

The First Draft of History

Thirty-Four of the Best Pieces on the Paris Agreement at COP 21

John Foran, editor



– From Oscar Reyes, “Seven Wrinkles in the Paris Climate Deal” (December 14, 2015), <http://fpif.org/seven-wrinkles-paris-climate-deal/>

By comparison to what it could have been, it’s a miracle. By comparison to what it should have been, it’s a disaster.

– George Monbiot, “Grand promises of Paris climate deal undermined by squalid retrenchments” (December 12, 2015), <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/georgemonbiot/2015/dec/12/paris-climate-deal-governments-fossil-fuels>

Copyright © 2020 John Foran

All rights reserved.

Eco Vista Climate Justice Press

Eco [Isla] Vista, California

Introduction

John Foran

The recent COP 21 UN climate summit is something of a political, social, and climate justice Rorschach test. Opinion is all over the place as any historic event I can think of. And make no mistake, Paris *was* historic.

We [knew](#) it was likely to be historic going into it; we just didn't know what that history would look like. And that, of course, is one of the hallmarks of the hinges of history – we don't know who will make it, or how it will turn out, until it happens.

Everything seems to be at stake. And *no one* is in control of the outcome. The outcome, in fact, is the sum of all the vectors of force put on the object itself: in this case, the meaning of what happened in Paris between November 29 and December 12, 2015.

And no one knows where things stand today. Powerful forces met on the ground in Paris, and things after now look different, if still completely up in the air (NPI – no pun intended).

And if Zhou Enlai actually uttered the words “It is too soon to say” when asked what he thought of the outcome of the French Revolution, it's even more true, and *way* too early to tell “what happened in Paris.”

But it's never too early to begin the telling. And this is what started even before the joyful (or relieved) applause died down after Laurent Fabius gaveled COP 21 to a conclusion.

This collection, then, aims to explore the outcomes less than one month on by presenting – in full, the best pieces I could find in my obsessive ongoing archiving of opinion. Though I have grouped them in section titled Outcomes, Judgments, Interpretations, and Advice for Movements, it should be clear that these categories blur into each other and many of the pieces fit easily into more than one of them.

I make no pretense to presenting here a “balanced” spectrum of opinion on the Paris outcome. These are personal choices, the ones that brought me the most from reading them. If anything, taken as a whole, they “balance” the mainstream press on the outcome, which generally starts by accepting the self-congratulation of the makers of the Agreement as its opening premise. Here the opposite principle holds.

And remember, what happened in Paris doesn't stay in Paris. It radiates outward (NPI) and will resonate in the days and years to come. It was history – to be sure – but nothing began or ended there.

The next chapters will be ours to write, and we will write them with our passion, imagination, actions, and movements.

My own assessment of Paris can be found in the blogposts at the [Climate Justice Project website](#), as well as in the last piece in this collection.

In a nutshell, my judgement is that nothing new was agreed, except for a hollow promise to keep warming as far under 2 degrees as possible. In exchange, almost everything else of value was jettisoned.

Frankly, we have no advance on Kyoto, with its legally binding emissions cuts for the wealthy nations. Or Copenhagen, with its promise of \$100 billion annually to be placed in a Green Climate Fund by 2020 for mitigation and adaptation efforts by the global South (in fact, there was regression on this pledge, since no countries have stepped up to make their contribution known).

And the whole Paris Agreement is an obscene regression on the founding principles of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which promised to deal forthrightly with the scale of the crisis, and to make sure that those responsible for global warming pay their fair share of the costs of the effort. All that is pretty much out the window.

The can was kicked down the road, as it always is at the COP. That it has been hailed as a huge achievement is a scandal. But it will backfire.

For at the end of the day, of course, we're as badly off as ever. And with each passing day, even more so.

Paris is a capitalist agreement to extend a capitalist crisis forever. And if we can't see beyond capitalism, we've had it.

But we can.

The First Draft of History Thirty-Four of the Best Pieces on the Paris Agreement at COP 21

Table of Contents

Outcomes **12**

1. Danny Chivers and Jess Worth, “Paris deal: Epic fail on a planetary scale” (December 12, 2015), <http://newint.org/features/web-exclusive/2015/12/12/cop21-paris-deal-epi-fail-on-planetary-scale/> **13**

“The Paris Agreement is being hailed as a great success. But will it deliver climate justice?” Danny Chivers and Jess Worth of *The New Internationalist* put it to the test. P.S. Chivers’s [*No-Nonsense Guide to Climate Change*](#) is still the best starting book on the crisis that I know of...

2. Talk Nation Radio, “David Swanson interviews Chris Williams on How Paris Set the Earth on a Course to Burn” (December 22, 2015), <https://soundcloud.com/davidcswanson/talk-nation-radio-chris-williams-on-how-paris-set-the-earth-on-a-course-to-burn> **20**

Ecosocialist thinker Chris Williams gives an engaging and very cogent political analysis in this 30-minute interview...

3. Raymond Cléménçon, “Two Views of the Paris Climate Conference Outcome” (December 13, 2015) **21**

Professor and former Swiss climate negotiator Raymond Cléménçon, my colleague at UC Santa Barbara, offers a measured assessment of the good, the bad, and the ugly from Paris...

4. George Monbiot, “Grand promises of Paris climate deal undermined by squalid retrenchments” (December 12, 2015), <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/georgemonbiot/2015/dec/12/paris-climate-deal-governments-fossil-fuels> **26**

Crusading climate journalist George Monbiot puts the whole thing in perspective in two sentences: *“By comparison to what it could have been, it’s a miracle. By comparison to what it should have been, it’s a disaster.”*

5. Jonathan Neale, “At COP21, the world agreed to increase emissions“ (December 13, 2015), <http://climateandcapitalism.com/2015/12/13/cop21-world-agrees-to-increase->

emissions/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+climateandcapitalism%2FpEtD+%28Climate+and+Capitalism%29 **28**

The title gets us to the bottom line very quickly...

6. Oscar Reyes, “Seven Wrinkles in the Paris Climate Deal” (December 14, 2015), <http://fpif.org/seven-wrinkles-paris-climate-deal/> **30**

The wrinkles are in the details: “*The headlines from the Paris climate talks tell an inspiring story.... Unfortunately, however, the main text of the agreement is long on rhetoric and short on action. Here are seven takeaways from a closer parsing of the deal...*”

7. Daniel Tanuro, “COP21: in spite of the show, the glass is 80% empty” (December 19, 2015), <http://systemchangenotclimatechange.org/article/cop21-in-spite-show-glass-80-empty> **36**

The author, an excellent ecosocialist analyst, gets the math about right in his title...

8. Brian Tokar, “Inside the Paris Climate Agreement: Hope or Hype?” (December 30, 2015), <http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/12/30/inside-the-paris-climate-agreement-hope-or-hype/> **42**

Leading Green Party thinker and author of a great book on the climate justice movement – *Toward Climate Justice* – Brian Tokar weighs in with another telling title, which he answers in detail.

9. Hilal Elver and Richard Falk, What *Really* Happened at the Paris Climate Conference (December 31, 2015) **48**

UN Special Rapporteur on Food Hilal Elver and radical scholar Richard Falk conclude that “the very obvious shortcomings of the Paris agreement should encourage vigilant transnational activism, and hopefully give rise to a robust climate justice movement.”

Judgments **54**

10. Climate justice groups, “The lack of ambition in this room is palpable,” or, “The Great Escape of the developed world comes at the expense of real lives, real bodies in the South” (December 12, 2015), <http://ldcnews.com/climate-justice-groups-great-escape-developed-world-comes-expense-real-lives-real-bodies-south/> **55**

This is the final speech given by civil society inside the COP, delivered powerfully by College of the Atlantic student Aneesa Khan. Withering, scathing, powerful words.

11. Climate Justice Network, Friends of the Earth, Global Justice Now, WWF, Carbon Market Watch, Climate News Network, “Too weak, too late, say climate justice campaigners” (December 12, 2015, <http://oneworld.org/2015/12/12/too-weak-too-late-says-climate-justice-campaigners/>) **56**

This is an invaluable compendium of movement reactions to the Agreement, all issued within twelve hours of the final gavel...

12. Maxime Combes, “Réaction d’Attac France à l’Accord de Paris” (December 12, 2015), <https://france.attac.org/se-mobiliser/changeons-systeme-pas-climat/article/reaction-d-attac-france-a-l-accord-de-paris> **68**

Get out your French dictionaries, because Maxime Combes, one of the organizers of the Climate 21 Coalition that so valiantly worked on behalf of civil society during COP 21, lowers the boom and gives Attac’s perspective on the outcome.

13. Eric Mann, “The Paris Climate Talks: A Victory for President Obama, A Defeat for the Planet, and a Challenge to the Climate Justice Movement” (December 2015), http://www.blackcommentator.com/634/634_cover_paris_climate_talks_analysis_mann_guest.html **72**

Los Angeles-based social justice activist Eric Mann provides a very nuanced account of what Paris means from various angles, including, most importantly, communities on the frontlines of environmental racism in the United States.

14. Yeb Saño, “After Paris, Is Another World Possible?” (January 4, 2016) **79**

The delegate who brought the 2013 Warsaw COP 19 to tears after a cyclone hit the Philippines, now from inside the climate justice movement, delivers a devastating critique of what did and didn’t happen in Paris.

15. Pablo Solón, “From Paris with love for lake Poopó” (December 21, 2015), <http://obccd.org/2015/12/21/from-paris-with-love-for-lake-poopo/> **81**

Another former negotiator, Bolivia’s Pablo Solón, put global elites [on trial](#) for crimes against Mother Earth in Paris. His was one of the few voices for the position that [no agreement](#) would be the best outcome of Paris argument; here he sums up the actual result.

