

POLITICAL CARTOONS

Exploring the Gordon Brewster Cartoon Collection at the National Library

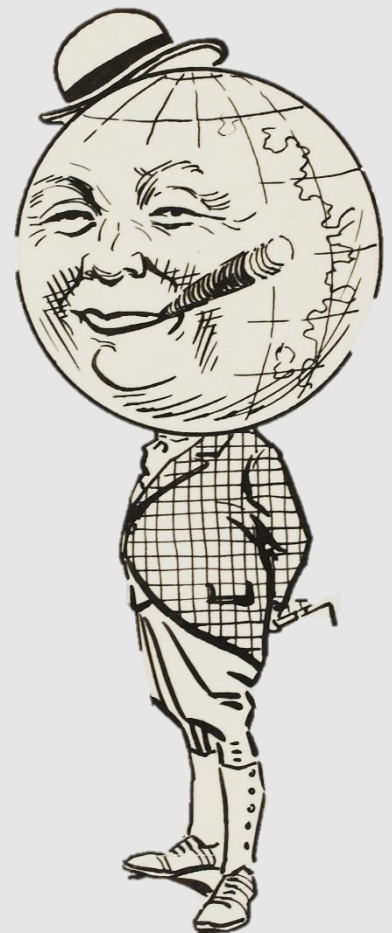


Pre- Learning Questions

THINK: What is a political cartoon?

TOPICS: What sort of topics or themes do political cartoons address?

RELEVANCE: Why are political cartoons important?
What advantages do they have over other forms of media?



Political cartoons use caricature, symbolism and other artistic techniques to represent messages or point of views regarding certain people, events and situations.

The context depends on whatever issues and events are ongoing or whatever figures—political or otherwise—are dominating the news cycle.

They can visually represent a complex issue and accompany an editorial. They are quick to read, easy to grasp and convey the basics of the information presented. They also offer a way to create a continuum of responses across time.

The following cartoons from the Gordon Brewster Collection address the issue of unemployment in Ireland from 1930 -1932.



Who is Gordon Brewster?

Gordon Brewster was born on the 26th of September 1889 in Dublin, at 15 D'Olier Street. He studied at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art (now National College of Art and Design). He went on to become the editorial cartoonist for the Irish Independent group of newspapers. He frequently had illustrations in daily newspapers such as the Evening Herald, which is where the following cartoons were printed. Up until the 1970s, there were very few satirical cartoonists working for Irish newspapers.

Brewster required that his cartoons be sent back to him by the newspapers. Upon his death in 1946, he had maintained a collection of his published cartoons which was then donated to the library. The collection contains 479 original cartoons!

This activity will focus on just four cartoons published in the Evening Herald between 1930 and 1932.



