast of the air conditioning unit in summer, cheap gadgets shipped from the other side of the world.

It is one of the misfortunes of global politics that Britain is in charge of COP26 – or more accurately the Johnson government is. As he demonstrated last week with his insensitive quip about Margaret Thatcher being in the forefront of climate change activism because she destroyed the British coal industry; Johnson the clown has no understanding of the seriousness of the situation facing us.

Informed observers tell us that the British government has done little real work in preparing for the conference's success. Building global consensus about the objectives, and the necessary outcomes, ahead of international conferences like this is critical. Johnson has not done that.

The big players will want to come out of it giving the appearance of action, while pushing the problems down the line – in the hope that science will come up with a solution, or that their successor governments will take the difficult decisions.

But it is too late to kick the oil can down the road. We have run out of road.

For us there is the inconvenience of flash flooding, unseasonable weather and truncated holidays in the Greek isles; but for many in the global south it is beyond inconvenience. The climate emergency is already a matter of life and death.

The longer we delay, the quicker we hasten our own demise. There will be some who say 'good riddance'. The dinosaurs were obliterated by what is commonly called an act of god. Humanity is sowing the seeds of its own destruction. God does not need to act. We do.

ON THIS DAY

AUGUST 12 1971

Death Toll Rises

WITH five more deaths in Belfast yesterday – bringing the street toll since internment was announced to 23 – there was renewed violence in Derry, Newry, Armagh, Lurgan, Strabane and Crossmaglen. And the pathetic spectacle of refugees fleeing the terror shootings and burnings continued. An estimated 4,000 people have now fled their homes in Belfast. Though some have found alternative accommodation, most are in emergency centres which have been set up in schools and in Irish Army camps. Meanwhile UVF gunmen crossed the 'peace line' to open fire on the Falls Road...

The Death of Bryson Street

THE Russian 'scorched earth' policy of World War II was put into operation in Bryson Street in Belfast's East End last night as with the Army on guard on one side and the RUC on the other, both Catholic and Protestant families moved out. It was an unbelievable sight, writes an Irish News reporter. In a city with an acute shortage of housing, almost 100 comfortable, eminently-habitable dwellings were reduced to charred ruins so that they could never be occupied 'by the other side'. Protestants evacuating houses in other parts of the city set the trend. The Catholic families fleeing Bryson Street caught on quickly. Fear had stalked Bryson Street since the beginning of the 1969 disturbances. On the Catholic side it was brought about by repeated nail bomb and incendiary device attacks on the back of the homes. They were told that they could get out or be burned out'. The deadline was last night.

Editorial – The New Barbarism

AFTER the nights of strife and bloodshed and the counting of the dead, the road this city of Belfast is travelling goes backwards – and downhill... Another strange element in the Army tactics has been the immunity given to heavily-armed UVF men who have been opening up in the fringe areas without hindrance. ... So that notwithstanding Mr Faulkner's asseverations on television yesterday, the 'enemy' in the eyes of British troops live only in Catholic areas... By their tactics the troops are alienating the vast majority of the Catholic population which Mr Faulkner is quick to assert is not behind the IRA.

(In this stinging leader, the Irish News captured the sense of abject hopelessness and full-scale nationalist alienation which followed Faulkner's disastrous decision. As loyalist gunmen joined in battles between the British Army and the IRA, the one-sided nature of internment rankled. Embarrassed by this perception in Britain, Unionist Home Affairs Minister John Taylor suggested that the Stormont government should highlight the fact that at least two Protestants had been lifted – both as IRA suspects!)

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