16. Patrick Bond, “Paris climate agreement: a terror attack on Africa” (December 17, 2015), http://climateandcapitalism.com/2015/12/17/paris-climate-agreement-a-terror-attack-on-africa/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+climateandcapitalism%2FpEtD+%28Climate+and+Capitalism%29 **84**

Patrick Bond – perhaps the world’s leading scholar-activist of climate justice – centers Africa, the world’s front-line continent, in this piece.

17. Kevin Anderson, “Talks in the city of light generate more heat” (December 21, 2015), <http://www.nature.com/news/talks-in-the-city-of-light-generate-more-heat-1.19074> **87**

The well-known and highly-regarded radical climate scientist Kevin Anderson offers a sobering analysis of how we can’t deliver a livable planet if the root cause of the climate crisis – capitalism – is taken off the table.

Interpretations **89**

18. John Michael Greer, “Too Little, Too Late” (December 24, 2015), <http://www.resilience.org/stories/2015-12-24/too-little-too-late#> **90**

If you’re one of the few Resilience readers who doesn’t know the work of John Michael Greer (aka the Archdruid), this will be a fair introduction to the way his mind works – unlike anyone else, but in a good way!

19. Justin Kenrick, “Everyone is the Mother of Victory” (December 16, 2015), <http://www.resilience.org/stories/2015-12-16/everyone-is-the-mother-of-victory> **96**

I’m a sucker for a great title, but this one is strong all the way through...

20. Avi Lewis and Rajiv Sicora, “Why Most of What You Think You Know About The Paris Climate Deal Is Wrong: An Annotated News Story” (December 16, 2015), <http://theleap.thischangeseverything.org/why-most-of-what-you-think-you-know-about-the-paris-climate-deal-is-wrong-an-annotated-news-story-2/> **103**

This piece is a refreshing send-up and deconstruction of the mainstream reportage on Paris. If we need this to get the real story, imagine how few people have got a sense of what really happened in Paris. This is the antidote to complacency.

21. Oliver Milman, “James Hansen, father of climate change awareness, calls Paris talks ‘a fraud’” (December 12, 2015),

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/12/james-hansen-climate-change-paris-talks-fraud> **111**

James Hansen, never one to mince words, gets down and dirty here. One has to love his passion, and when Hansen gives an opinion on the severity of our predicament, we would do well to listen (except for the nuclear power stuff...).

22. Roz Pidcock, “AGU 2015: Scientists react to Paris agreement on climate change” (18 December 2015), http://www.carbonbrief.org/agu-2015-scientists-react-to-paris-agreement-on-climate-change?utm_source=Daily+Carbon+Briefing&utm_campaign=61b2672363-cb_daily&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_876aab4fd7-61b2672363-303461217 **115**

I really liked this set of short video interviews with scholars at the meetings of the American Geophysical Union that took place in San Francisco right after Paris ended. Maybe there’s hope for the climate science community getting more political in the near future?

23. Carl Pope, “Paris Agreement ‘Greatest Single Victory Since Emergence of Modern Environmental Movement’” (December 14, 2015), http://ecowatch.com/2015/12/14/paris-agreement/?utm_source=EcoWatch+List&utm_campaign=8b4680b31d-Top+News+12+14+2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_49c7d43dc9-8b4680b31d-85960137 **116**

Carl Pope, *eminence grise* of the new, more radical Sierra Club that is being birthed, goes a tad overboard in this ode to the Agreement...

24. Jess Worth and Danny Chivers, “Why we should feel positive about Paris” (December 13, 2015), <http://newint.org/features/web-exclusive/2015/12/13/why-we-should-feel-positive-about-paris/> **118**

Jess and Danny, who opened this collection on a properly downbeat note, go into happy mode in their concluding piece, taking me along with them both times...

25. John W. Roulac, “The Fraudulent Science at COP21 Exposed” (December 17, 2015), http://ecowatch.com/2015/12/17/fraudulent-science-cop21/?utm_source=EcoWatch+List&utm_campaign=09bd0265f5-Top+News+12+20+2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_49c7d43dc9-09bd0265f5-85960137 **124**

John Roulac, a leading light of the coming agricultural revolution focuses on the glaring wrong turn that the Agreement takes for one of the most important problems of our future lives –

sustainably feeding the world.

Advice for Movements **127**

26. Kate Aronoff, “Climate Games challenge Paris protest ban with peer-to-peer disobedience” (December 11, 2015),
<http://wagingnonviolence.org/2015/12/climate-games-challenge-paris-protest-ban-peer-peer-disobedience/> **128**

Kate Aronoff is one of my new favorite writers on climate justice, and here she brings the adventuring spirits and new tactics of the Climate Games into view for us...

27. Charlotte Du Cann, “Paris: the Untold Story” (December 23, 2015),
<http://www.resilience.org/stories/2015-12-23/paris-the-untold-story#> **133**

Charlotte Du Cann takes us behind the scenes into many of the most interesting actions that took place outside the COP on the streets of Paris...

28. Naomi Klein, “Speech on the Champ de Mars in front of the Eiffel Tower” (December 12, 2015), transcribed by John Foran,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhYIA7E3JsY> **137**

I heard Naomi deliver this speech on the Saturday afternoon the Agreement went down, and, as usual, she hit just the pitch perfect register for my needs and mood at that moment...

29. Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers, “COP21 An Opportunity For Climate Justice, If We Mobilize” (December 13, 2015),
<https://www.popularresistance.org/newsletter-opportunity-for-climate-justice-if-we-mobilize/> **139**

This duo at Popular Resistance always put things in a hopeful, strongly empowering way, and their takeaway for movements is right on the money (bad image)...

30. Ben Adler, “Paris Agreement represents progress on cutting emissions, but not so much on climate justice” (December 21, 2015), http://grist.org/climate-energy/paris-agreement-represents-progress-on-cutting-emissions-but-not-so-much-on-climate-justice/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=daily-horizon **148**

From the chief writer on Paris at Grist, one of my favorite climate change websites, here with a darker (and to my mind more accurate) assessment than the generally rosy

picture from Grist's many other pieces on Paris.

31. Francesco Martone, "On the other side of the sky" (December 26, 2015), <http://sinistracosmopolita.blogspot.com/2015/12/on-other-side-of-sky.html> **151**

Points for most beautiful title on Paris so far. Oh, and the rest of the piece is worth reading, too!

32. Belinda Rodriguez and Ben Case, "Why big NGOs won't lead the fight on climate change" (December 6, 2015), <https://roarmag.org/essays/paris-ngo-cop21-climate-march/> **154**

A hard-hitting set of questions for 350.org and others on the cancellation of the November 29 climate march. Food for thought...

33. David Schwartzman, "COP21: Achievements and challenges to the climate justice movement" (December 29, 2015), www.cnsjournal.org/cop21-achievements-and-challenges-to-the-climate-justice-movement/ **160**

Some sharp advice on the issues that should be "taken more seriously" by the climate justice movement going forward into 2016...

34. John Foran, "The Paris Agreement: Paper Heroes Widen the Climate Justice Gap" (December 13, 2015), <http://www.resilience.org/stories/2015-12-14/the-paris-agreement-paper-heroes-widen-the-climate-justice-gap> **164**

It's hard to argue with this view of the outcome. I couldn't have said it better myself...

Part One
Outcomes

Paris deal: Epic fail on a planetary scale

The Paris Agreement is being hailed as a great success. But will it deliver climate justice?

Danny Chivers and Jess Worth put it to the test.

December 12, 2015

<http://newint.org/features/web-exclusive/2015/12/12/cop21-paris-deal-epi-fail-on-planetary-scale/>



'D12' day of action in Paris, France, 12 December 2015. Photo by Allan Lisner / Indigenous Environment Network

Today, after two weeks of tortuous negotiations – well, 21 years, really – governments announced the Paris Agreement. This brand new climate deal will kick in in 2020. But is it really as 'ambitious' as the French government is claiming?

Before the talks began, social movements, environmental groups, and trade unions around the world came together and agreed on a set of criteria that the Paris deal would need to meet in order to be effective and fair. This 'People's Test' is based on climate science and the needs of communities affected by climate change and other injustices across the globe.

To meet the People's Test, the Paris deal would need to do the following four things:

- 1. Catalyze immediate, urgent and drastic emission reductions;**
- 2. Provide adequate support for transformation;**

- 3. Deliver justice for impacted people;
- 4. Focus on genuine, effective action rather than false solutions;

Does the deal pass the test? The [15,000 people who took to the Paris streets today](#) to condemn the agreement clearly didn't think so. Here's **New Internationalist's** (NI) assessment.

Test 1. Catalyze immediate, urgent and drastic emission reductions: *'In line with what science and equity require, deliver urgent short-term actions, building towards a long-term goal that is agreed in Paris, that shift us away from dirty energy, marking the beginning of the end of fossil fuels globally, and that keep the global temperature goal in reach.'*

NI assessment: Fail.

The Paris Agreement aims to keep the global average temperature rise to 'well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C.' But the emission cuts contained in the agreement are based on *voluntary pledges* called 'Intended Nationally Determined Contributions' (INDCs) that governments [drew up individually before the talks](#), based on what they were prepared to deliver, not what science or equity demanded. These cuts have now become an official part of the deal, but go nowhere near far enough to achieve a 1.5°, or even a 2° goal, and the agreement does not require these targets to be re-examined until 2020.

In the words of Asad Rehman from the Global Campaign to Demand Climate Justice, 'This agreement is a great escape for the big polluters, and a poisoned chalice for the poor. We've got some warm words about temperature levels, but no concrete action. Rich countries aren't pledging to do any more about their inadequate emissions reduction targets which are going to lead us to 3.7° warming of the planet. None of the developed countries are doing their fair share to reduce their emissions and move away from dirty energy.'

This agreement is a great escape for the big polluters, and a poisoned chalice for the poor

According to Kevin Anderson, Deputy Director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, 'The Copenhagen text included aviation and shipping emissions, that together are as large as the emissions of Britain and Germany combined, but they are not mentioned in the Paris text.' Overall, he says, the agreement 'is weaker than Copenhagen' and 'not consistent with the latest science'.