Cartoon for Saturday Herald
April 9th 1932

3 cols

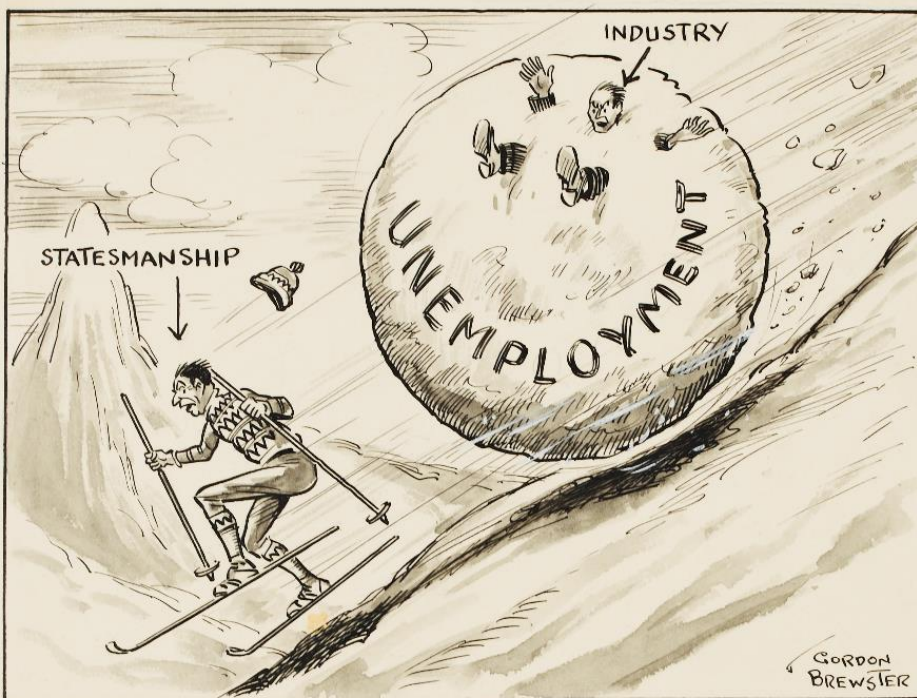
W 9/12



GORDON
BREWSTER

STILL HIKING

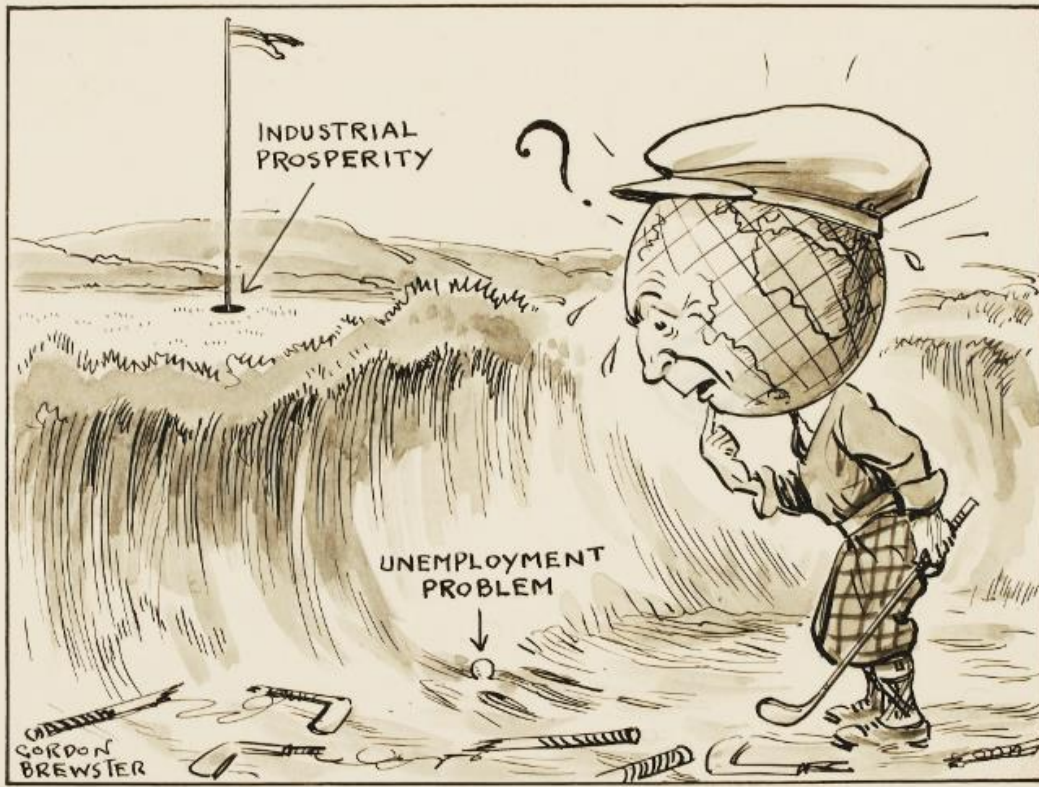
"Mr. Albert Thomas, Director of the International Labour Organisation estimates that there were, at the end of 1931, between twenty and twenty-five million unemployed in the principal industrial countries of the world."



