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A World To Change In 2016

Andrew Flood

January 2, 2016

We awake to news that more towns in Ireland are under water due to storm flooding. And that perhaps the sea ice at the north pole might melt due to temperatures rising above zero. The first story is given a lot more prominence in Irish media than the second but strangely at the same time another story is being celebrated. The start of yet more greenhouse gases being pumped out of their safe place far below the sea off the Irish shore to be processed and then released into the atmosphere via the Corrib refinery (The refinery was sold off by the Irish Government to the Shell company for a fraction of what it is worth).

The Corrib refinery is almost two decades late and costing four times its original budget due to 20 years of successful resistance, which the politicians hope has finally been defeated. It's only weeks since Taoiseach Enda Kenny told the Paris Climate summit that Ireland could not afford to meet its obligations. We've become the nightmare neighbour from hell as we simultaneously rob the rest of Europe of tax revenue and then plead poverty when it comes to (not) dealing with our pollution output.

The pathetic thing is very few of us living here make any real gains from this. The profits from Corrib will go to Shell sharehold-

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Retrieved on 13th August 2021 from www.anarkismo.net

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ers as we pay them for our own gas at full market rate. A relatively small number of big ranchers and construction companies are the ones producing the output of climate change gases that 'we' can't afford to do anything about. And apart from a small number of trickle down tech jobs the corporate tax scam we run against the rest of Europe only really benefits a very thin layer of law firms and property developers.

This isn't that big a secret. At the same time as a hike in corporate tax intake has allowed the government to suggest a recovery is under way, the number of homeless sleeping on the streets, in tents in the parks, and in other emergency accommodation has soared. In the year to come it's clearly going to be recovery for some, miniature Irish flags for the rest of us. The 1916 proclamation is to be celebrated yet as Shell starts to pump gas we are a further than ever from any "right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland"

And far from "cherishing all the children of the nation equally" women continue to face up to 14 years in prison for terminating a pregnancy, Travellers are stuck with overcrowded, unsanitary and all too often unsafe accommodation and asylum seekers spend years in the poverty and isolation of Direct Provision.

There has been resistance. The last couple of years have seen the widespread popular uprising against the water charges but just as happened in the early 1900s it seems that energy is to be channelled into constitutional politics and the promise that change can be achieved by electing the right people to parliament. As was the case then the revolutionaries are small in number and mostly sneered at by those convinced that moderating their demands offers the most realistic way forward.

Back then it was the crisis of World War One that would expose the limits of parliamentary democracy and eventually lead to mass rebellion. Today the crises we face are quite different but, it is increasingly clear, no less destructive and no more subject to being reformed away.