The Paris deal requires no emissions reductions from countries before 2020. Steffen Kallbekken, Director of the Centre for International Climate and Energy Policy, explains that 'by the time the pledges come into force in 2020, we will probably have used the entire carbon budget consistent with 1.5°C warming. If we stick with the INDCs we will have warming between 2.7°C and 3.7°C.'

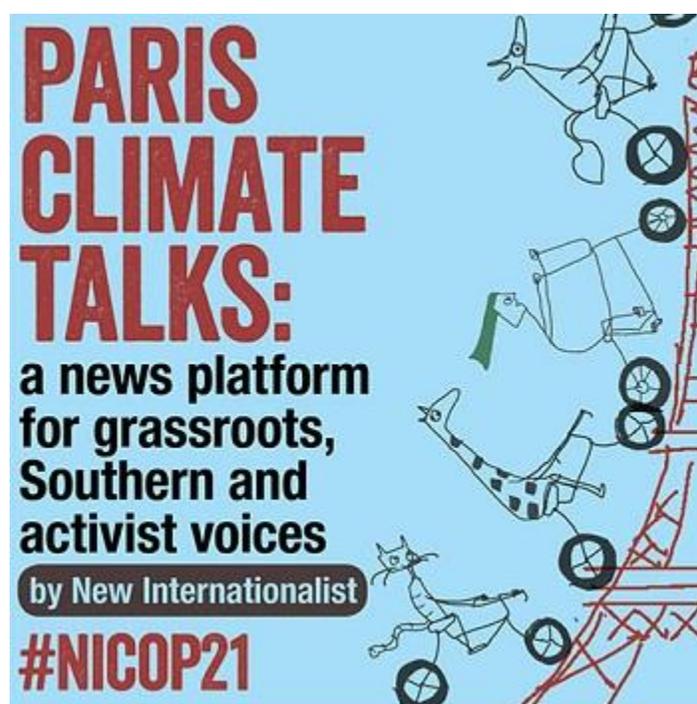
In order to have a decent chance of reaching that 1.5° target, we need to keep at least 80 percent of known fossil fuels in the ground, and urgently halt the exploration and extraction of new sources. We need to stop deforestation and reduce other greenhouse gases such as methane,

by tackling major drivers such as the growth of animal agriculture. But the Paris agreement contains no mention of the words ‘fossil fuel’ – no coal, no oil, no gas - and not a whisper about the livestock, palm oil and other industries driving deforestation either.

‘Our survival is non-negotiable. But after all the hype about high ambition and the 1.5°C aspirational limit for global warming, the final version of the climate agreement is sentencing us to even more deaths and destruction’ said Lidy Nacpil, coordinator of the Asian Peoples’ Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD).

Test 2. Provide adequate support for transformation: *‘Ensure that the resources needed, such as public finance and technology transfer, are provided to support the transformation, especially in vulnerable and poor countries.’*

NI assessment: Fail.



Visit our [#NICOP21 alternative media Paris hub](#)

According to the International Energy Agency, the transformation to a fossil-free world will require \$1,000 billion per year by 2020. Around two-thirds of this – so \$670 billion - will need to be spent in developing nations, hence the need for a significant transfer of finance from North to South. This is only fair, because industrialized nations have grown so wealthy by burning fossil fuels for the last 200 years; countries containing just 10 percent of the world’s population are responsible for around 60 percent of the greenhouse gases currently in the atmosphere.

However, the Paris Agreement only commits to ‘mobilizing’ \$100 billion per year by 2020, to cover not just emission cuts but also adaptation (see 3, below). This is far short of the

support required, and there is no firm commitment to increase this figure, merely an aspiration to review it by 2025. Meanwhile, the definition of ‘mobilize’ is purposefully broad, to include loans, private finance, grants with strings attached, and the reallocation of aid budgets. There has even been talk of calling the money sent home by migrants working in richer countries a form of climate finance, and counting it towards the total ‘mobilized’ by those rich countries.

This is inadequate and mean, especially given that governments spend an [estimated \\$5,300 billion per year](#) on direct and indirect subsidies to fossil fuels. Janet Redman, Director of the Climate Program at the Institute for Policy Studies, puts the finance required in perspective: ‘We spend \$2,000 billion a year on our military and mobilized \$14,000 billion to bail out banks. Wealthy nations have to shift money from banks and tanks to clean energy and climate resilience.’

Test 3. Deliver justice for impacted people: *‘Enhance the support for adaptation in a new climate regime, ensure that there will be a separate mechanism to provide reparations for any loss and damage that goes beyond our ability to adapt, and make a firm commitment to secure workers’ livelihoods and jobs through a Just Transition.’*

NI assessment: Fail.

According to the UN Environment Programme, on top of the \$670 billion needed for emissions cuts per year by 2020, vulnerable countries will also need around \$150 billion per year for adaptation measures to protect them from the worst impacts of climate change. That’s more than \$800 billion per year in total – so the \$100 billion ‘finance floor’ represents less than 15 percent of what is actually needed.

Developed countries have done the most to cause the problem, and therefore have the responsibility to solve it, but this crucial principle (known as ‘Common but differentiated responsibility’) has been watered down in the Paris text at the behest of the US and other industrialized nations. Rather than a clear statement that richer countries should provide finance to poorer nations for adaptation, the Paris deal just says that developed countries should ‘take the lead’ on providing finance, as part of a ‘shared effort’ by all parties.

While the US and some NGOs have been quick to blame developing countries for not pulling their weight in the agreement, the [‘Fair Shares: A Civil Society Equity Review of INDCs’](#) report, from climate justice organizations, social movements, faith groups, trade unions, environmental and development organizations, shows that the opposite is true. Many developing countries are pledging to do more than their ‘fair share’ to cut emissions while rich countries are dragging their feet.

The US and its allies do not want to pay for loss and damages which countries like mine are already experiencing

Furthermore, as climate change is already happening, many countries are already being hit by devastating floods, storms and droughts. These will continue – and worsen – for many years, even if the world succeeds in keeping temperature rises below 1.5 degrees. They deserve

compensation and financial support to deal with the loss and damage caused by rich countries' pollution. But the Paris Agreement denies them this by introducing a clause that says the deal provides 'no basis for any liability or compensation'. Many climate-vulnerable nations fought hard for the right to compensation, but were bullied, bribed and browbeaten by the US and EU into accepting this clause.

As Asad Rehman puts it, 'the EU, the US, and the umbrella group of rich countries have imposed a clause which absolves them of the legal, moral and political responsibility for the carbon pollution that they've created and that has devastated the lives and livelihoods of millions of people.'

Magline Peter, an Indian fisherfolk leader whose flight to Paris was delayed because of the floods in Chennai, also denounces this clause. 'The US and its allies do not want to pay for loss and damages which countries like mine are already experiencing, whether through rising sea levels or freak floods, like the latest in Chennai. It's absurd to see these developed countries continue to blame India for blocking a fair and just climate agreement.'

The concept of a [just transition](#) – that governments should provide training and financial support to ensure that workers in the fossil fuel industry can find alternative employment in the shift to a zero-carbon world – is mentioned in the preamble but not in the core, agreed text of the Paris deal. And the requirement that human rights should be taken into account has been stripped from the text.

This means that the rights of Indigenous peoples has also been removed from the binding part of the text. As Dallas Goldtooth, of Indigenous Environmental Network, explains: 'It's hard to take as an Indigenous person that our ability to decide and self-determine our futures, where we get our food from, where we get our water from is not legally recognised by the nations of this world. It's destructive, it's hurtful, and it shows that this agreement is a failure.'

Test 4. Focus on transformational action: *'Ensure that renewable and efficient solutions are emphasized rather than false solutions that fail to produce the results and protection we need, such as carbon markets in land and soil, dangerous geoengineering interventions, and more.'*

NI assessment: Fail.

The agreement talks vaguely about 'technologies' and 'actions' without defining what these are, leaving the door open to all kinds of false solutions. Renewable energy is mentioned just once, in relation to Africa. The deal aims to 'achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century'. This could mean anytime between 2050 and 2100, when a 1.5 degree target would require a definitive end to fossil fuel use by 2050; and the purposefully slippery language allows for the possibility of continued fossil-fuel burning 'offset' by 'removals' via dubious carbon capture, geoengineering or forestry schemes.

The [door is left open for carbon trading mechanisms](#) – which have so far been wildly ineffective at cutting emissions – with ‘internationally transferred mitigation outcomes’ recognised in the text as a legitimate solution. Meanwhile, there is no mention of effective and fair solutions such as [respecting the land rights of forest peoples](#), [promoting clean democratic energy](#) or ensuring [food sovereignty for communities and small farmers](#), all of which would keep carbon safely locked up underground and in trees and soils. Regulations to rein in destructive industries, halt deforestation and keep fossil fuels in the ground are not even hinted at. Worse, there is no language in the deal to give it precedence over imminent trade agreements such as Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and Trans-Pacific Partnership, which are threatening to give corporations the power to overturn environmental regulations that affect their profits.

The Paris agreement is a farce. Any discussion of carbon markets and carbon trading is a false solution

In the words of Dallas Goldtooth, ‘The Paris agreement is a farce. Any discussion of carbon markets and carbon trading is a false solution. The truest solution, which is backed up by science, is that we have to keep fossil fuels in the ground. We must see a moratorium on fossil fuel development, and we must see a just transition for all those communities that are dependent on fossil fuel economies. Whether we’re from the global north or the global south, we need help and support to create a future that has renewable energy for 100 percent of people on this planet.’

NI Final score: 0/4.

Scored in this way, the Paris Agreement is a disaster for the world’s most vulnerable people. The headline target of 1.5 degrees and eventual decarbonization look good on paper but there’s no sign that governments are willing to make them a reality yet. Paris could mark the beginning of the end of the fossil fuel industry, but much more needs to change before that becomes a reality.

So what next?