Cartoon for Saturday Herald 3rd
5th 1931
490
Jan 10th 1931

THE GATHERING SNOWBALL

"On December 29th the number registered at the Employment Exchanges in Britain was 2,643,127. This was 234,756 more than a week before, and 1,132,896 more than a year before"



STILL AT IT

3 cols
5"
1948

Cartoon for Thursdays Herald
October 9th 1930



THE HARDY ANNUAL

306
5"
690

Cartoon for Saturday Herald
June 21st 1930

ANALYSE

Use the space below to write down your initial thoughts. Look at the prompts below to get started.

What people and objects are shown in the cartoons?

Can you identify any symbols in the cartoons?

How does Brewster use text in the images?

How would you explain the relationships between the topics and ideas Brewster portrays in the images?

What do you think Brewster's stance on the topic is?



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

What do you know about global and Irish economics in the 1930s that can help you interpret these cartoons?

The history of Irish economics and employment rates during this time must be understood in conjunction with the split of Ireland from Great Britain. Those in favour of home rule believed that it would foster economic growth.

Throughout the 1920s, the economic policy was “cautious.” Agricultural output had grown by 10% but there were still not enough jobs to end unemployment. Ireland did hit its peak for economic activity in 1929. This is demonstrated by statistics from the Irish subsidiary of Henry Fords and Sons in Cork which had grown in the late 1920s. In the first few months of 1930, it was producing 3,000 tractors a month and employed almost 7,000 men. The majority were laid off in the coming months as the effects of the Depression set in.

This period in history is of two halves—these are marked by the Great Depression and the transfer of power from Cumann na nGaedheal to Fianna Fáil in 1932. In the last few years of the Cumann na nGaedheal government, there was a drop in output, trade and employment.

Leading up to the 1932 election, De Valera addressed the American public in his St. Patrick’s Day address saying that unemployment was the biggest issue facing the government. This is in stark contrast from the previous year, when Cosgrave gave his U.S. public address on the same day and gave the statistic that unemployment was 50% lower in 1930 than it had been in 1922. Fianna Fáil thought that unemployment was caused by “structural deficiencies in the Irish economy, and not primarily a consequence of the depression.” One thing modern economists have noted is that this structure also helped “mask the impact of the depression.” Only 44% of those in work were actually employees—the rest were self-employed, relatives assisting or employers.

When Fianna Fáil entered power in 1932, the immediate actions were an increase in public spending on land reform, social housing, export bounties and the old age pension. This also represented a switch from comparative advantage economic policies—where one is looking to produce a good or service at a lower cost than its trading partners—to protectionism—where international trade is restricted to help domestic industries. Fianna Fáil thought that this move would help create jobs quickly and build a home industrial sector. Most European countries in the 1930s were moving towards protectionism. This mostly worked—and high tariffs are often associated with better economic performance.

Fianna Fáil supported import-substituting industrialisation. This is a trade and economic policy that advocates replacing foreign imports with domestic production. They

argued that this move was necessary because farming was not producing enough jobs and that free trade wasn't resulting in enough industry to increase employment either. The initial Free State economy had been based on agriculture which employed majority of the workforce. Moving on from this, prominent economists of the day were concerned by Fianna Fáil's supposed anti-rural slant.

In 1932, the government announced a public works programme that would recruit workers from the live unemployment register. Following this announcement, the number registered increased from 32,000 to 67,000 from April to June. By December it had reached 103,000. Still, between 1931 and 1938, manufacturing employment rose in Ireland from 111,000 people to 166,000. The policies were seeming to work. Another added dimension of the time, is that emigration to North America had almost halted due to the Great Depression, leading to even more jobs needed at home.

“Looking around the world and trying to understand what were the causes of unemployment in different countries I came to the conclusion that there was less reason for unemployment in this country than in any country of which I know. I said there was less reason for unemployment here than in the United States, because in the United States you have the people industrialised to such an extent that the moment their outside markets fail they have a surplus of produce that they are not able to dispose of and the whole machinery of capitalism is broken down for the time being. The same takes place in Britain.” - De Valera