None of this comes as a surprise to climate justice campaigners. As Asad Rehman puts it: ‘When we came into these Paris talks we had very low expectations. These expectations have been exceeded in how low they are. It’s what happens on Monday that’s the most important thing. Do we return to our capitals, do we build a movement, do we make sure our countries are doing their fair share? Do we stop the dirty energy industry, do we invest in new climate jobs, do we invest in community-owned decentralized energy? And most importantly, do we stand in solidarity with the millions of people across the world who are struggling for climate justice?’

Dallas Goldtooth agrees:

‘The decision-makers of the world can’t make the changes that we want. It’s on us as people to make that change. And we’re already seeing the power of the people. Look at North America – the Keystone XL pipeline was taken down because of people organizing. It wasn’t the governments who made that choice, it was the ranchers and farmers, the Indigenous peoples on

the frontline in the heartland of America that made that choice, and the politicians adjusted accordingly.’

People shouldn’t be surprised that the deal is bad, Goldtooth says. ‘Industry has heavily influenced these negotiations. We have nation states who are dependent on a fossil fuel economy influencing these negotiations. Grassroots people who are advocating for the alternatives are not allowed in those negotiations. So we shouldn’t be surprised. Instead we are using this moment to reinvigorate our base, to continue forward demanding climate justice, and to show the world, show the countries, show the corporations what people can do when we unite for climate justice.’

See more at: <http://newint.org/features/web-exclusive/2015/12/12/cop21-paris-deal-epi-fail-on-planetary-scale/#sthash.QKYIkcmy.dpuf>

Talk Nation Radio: David Swanson interviews Chris Williams on How Paris Set the Earth on a Course to Burn

December 22, 2015

<https://soundcloud.com/davidenswanson/talk-nation-radio-chris-williams-on-how-paris-set-the-earth-on-a-course-to-burn>

Chris Williams wrote the book *Ecology & Socialism: Solutions to Capitalist Ecological Crisis*. He is a long-time environmental activist with a scientific background and has authored numerous articles on the science and politics of climate change and energy for various media outlets. He's a writer-in-residence at *Truthout*, and an educator and professor at Pace University in the dept of chemical and physical sciences. He discusses climate change after Paris.

Two Views of the Paris Climate Conference Outcome

Raymond Cl  men  on, PhD
Global Studies Department / Department of Sociology
University of California, Santa Barbara

December 12, 2015

For those interested, here is my take on the Paris climate agreement just adopted. I have followed the process for more than 25 years. As a government official with the Swiss environment ministry, I helped organize the first governmental climate conference in Geneva in 1990 and negotiate the Framework Convention on Climate Change at Rio in 1992. As an observer, I attended a number of the later COPs including in 2009 in Copenhagen and just spent the last week inside the conference center at the Paris COP21. My assessment is shaped by a more historic and contextual analysis of the Paris outcome and international environmental negotiations. One can look at Paris in two ways. One can be either very pessimistic or somewhat optimistic and there are reasons for both viewpoints. In my final analysis I choose to be more optimistic. History tells us that momentum can lead to quicker changes than anyone could have seen coming. Hopefully the adoption of the Paris agreement is this departing point.

The pessimistic assessment

The Paris conference has officially buried the Kyoto Process and abandoned the idea of an international equitable burden-sharing arrangement to control and reduce carbon emissions based on multilaterally negotiated, legally binding emissions targets and time tables for each country. By that it has effectively sidelined equity and environmental justice considerations. It has let the developed world largely off the hook for its massive historic contribution of carbon that has already accumulated in the earth's atmosphere while putting a large burden on developing countries to control their future emissions.

The Paris agreement is built entirely around voluntary country pledges that are far from adding up to what is necessary, are as different as the countries they are coming from and largely lack real ambition while succumbing to short-term economic growth priorities and fossil fuel industry interests. The Paris agreement does not limit warming to 2 degree Celsius, even less 1.5 degree, the guardrail scientists believe past which dangerous global warming would make parts of the world uninhabitable and wreak havoc with world food production. Although polar ice sheets would only melt over hundreds of years, once the process is triggered it is unstoppable leading to dramatic sea level raise (approximately 30 meters from Greenland, 50 meters from Antarctica if the ice would completely disintegrate) for future generations to deal with.

The Paris climate talks were a carefully managed event designed to make governments look good after the failure of the Copenhagen conference to reach a comprehensive agreement in 2009. Since binding national commitments were not an element of an agreement, negotiations focused instead on less divisive objectives. The language in the Paris agreement on most issues spells out general global aspirational objectives that ultimately have little direct legal implications for any particular country. The Copenhagen conference in 2009 failed for a variety

of reasons, but also because its objective still was to lock in binding emissions targets and timetables and therefore was much more ambitious than the Paris conference. The negotiating process launched in Durban in 2011 had learned the lessons from Copenhagen and successfully lowered expectations long before the Paris conference began.

The Paris outcome is a huge success for the United States which managed to present itself as a new climate policy leader. It got China to agree to a bilateral climate agreement in November 2014 as a precursor to the Paris conference and in Paris became part of a loose “high ambitions’ group” that included small island states calling for recognizing 1.5 degrees as the point at which warming must be stopped and for strong reporting guidelines. All this played well to a largely uncritical press and receptive European audience willing to give the Obama administration credit for his relatively ambitious domestic climate policy agenda of late, which however is a far cry from what is needed to make the US a credible leader of emissions reductions. The US has managed to push the historic equity issues into the background by focusing on future emissions, overall global targets, and common monitoring and reporting guidelines targeting developing countries. The US - and other developed countries - have on the other hand fallen far short of providing the very limited financial support already pledge in Copenhagen in 2009 for mitigation and adaptation in developing countries. And they have refused to substantially revisit their financial support pledges. US contributions to climate financing for example are largely a relabeling of existing official development assistance and counts private sector financings as well. Neither have developed countries accepted liability for loss and damage caused by climate change in developing countries.

The US has achieved its basic negotiating goals - focusing on broad global objectives and reporting guidelines for developing countries - partially by playing China against India. India maintains that rich countries must pay back their historic debt they have drawn from the earth’s carbon budget, an argument China has increasing difficulties to maintain. India, with far lower per capita emissions than China (less than 1 ton compared to close to 5 tons for China, US by comparison is at 20 tons with EU countries around 8 to 10), has been one of the most vocal and largest advocate of maintaining a strict differentiation between developed and developing country responsibilities, which the US has worked hard to erase (common but differentiated responsibilities, according to the Framework Convention). It makes little sense for India, which shares very little blame for historic emissions, to accept an ambitious global mitigation objective without a substantial binding commitment by the US. It makes even less sense for most of the other poor developing countries which however have been bought into the agreement with lofty global objectives (mention of 1.5 degrees), some financial support and the sobering prospect that this would be the best deal possible. There is no plan B was a commonly heard expression. To have the international press chide India as the obstacle to a successful agreement (as the New York Times and others did) shows the uncritical adoption of key US talking points by the press and is not only hypocritical but ignores the history of the process and the basic understanding of the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The US could also build on the strong desire by France and an internally split European Union to adopt any deal possible. EU negotiators were much less visible and proactive than in Copenhagen, although they supported the high ambition agenda by least developed countries - with the exception of the a substantial increase in financial commitments. But the Europeans

needed a deal - any deal - to continue to push their own relatively ambitious domestic energy and climate policy objectives against their own industry opposition.

To appreciate where we are today, it is necessary to recall some of the history and the two decade-long obstructionism of the United States. From the late 1980s on, it was the European Union that pushed for binding emission targets and timetables, with the US firmly rejecting such targets when the 1992 Framework convention was adopted. In 1997, the Clinton administration ultimately agreed to the Kyoto Protocol, which included such targets and time tables for developed countries. Kyoto built on the common but differentiated responsibilities of developed and developing countries and recognized the need for developed countries to take the first steps to reduce their emissions before the developing countries would be asked to do so. This is the basic equity consideration that now has been largely dropped. The effort to get the US on board the Kyoto agreement came at a price: the EU had to agree to the principle of emissions trading, i.e. to the idea that countries would be able to purchase emission rights from other countries or get credits by financing projects in developing countries that reduce emissions. This was the ultimate neo-liberal market concession to the climate process, an instrument advocated by many mainstream economists, and one that never worked as it was supposed to (as the experience with the European emissions trading system introduced in 2005 has proven). The simple alternative of course would have been a carbon tax, which industry at the time fought tooth and nail, which fortunately - 20 years later - is making a comeback again at least as a policy idea.

The US stepped away from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001 and thereby doomed the idea of building an equitable carbon emissions burden sharing arrangement into the future. Australia, Canada, Japan eventually have stepped away from the Kyoto Protocol as well following the US lead, after conservative governments supported by the fossil fuel industries were elected. The US's key argument of course is valid: nothing developed countries do will matter if the large developing countries do not commit themselves to reigning in their rapidly growing future emissions. But this understanding which the Europeans and other share, could have been accommodated easily in a second phase of a Kyoto-type framework, AFTER developed countries have shown their leadership. Obviously, the US, for domestic political reasons never was in a position to accept such an approach and therefore instead advocated in favor of an all embracing global agreement that would also include developing countries, particularly China and India. The abandonment of binding and comparable emission targets for developed countries is a critical weakening of an international climate regime, because it has lowered the pressure on developed countries. In spirit if perhaps not strictly legally, it violates the UN Framework Convention.

The numbers are pretty scary: current voluntary pledges (the intended nationally determined contributions, INDCs) - if fully implemented - will still lead to close to a 3 °C above preindustrial levels warming (2.7 according to UNEP but there is a lot of uncertainty in these figures). New analytical tools like the carbon budget approach and UNEP's emissions gap 2015 report draw a pessimistic picture of the ability that countries can ramp up their commitments quickly enough to get on track. The world continues to lock in high emission fossil fuel infrastructure at a rapid rate and with every year it will be more costly and difficult to reverse this. UNEP says that the carbon budget until 2100 (1000 Gigatons) will be used up by 2030 at current emission rates. To have a 50 per cent chance of keeping global warming below 1.5 °C

above preindustrial levels, global greenhouse gas emissions would have to fall from an expected 56 billion tonnes of CO₂ emissions in 2020 to just eight by 2050! It needs to be zero global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions by 2060 for 1.5 °C or by 2080 to 2090 for 2 °C. Meanwhile, the world still spends close to \$500 billion in fossil fuel subsidies each year but only about 70 billion a year for helping developing countries lower their emissions.

In substantive terms, the Paris agreement itself DOES NOT provide the blueprint for the kind of energy transition that is necessary for coming in at about 2 degree, even less the 1.5 degree now referenced in the agreement and celebrated by many as a breakthrough. It does not fundamentally redirect global economic activities towards a low carbon future, it entirely leaves out the role that globalization and trade liberalization plays in obstructing a rapid energy transition to a zero-carbon emission future, and it leaves poor countries with little support to adapt to a warming world. There was no talk about questioning the basic growth-paradigm nor to really rethinking the worlds' energy economy. Trade liberalization for example continues to foster coal exports even by countries that themselves are moving away from coal, such as from the US and Australia.

The more optimistic assessment

A more hopeful assessment of the Paris climate conference is possible when considering the long history of climate negotiations and the momentum the process leading up to the conference has generated. Perhaps most significantly, as many civil society organizations have praised, the agreement aims to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above preindustrial levels. The new 1.5 °C benchmark seems to be quickly replacing the original 2 °C target that has so far served as the official reference point for countries climate actions. The normative implication of this “guardrail” number moving forward is important as ultimately INDCs, financial support and domestic policy implementation measures would need to fall in line with this more ambitious target.

One has to accept that negotiating fair and equitable binding emission reduction targets for each country would require agreement on some common methodology which has remained elusive and therefore appears literally impossible to accomplish. The domestic political constellations in the US, India, China and many other countries do not support such top-down internationally determined commitments which would require these countries to move away from long-held hardline core negotiating positions. As a result, a bottom-up approach based on each country's voluntary pledge seems the only way forward.

Many commentators celebrate the fact that 180 plus countries have now submitted their nationally determined pledges to take action to control emissions. Although these pledges are voluntary and not multilaterally negotiated outcomes - never before in 25 years of climate diplomacy has there been this kind of commitment from so many countries. These plans reflect unprecedented national level processes involving a wider range of actors and legislative and executive action than ever before. Each country's INDC can now be scrutinized by domestic and international actors and the Paris agreement spells out concrete steps by which countries should report on their emissions and policy steps, which will be reviewed every 5 years. This provides some transparency in that countries can be held accountable to fulfill their own pledges. (See the

UNFCCC's own assessment and WRI's critical examination of the G20's INDCs). However, there is no compliance mechanism for non-fulfillment of their pledges, except for calling out the laggard country.

A more positive assessment of the role that the United States has been playing than elaborated before recognizes the determined efforts of the Obama administration to take concrete domestic emission reduction steps despite a US Congress hostile to any kind of climate action at home and even less to a UN-sponsored deal. The US delegation has tried hard to help build a cooperative spirit among countries with the limited credibility it has had available, concluding a significant bilateral climate agreement with China in November 2014, which spelled out the INDCs of these two largest emitters. A global deal on the other hand will critically strengthen the administration's hand at home to pursue its climate policy which is being challenged at every step of the way. Claiming US leadership in the global climate deal further plays into the same objective to spur private sector initiatives, and public and civil society support at home. It might even help improve chances of pro-climate legislators being elected to Congress in 2016.

Civil society activism has been as vocal and well organized on the issue as at no time before. This will keep the pressure on governments and sends critical signals to the private sector to embark on the great energy transition and to move out of fossil fuels. The Paris agreement helps their cause as well because it sends a positive signal to millions of young activists around the world that they are being heard. The fossil fuel divestment campaign has gained significant momentum in many countries, with a number of large institutional investors having declared their intention to fully divest from any fossil fuel investments. Although all this in my opinion could have come 10 even 20 years ago, the private sector move away from fossil fuel may finally be reaching a critical mass as alternative technologies have become economically competitive.

Momentum going out of the Paris process will however remain absolutely critical for scaling up ambitions around the world. There are huge hurdles to overcome in most countries to make INDCs more ambitious without delay and given global economic imperatives it is hard to see how any country will have much incentive to embark on this without some commensurate action by other key countries. Ultimately the world's carbon budget will need to be equitably shared in some ways. It is hard to see how voluntary pledges can solve this in the long run.

A final note on international conference diplomacy and lofty international agreements: they can only go as far as the processes and decisions leading up to the events will allow. The best that can be hoped for is that existing momentum can be reinforced and the ground can be prepared for the next round of difficult decisions that will have to be taken domestically and internationally.

I might as well end by quoting Bill McKibben, co-founder of the climate activist group 350.org and eminent US environmental leader who assesses the importance of the Paris outcome as follows: "This didn't save the planet but it may have saved the chance of saving the planet."

Grand promises of Paris climate deal undermined by squalid retrenchments

George Monbiot

Until governments undertake to keep fossil fuels in the ground, they will continue to undermine agreement they have just made

Saturday 12 December 2015

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/georgemonbiot/2015/dec/12/paris-climate-deal-governments-fossil-fuels>

By comparison to what it could have been, it's a miracle. By comparison to what it should have been, it's a disaster.

Inside the narrow frame within which the talks have taken place, the draft agreement at the UN climate talks in Paris is a great success. The relief and self-congratulation with which the final text was greeted, acknowledges the [failure at Copenhagen six years ago](#), where the negotiations ran wildly over time before collapsing. The Paris agreement is still awaiting formal adoption, but its aspirational limit of 1.5C of global warming, after the rejection of this demand for so many years, can be seen within this frame as a resounding victory. In this respect and others, the final text is stronger than most people anticipated.

Paris climate talks: governments adopt historic deal – as it happened

Live coverage from COP21 in Paris, as nearly 200 governments prepare to officially adopt a climate change deal on how to cut carbon emissions post-2020

[Read more](#)

Outside the frame it looks like something else. I doubt any of the negotiators believe that there will be no more than 1.5C of global warming as a result of these talks. As the preamble to the agreement acknowledges, even 2C, in view of the weak promises governments brought to Paris, is wildly ambitious. Though negotiated by some nations in good faith, the real outcomes are likely to commit us to levels of climate breakdown that will be dangerous to all and lethal to some. Our governments talk of not burdening future generations with debt. But they have just agreed to burden our successors with a far more dangerous legacy: the carbon dioxide produced by the continued burning of fossil fuels, and the long-running impacts this will exert on the global climate.

With 2C of warming, large parts of the world's surface will become less habitable. The people of these regions are likely to face wilder extremes: worse droughts in some places, worse floods in others, greater storms and, potentially, grave impacts on food supply. Islands and coastal districts in many parts of the world are in danger of disappearing beneath the waves.

A combination of [acidifying seas](#), [coral death](#) and [Arctic melting](#) means that entire marine food chains could collapse. On land, rainforests may retreat, rivers fail and deserts spread. Mass extinction is likely to be the hallmark of our era. This is what success, as defined by the cheering delegates, will look like.

And failure, even on their terms? Well that is plausible too. While earlier drafts specified dates and percentages, the final text aims only to “reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible”. Which could mean anything and nothing.

In fairness, the failure does not belong to the Paris talks, but to the whole process. A maximum of 1.5C, now an aspirational and unlikely target, was eminently achievable when the first UN climate change conference took place in Berlin in 1995. Two decades of procrastination, caused by lobbying – overt, covert and often downright sinister – by the fossil fuel lobby, coupled with the reluctance of governments to explain to their electorates that short-term thinking has long-term costs, ensure that the window of opportunity is now three-quarters shut. The talks in Paris are the best there have ever been. And that is a terrible indictment.

Progressive as the outcome is by comparison to all that has gone before, it leaves us with an almost comically lopsided agreement. While negotiations on almost all other global hazards seek to address both ends of the problem, the UN climate process has focused entirely on the consumption of fossil fuels, while ignoring their production.

At COP21, the world agreed to increase emissions

Some countries will reduce emissions a little, but other countries will increase them a lot. You would never know this from UN and media reports.



Jonathan Neale

December 13, 2015

http://climateandcapitalism.com/2015/12/13/cop21-world-agrees-to-increase-emissions/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+climateandcapitalism%2FpEtD+%28Climate+and+Capitalism%29

The circus is over. The suits are leaving Paris. There have been millions of words written about the text. But one fact stands out. All the governments of the world have agreed to increase global greenhouse gas emissions every year between now and 2030. [1]

Why? Because all the countries have agreed to accept the promises of all the other countries. Among the top 20 countries for emissions, here are the countries that have promised to increase their emissions a lot by 2030: China, India, Russia, Korea, Mexico, Indonesia, South Africa, Turkey, Thailand, Kazakhstan, United Arab Emirates, Vietnam.

And here are the countries in the top 20 that have promised to cut their emissions by about 1% a year between now and 2030: USA, European Union, Japan, Canada, Brazil, Australia, and Argentina.

The countries that won't cut will increase a lot will increase a lot. The countries that will cut will not cut by much. You would never know this from the way the agreement has been reported by the UN or the media.

They phrase everything as a promise to cut emissions. But they phrase these promises in ways that lie. So some countries, like Korea and Mexico, promise to cut emissions compared to Business as Usual (BAU). Business as Usual means the current UN estimate of how much

emissions will increase if nothing is done. So a promise to cut only compared to Business as Usual is a promise to increase emissions.

Other countries, like India and China, promise to cut emissions in terms of carbon intensity. Carbon intensity is the amount of carbon in fossil fuels that is needed to produce the same amount of work. Carbon intensity has been going down in the United States for a hundred years. It is going down all over the world. This is because we learn to use coal, oil and gas more efficiently, just like we learn to use everything else in industry more productively. So a promise to cut carbon intensity is a promise to increase emissions.