PARAPHRASE

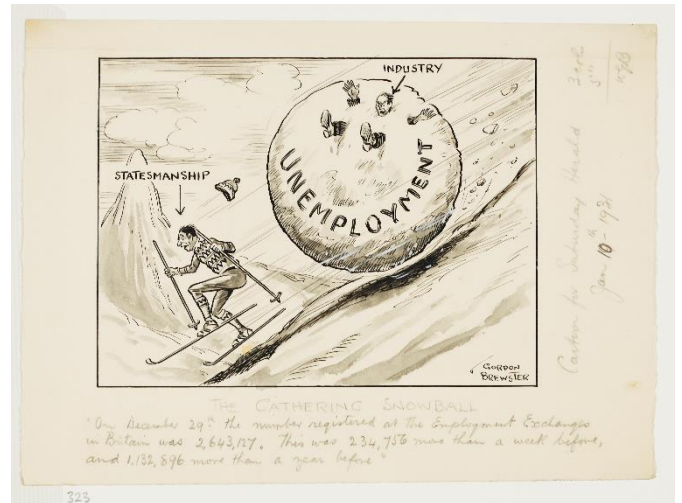
Summarise your understanding of the historical context and supplement it with any other information you have.



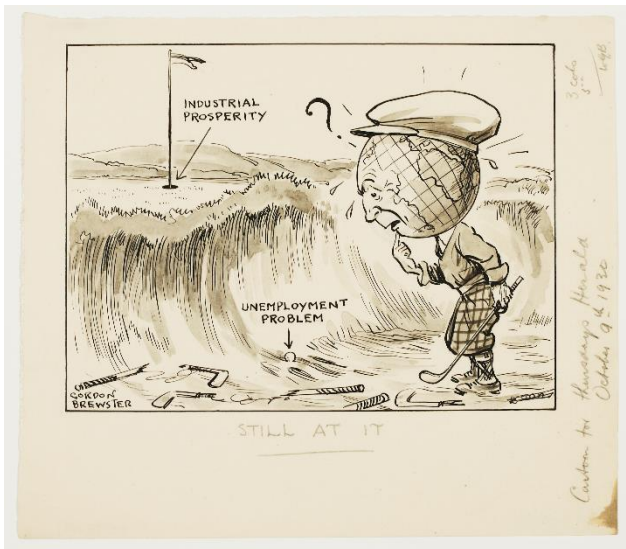
TIMELINE: Think critically to match each cartoon to a publication date. Use the captions as context clues and think about how issues develop over time.



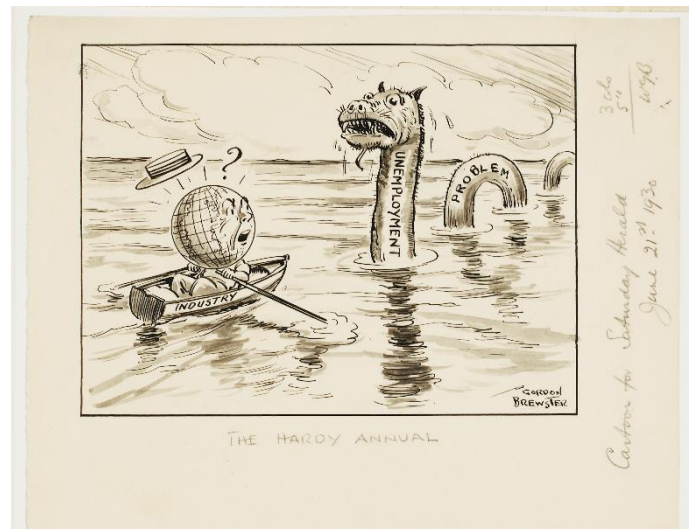
10 January 1931



21 June 1930



9 October 1930



9 April 1932

RECONSIDER: Return to the previous prompts and answer the questions based on your new knowledge. Has your interpretation of the cartoons changed? How?

How would you explain the relationships between the topics and ideas Brewster portrays in the images?

What is Brewster's stance on the topic?

How might a different point of view affect the way the unemployment issue is illustrated?

What are some similarities across the cartoons in terms of method and technique?

Activity

Use the space below to draw your own political cartoon on a topic of your choice. Be creative and try to incorporate symbols and compelling compositions.