Or they play tricks with time. Russia promises to cut emissions by 25% by 2030, compared with emissions in 1990. But the Russian economy collapsed after 1990, so the emissions were much higher in 1990 than they are even now. A promise to cut emissions compared to 1990 by 25% is a promise to increase emissions by 30% compared to this year. [2]

Then there are the rich countries which promise to cut emissions by a lot. But they always choose a comparison date to make them look good.

The US, for instance, promises to cut emissions in 2030 by 26% compared to 2005. But US emissions in 2014 were already 9% lower than in 2005. So really they are only promising to cut emissions by 15% in the next fifteen years.

The European Union promises to cut emissions by 40% compared to 1990. But EU emissions are already 20% less than they were in 1990. So this is a promise to cut emissions by 20% in the next 15 years.

So some countries will increase emissions a lot and some countries will cut them a little.

The regions of the world that will increase emissions already make two thirds of global emissions. The regions that will cut emissions a little make one third of global emissions. [3]

You do the math. They are lying. Emissions will rise every year. The leaders of the world have betrayed humanity. All we have on our side is seven billion people. Now we go home and mobilize.

Footnotes

[1] <http://www.c2es.org/indc-comparison>

[2] <http://climateactiontracker.org/countries/russianfederation.html>

[3] <http://cait.wri.org/historical>

Seven Wrinkles in the Paris Climate Deal

Will the landmark UN climate deal mark a turning point in the fight against climate change? The devil's in the details.

Oscar Reyes

December 14, 2015.

<http://fpif.org/seven-wrinkles-paris-climate-deal/>



(Photo: Takver / Flickr)

The headlines from the Paris climate talks tell an inspiring story. *Agence France-Presse* reported an outbreak of “[euphoria](#)” as the international climate accord was sealed. *Reuters* hailed a global “[turn from fossil fuels](#).” The *Guardian* headlined “a major leap for mankind.”

The celebratory tone is partly relief at the fact that 195 countries managed to agree to any kind of climate deal at all. It drew a stark contrast with the finger-pointing and despair that followed the failed 2009 talks in Copenhagen, which ended with only vague promises to action and left many climate activists pessimistic that negotiators would be able to bridge their differences.

This time, they were. They managed to seal a pact that sets a surprisingly ambitious target for limiting global warming, reflects the vast differences between countries in terms of their different historical and current responsibilities for causing climate change, and recognizes poorer countries' need to eradicate poverty even as they embark on a more sustainable development path.

Unfortunately, however, the main text of the agreement is long on rhetoric and short on action. Here are seven takeaways from a closer parsing of the deal.

1. **Its targets are ambitious, but they're unlikely to be met.**

An extraordinary claim at the heart of the [Paris Agreement](#) aims not only at “holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2° C above pre-industrial levels” — that’s 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit — but also promises “to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C,” or 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit.

In other words, the emission reduction goals from Paris are even more aggressive than the 2-degree baseline promoted by scientists as a means to prevent the worst impacts from climate change

Yet actually achieving the 1.5°C goal is more than even many climate campaigners have the audacity to hope for. It [would mean](#) the world would have to stop burning fossil fuels by 2030. Unfortunately, nothing in the Paris deal itself suggests that’s likely to happen. This is even acknowledged in the introductory blurb to the treaty itself, which says that “much greater emissions reduction efforts will be required” to meet even the 2-degree target.

The new agreement doesn’t take effect until 2020, the chance to achieve the 1.5-degree goal will have already gone, unless all of the world’s largest economies dramatically change course.

But big polluters like the United States have been dragging their feet for years — [watering down](#) and then abandoning the Kyoto Protocol (which was the last global climate deal), [scuppering progress](#) at the UN climate talks in Copenhagen six years ago, and then killing off hopes of new global targets in Durban in 2011. The European Union, which has [already met](#) its unambitious 2020 emissions reduction pledge, has been similarly obstructive, refusing to take on more cuts despite falling a long way short of its [fair share](#) of global efforts to limit climate change.

Going into Paris, 176 of the world’s 195 countries wrote down what they intended to do to address climate change. But even if all of these promises were met, the world would still be heading for [3 degrees or more](#) of global warming. That would take us into extremely dangerous territory, with rising seas inundating coastal cities and setting off some chain reactions (called “tipping points”) that could fundamentally alter our ability to live on large parts of the planet.

Leaving Paris, that’s still the case.

2. **There are no legally binding targets to cut climate pollution.**

There's a big legal devil in the details that made the Paris Agreement possible.

While the now defunct Kyoto Protocol set binding targets for rich countries related to their responsibility for causing climate change (admittedly, with some considerable loopholes), the new deal takes an "anything goes" approach. Countries are free to promise whatever they want, and there's *no penalty* if they break these promises.

All a country needs to do to meet its obligations under the Paris Agreement is to come back in 2023 (and every 5 years after that) and say they'll do a little more. That leaves a risk that if some countries clearly aren't pulling their weight, others might take it as an excuse to call a halt on their own efforts.

A number of rich countries have a history here: The United States, Canada, and Australia all missed their targets under the Kyoto Protocol, which makes their claim to be "[high ambition](#)" champions this time around ring particularly hollow.

James Hansen, a former NASA scientist dubbed the "father of climate change awareness," is [fairly blunt](#) about what this means in practice:

It's just bullshit for them to say: "We'll have a 2C warming target and then try to do a little better every five years." It's just worthless words. There is no action, just promises. As long as fossil fuels appear to be the cheapest fuels out there, they will be continued to be burned.

3. No new money is promised to address climate change in developing countries.

The 1992 global treaty that gave birth to the Paris Agreement this year gets one thing straight: [developed countries](#) should give "new and additional financial resources" to developing countries to cover the costs of addressing climate change.

This "climate finance" isn't aid or charity. It's better thought of as a form of debt.

Imagine it this way: You hosted a party in a friend's house, things got out of hand, and now you're paying for the clean up. There are even some things that will never work the same way again, so you'd better pay a bit more to patch those together or replace them, too.

Climate finance means paying developing countries to move beyond the reliance on fossil fuels that made the U.S. and other developed countries rich. It also means paying for vulnerable communities and ecosystems to adapt to the climate change that's already happening.

Yet rich countries have repeatedly failed to provide climate finance on anything close to the scale needed. Back in Copenhagen, they [promised](#) to "mobilize" \$100 billion per year of climate finance by 2020. Using some highly [creative accounting](#), they now [say](#) they're already providing \$62 billion, and that [new promises](#) made in Paris could take that total to \$94 billion per year.

In reality, only about \$2 billion is actually **delivered annually** in dedicated climate funds, and a **maximum \$20 billion** per year of climate finance is flowing if a broader definition is used. The **estimated need**, according to the Climate Fairshares tool, is upwards of \$400 billion annually.

The Paris Agreement offers no new numbers. Instead, it introduces language about making the fundraising a “global effort,” which sounds innocuous but is intended to chip away at the liability of developed countries. During the talks, rich countries snubbed efforts led by African negotiators to set a better target for adaptation funding over the next five years.

And while rich countries now “intend to continue” efforts to provide \$100 billion in climate finance a year until 2025, the wording of the deal is deliberately vague about their obligations after that. You don’t have to be a lawyer to see how weak that commitment is.

4. **Climate reparations are off limits.**

Unfortunately, the discussions of climate finance that did occur were limited from the outset. That’s because the U.S. categorically refused to consider any proposals for reparations for the damage rich countries’ emissions have already caused.

“The idea of even discussing loss and damage now or in the future was off limits. The Americans told us it would kill” the agreement, **said Leisha Beardmore**, chief negotiator for the Seychelles.

Other developing country diplomats reported the same message. Floods, typhoons, or droughts costing you billions? Tough luck. Climate change melting the glaciers that provide you with water? Don’t look to the United States for help, or the other developed countries who were supporting the same position with less fanfare.

Washington’s negotiators shut down this discussion through a mix of bullying and bribery. The carrot was a promise that the U.S. would sign up to the 1.5-degree Celsius goal, or something approximating that — as long as it wasn’t binding, and as long as the U.S. didn’t have to take on its **fair share** of meeting that target. The stick was a threat to bring the whole show crashing down if compensation was mentioned.

The U.S. even sought to go further, proposing that the Paris Agreement should insure wealthy countries against any future claims for “liability or compensation” for the **loss and damage** caused by climate change. That phrase was kicked out of the final Paris treaty, although it remains in the accompanying guidance on how it will be implemented. That’s a devastating blow to poor and vulnerable countries already facing the worst impacts of climate change.

5. **It doesn’t tell oil, gas, or coal producers to leave fossil fuels in the ground.**

Avoiding runaway climate change means leaving **over 80 percent** of the world’s remaining fossil fuel reserves in the ground, according to climate scientists.

Earlier drafts of the Paris Agreement included options that reflect this, suggesting that countries should “decarbonize” over the course of the century. Even this languid approach to getting out of

fossil fuels is absent from the final text. A call to “reduce international support for high-emissions investments” was struck out too, at the behest of the big oil producers.

Instead of getting out of fossil fuels, the Paris Agreement aims only to achieve “a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century.” Loosely translated: We’ll fake it if we don’t make it.

“Removals by sinks” can mean protecting or even re-growing the world’s depleted forests, which capture carbon dioxide and convert it into oxygen. That would be a good thing. But the language hints at a variety of more damaging and outlandish ideas, too.

“Reforestation” is sometimes [so loosely defined](#) that it can mean replacing forests with plantations, or kicking indigenous peoples and forest communities off their land. “Sinking” carbon can also be a way of referring to Carbon Capture and Storage, an [unfeasibly expensive](#) (and [leaky](#)) scheme to bury carbon emissions that dirty industries invoke whenever they want to avoid cleaning up their act. Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage (BeCCS), the latest fad in carbon sinks, proposes that we burn biomass as an energy source and then bury the carbon released by the process deep in the ground. The science behind this is [contested](#), at best.

6. It opens the same carbon trading loopholes that undermined the last global climate deal.

The Paris Agreement is intended to replace the Kyoto Protocol, a planet-sized flop that established a target for reduced greenhouse gas emissions far below what science suggested was needed — and then set up a series of loopholes that allowed developed countries to avoid climate action.

It relied on a system called the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), a [carbon “offsetting”](#) scheme that allowed rich countries to buy “carbon credits” from poorer countries instead of reducing their own emissions. The credits were meant to represent a ton of carbon cuts, but were based on dubious accounting that meant polluting companies got paid for doing almost nothing, or even expanding harmful projects. The market for CDM credits [“essentially collapsed”](#) in 2012, and since then a ton of carbon has cost far less than a cup of coffee.

The idea of trading emissions hasn’t gone away. Though there’s no mention of carbon markets, the Paris Agreement explicitly allows countries to count emissions reductions made in other countries as part of their own domestic targets, referring to these by the euphemism “internationally transferred mitigation outcomes.”

It also creates a new mechanism to replace the CDM. To keep the [diplomatic silence](#) on the discredited carbon market system, this is referred to as “a mechanism to contribute to the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions and support sustainable development” (MCMGGESSD?).

It’s based on a [joint proposal](#) from the EU and Brazil, who clearly intend it to be a carbon trading scheme. But the length of the acronym and the obscurity of the language reflects the controversy

surrounding international carbon markets, with Bolivia and its allies in the ALBA group of Latin American countries raising particularly strong objections.

Nonetheless, a new carbon market mechanism won't get off the ground without a fight. A battle over the rules for creating one will likely take place at the next UN climate change conference in Marrakech — the same city that hosted the 2001 summit that [established the rules](#) for the CDM and the other UN carbon trading mechanisms.

7. Carbon pollution from international shipping and flights doesn't count.

[Carbon emissions](#) from international transportation already have as much climate impact as those from Germany or South Korea. And it's going to get worse: Emissions from international flights are on course to triple by 2050, and shipping emissions set to [quadruple](#).

But for some reason, that pollution doesn't count as greenhouse gas emissions, according to the Paris Agreement.

That's scandalous, but sadly predictable. A [similar hole](#) was worked into the Kyoto Protocol, which gave responsibility for emissions cuts in those sectors to the International Civil Aviation Organization and the International Maritime Organization, respectively. In the 18 years since Kyoto, those bodies have shown themselves incapable of taking meaningful action.

Oscar Reyes is an associate fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies.

COP21: in spite of the show, the glass is 80% empty



Illegal protest, Paris, Dec. 12, 2015. WeAreChange.org.

Daniel Tanuro, [International Viewpoint](#)

Dec 19 2015

<http://systemchangenotclimatechange.org/article/cop21-spite-show-glass-80-empty>

The COP21 Paris Climate Conference has, as expected, led to an agreement. It will come into effect from 2020 if it is ratified by 55 of the countries which are signatories to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and these 55 countries account for at least 55% of global emissions of greenhouse gases. In the light of the positions taken in Paris, this dual condition should not raise any difficulty (although the non-ratification of Kyoto by the United States shows that surprises are always possible).

“Well below 2°C”: how?

The agreement sets the objective of “holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change.”

In addition, the preamble to the agreement affirms its willingness to achieve these objectives while respecting the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, human rights, the right to health, the right to development, the rights of indigenous peoples, the rights of persons with disabilities and children, gender equality (by promoting the “empowerment” of women) as well as intergenerational solidarity, stressing the importance of a “just transition” for the world of work and taking into account the respective capabilities of countries.

One can of course only agree with these positions, but the text adopted by the 195 countries represented at the COP gives no guarantee that they will be effectively followed. In addition, and more importantly, it remains completely vague with respect to the deadlines for the climate goals to be achieved: it simply says that the “Parties aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, recognizing that peaking will take longer for developing country Parties, and to undertake rapid reductions thereafter in accordance with best available science, so as to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century.” However, the peak year, the annual rate of overall reductions of emissions after this peak and the precise time between 2050 and 2100 where the overall balance of emissions/removals is achieved condition the stabilization of warming at such or such a level.

“Reconciling the irreconcilable?”

Taking the floor before the plenary of participants, on December 12, 2015, French President François Hollande welcomed the fact that the conference had “reconciled what seemed irreconcilable” by adopting a document “both ambitious and realistic.” “The decisive agreement for the planet is now”, he concluded. Speaking before him as president of this COP, his foreign minister, Laurent Fabius, welcomed a result representing “the best possible balance.”

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change dates from 1992. It has led to a very insufficient sequel: the Kyoto Protocol. For some years the climate challenge has contributed more and more to undermining the legitimacy of capitalism and the credibility of its political managers. In the wake of the COP in Paris it is already clear that we are going to be faced with a very broad counter-offensive aimed at spreading the idea that the system, contrary to what has been said, is able to stem the disaster that it has created, and that the governments in its service are up to the challenge facing them.

Those who do not believe in the possibility of a green capitalism, who do not believe in particular in the possibility of saving the climate without calling into question the fundamental tendency of the system to growth, therefore have an interest in examining the Paris agreement from this angle: does the COP21 “reconcile the irreconcilable”? This article focuses primarily on this. We will return later on other aspects of the Agreement, such as adaptation, support for the countries of the South, and so on.

So, has Paris given the lie to those terrible grumpy pessimists and eco-socialists? The answer to this question is -at least - 80% “no”. Why 80%? Because, on the basis of the expertise of the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), we can say that only a fifth of the path to stay under 2°C of warming has been taken (and this only on paper!). In other words, it is not a case of the glass half full and half empty: the glass of COP21 is four-fifths empty, at least. Fundamentally, the climate catastrophe continues, the evidence that things deemed irreconcilable can be reconciled has not been presented. We will explain.

Between the Agreement and the INDCs

There are two elements in the negotiation: the agreement adopted in Paris and its preamble, on the one hand, and the projected “Climate Plans” that each country participating in the Conference has adopted and transmitted to the Secretariat of the UNFCCC in view of the COP, on the other hand. In the jargon of the negotiators, these projected climate plans are designated by the acronym INDC (for “intended nationally determined contributions”). The text adopted in Paris poses the objective of a warming lowered to 2°C, as close as possible to 1.5°C. But the INDCs - which relate to 2025 or 2030 - are far from achieving this objective: according to the estimates which have been made, their cumulative effect would be to lead us toward a catastrophic warming of approximately 3°C.

This contradiction between the declarations of intent of the Agreement and the reality of the climate plans of the countries which are signatories to the agreement is not a secret. The preamble to the agreement adopted in Paris, “(emphasizes) with a serious concern the urgent need to tackle the significant gap between the aggregate effect of the promises of mitigation of the Parties in terms of annual global emissions of greenhouse gases by 2020 (on the one hand), and the cumulated emission trajectories consistent with the objective of maintaining the increase of the average temperature of the globe at well below 2°C and to continue the effort to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C (on the other hand). “

This gap between the cumulative effect of the INDCs and the objective of 1.5 to 2°C adopted in Paris has been studied by the ad hoc working group established at the COP in Durban to decide on ways and means to enhance the level of ambition of the climate policy (Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action). On October 30, 2015, in the framework of the preparation of COP21, this working group submitted a detailed report to the Secretariat of the UNFCCC.

In this text, the sum of the INDC emissions at the deadlines in 2025 and 2030 is compared to the “business as usual” emissions, on the one hand, and, on the other to (variants of) the reduction trajectory for global emissions which should be followed, according to the IPCC, for having a 66% probability of keeping warming under 2°C “at least cost” (these trajectories constitute what the last IPCC report called the “least cost 2°C scenarios”).

The method of the authors of the study is simple: they take the “business as usual” emissions as the reference scenario (0% of the 2° objective) and the “least cost 2°C scenario” as the goal to achieve (100% of the 2° objective); this done, they express the sum of the emission reductions projected by the INDCs as a percentage of the 2° objective. Here is their conclusion: “in this

comparison, the INDCs are estimated to reduce the difference between “business as usual” emissions and the 2°C the scenarios by 27% in 2025 and 22% in 2030”. That is why we have said above that “the glass of COP21 is 80% empty”.

It is moreover not excluded that this figure of 80% is lower in reality. The INDCs should be subjected to a more detailed review, to check whether states have not inflated their figures in order to give an image of being good pupils. Cheating of this kind has already occurred several times in relation to the climate (we think for example of the way in which the member states of the EU have overestimated the emissions of their polluting industries, so that the latter receive free of charge a maximum of emission rights resold with profit). The fact that a good number of INDCs rely heavily on removals of CO₂ by forests, or on reductions relating to emissions, and relatively little on net reductions, encourages mistrust. But let us leave this aspect to the specialists and rather see how the Paris Agreement intends to bridge the gap between the INDCs and the objective of a warming maintained between 1.5 to 2°C.

Bridging the gap

In advance, I must confess that one point of the IPCC reports remains for me unexplained: whereas the diagnosis of the severity of climate change is increasingly worrying and the phenomenon is growing much more quickly than projected using the models, how is it that the peak of global greenhouse gas emissions to meet in order for there to be a 66% chance of remaining under the limit of 2°C has been deferred so significantly between the fourth and the fifth report? According to the fourth report, in order not to exceed the 2°C increase, it was necessary that global emissions peak no later than 2015; however, according to the fifth report, it would still be possible to remain under 2°C by starting to reduce global emissions only in 2020, in 2025, and even in 2030 – although at the price of increasingly significant difficulties. I suppose that the authors of the reports do not simply intend to maintain the flame of hope, and that there is a scientific explanation for this elision. But I don’t know.

In any case, let us assume that the peak of emissions compatible with 2°C or 1.5°C can indeed only occur in 2025 or in 2030, and go back to our question: how does the Paris agreement envisage bridging the gap between the INDCs and the objective of a warming “well below 2°C”? The answer is in the text adopted: by revising the INDCs every five years, with the aim of increasing the ambition. This revision will be based solely on the goodwill of the parties: the agreement is not legally binding and provides no penalty, so while the house burns down, a commitment as light as this is presented as a historic breakthrough.

One of the important issues here is that of timing: the Paris Agreement will enter into force in 2020, and the first revision will take place only in 2023. Remember that it took eight years to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, which concerned only a small number of parties and only implemented derisory emission reductions. To think that in ten years, whereas geopolitical tensions are growing, 195 countries will quickly agree on 80% of the path they must still take to save the climate, is in reality to play Russian roulette with the fate of hundreds of millions of human beings and with the ecosystems. COP21 does not invalidate the eco-socialist analysis, on the contrary it confirms it: the capitalist system, when it comes up against the ecological limits, can

only postpone the essence of the problem facing it, making it increasingly complex and dangerous.

Fossil fuels

In relation to the dangers, those who insist on believing that a miracle happened on December 12 at Le Bourget should still ask two more questions:

- How is it that the words or expressions “fossil fuels”, “industry”, “coal”, “oil”, “natural gas”, “car industry”, and others equally crucial to the topic which occupies us, do not appear at all in the Paris text? That the word “energy” is only used twice in the same sentence about Africa (plus in the name of the International Energy Agency)?
- Conversely, how is it that the words or expressions “energy transition”, “energy sobriety”, “recycling”, “re-use”, “common goods”, “localization” are never used? That the expression “renewable energy” is used only once, and only about the “developing” countries (“Africa in particular”)? That “biodiversity” is used only once? That the concept of “climate justice” appears only once, as “important for some” - precisely in this same grab-bag paragraph which mentions biodiversity and the importance (“for some” also!) of Mother Earth?

These gaps are not the fruit of chance but the mark of a specific project, a strategy of capitalist response to the climate challenge. The climate negationists seem to be losing the ear of the dominant class, and so much the better. For all that, it would be wrong to consider with relief that the Paris Agreement is a “strong signal”, “would turn the page on fossil fuels” or would mark the turning point toward a “just transition”, as some people have said. Those responsible for the disaster - the fossil fuel and credit sectors, broadly speaking - still hold tight to the rudder. A turning point but which?

Is Paris a turning point? Probably. There is probably awareness, at the highest level, of the major, incalculable risk that global warming represents for society, its cohesion and its economy if it is not confronted (the Encyclical of Pope Francis is a manifestation of this phenomenon). It is likely that some capitalist decision-makers do want more than using this COP as a smokescreen to hide the disaster that their political mismanagement has produced since the Earth Summit in 1992, that they will attempt to try to bridge the gap between the INDCs and what is needed to contain warming below 2°C. But it is very unlikely (and this is a euphemism) that they will succeed: their awareness has come very late, fossil fuel capital has its foot on the brake and the multi-polar world is torn by ferocious inter-imperialist rivalries, without clear leadership.

In addition, the objective is not everything, there is also the manner. The “least cost 2°C scenario” that inspires the strategists is the use not only of “soft energies” but also nuclear power, the combustion of fossil fuels with capture-sequestration of carbon, giant hydro-electricity and the combustion of biomass with “carbon recovery”. The fifth report of the IPCC is clear: without this, remaining below 2°C is really “not profitable”, costs explode, and profits are threatened! Sacrilege!

In the hit parade of these sorcerer's apprentice technologies, the combustion of biomass with carbon recovery ranks high (Bio-energy with carbon capture and sequestration, or BECCS). Its supporters argue that burning this biomass, by storing the CO₂ from this combustion and cultivating a new biomass to burn which will absorb CO₂ from the air, will not only reduce emissions but also reduce the stock of CO₂ accumulated in the atmosphere. The reasoning is faultless, but the tremendous consumption of biomass that this project involves can only destroy both the ecosystems and the human communities which live there. Compensation, biomass destruction and carbon storage are the heart of the Paris agreement. The text announces a broad "mechanism for sustainable development". On reading it, we understand that it will simply amplify to the maximum the "clean development mechanism" of the Kyoto Protocol, through which the European car companies, in particular, "offset" their emissions by investing in the South in "forest" projects on the backs of the indigenous peoples.

This is the "realistic ambition" described by Hollande. This is the true face of what some persist in hailing as the march toward a "green capitalism". Let us deal with reality. What is being put in place in the name of "sustainable development" is anti-ecological, anti-social, will not save the climate and will require ever more repression to break resistance and silence dissent. Decreed under the pretext of combating terrorism, the French state of emergency is in any account very revealing of certain hidden tendencies of this COP.

Daniel Tanuro, a certified agriculturalist and eco-socialist environmentalist, writes for "La gauche" (the monthly of the LCR-SAP, Belgian section of the Fourth International).

Inside the Paris Climate Agreement: Hope or Hype?

Brian Tokar

December 30, 2015

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/12/30/inside-the-paris-climate-agreement-hope-or-hype/>



It has become a predictable pattern at the annual UN climate conferences for participants to describe the outcome in widely divergent ways. This was first apparent after the high-profile Copenhagen conference in 2009, when a four-page non-agreement was praised by diplomats, but denounced by well-known critics as a “sham,” a “farce,” and a mere face-saver. UN insiders proclaimed the divisive 2013 Warsaw climate conference a success, even though global South delegates and most civil society observers had staged an angry walk-out a day prior to its scheduled conclusion.

So it was no surprise when this happened again on December 12th in Paris. Francois Hollande praised the Paris Agreement as “ambitious,” “binding,” and “universal.” Ban Ki-moon said it ushers in a “new era of global cooperation,” and UN climate convention executive secretary Christiana Figueres described it as “an agreement of solidarity with the most vulnerable.” Barack Obama waxed triumphant and proclaimed the outcome a testament to American leadership in diplomacy and technology.

Friends of the Earth International, on the other hand, immediately denounced the agreement as a “sham of a deal,” adding that the most vulnerable people around the world would “feel the worst impacts of our politicians’ failure to take tough enough action.” The renowned elder climate scientist James Hansen called it a “fraud,” adding, “It’s just bullshit for them to say: ‘We’ll have a 2C warming target and then try to do a little better every five years.’ It’s just worthless words.” British climatologist Kevin Anderson, among the most politically forthright of current scientists, described the agreement as “weaker than Copenhagen” and “not consistent with the latest

science.” More moderate in their criticisms were key figures such as Kumi Naidoo of Greenpeace International, who described the agreement as “one step on a long road . . . , but it is progress,” and 350.org’s Bill McKibben, who emphasized the agreement’s underlying challenge to the supremacy of the fossil fuel industry. “This didn’t save the planet,” McKibben wrote, “but it may have saved the chance of saving the planet,” in part by challenging the growing climate justice movement to keep moving forward.

Perhaps the most realistic assessment was posted by Guardian columnist George Monbiot on the day of the final deal. “By comparison to what it could have been, it’s a miracle,” he wrote. “By comparison to what it should have been, it’s a disaster.” It is clear that those who are praising the agreement and those who emphasize its shortcomings live in almost entirely different worlds.

One such world is dominated by the protocols of international diplomacy, the very real threat of obstruction by the Republican-controlled US Congress, and the logistical near-impossibility of getting representatives of 195 countries to agree to anything substantive. Consider China, whose overheated economy may be just beginning to slow down, and India, which is still growing rapidly and claims that continued economic expansion is needed to help its hundreds of millions of impoverished citizens. Saudi Arabia, according to long-time oil industry analyst Antonia Juhasz, was very active behind the scenes working to suppress even rhetorical limits on continued fossil fuel expansion. And the US delegation, led by John Kerry and climate envoy Todd Stern, was lobbying hard for a more “inclusive” agreement – superseding the historic responsibilities of industrialized nations – while struggling to minimize the financial cost to the richest countries. Recall that it was Stern who argued, with unsurpassed arrogance during the lead-up to the 2013 Warsaw conference, “It is unwarranted to assign blame to developed countries for emissions before the point at which people [sic] realized that those emissions caused harm to the climate system.”

The world the diplomats inhabit couldn’t be farther removed from the places where the impacts of continuing climate chaos are felt the most. In that world, people are working harder year by year to grow food and sustain their lives in the face of an increasingly unstable global climate. They struggle through seasons of devastating floods, droughts and wildfires that become more intense every year. The groundwater in numerous small island nations is increasingly contaminated by saltwater from rising seas and some Arctic communities are literally collapsing into the melting permafrost. The Philippines are now assaulted by unprecedented late-season typhoons year after year, and this year’s extreme El Niño current has heightened the impact of protracted droughts from northern Mexico to South Africa and the Middle East. Many of the million or so refugees that have swept into Europe from the Mideast’s expanding civil wars first saw their lives upended by those droughts, which killed as much as 85 percent of the livestock in parts of Syria, for example. While global warming brought balmy mid-December weather to the northern tier of North America, it has strengthened deadly tornadoes across the US South, flooded major cities in northern England, and threatens a pattern of perpetual extreme weather throughout the tropics and sub-tropics. In that world, the Paris Agreement’s rhetorical promise to “pursue efforts to limit the [global] temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels” is far too little, far too late.

Inside the Agreement

So what does the Paris Agreement actually offer to those facing an increasingly unstable future and what is it lacking? First, it's important to distinguish the agreement's various parts. The final Paris document consists of a twelve-page "Agreement" and a twenty-page "Adoption" text. The former outlines most of the substantive steps that were agreed to by the 195 countries represented in Paris and the latter describes just how they will be implemented.

Perhaps most widely cited is the Agreement's one-page preamble, which appears to embrace all the diverse concerns that various countries and civil society representatives brought to Paris. It preserves the original UN climate convention's focus on "common but differentiated responsibilities" for climate action among countries, as well as the "principle of equity" that was nearly lost in Warsaw and Lima. It acknowledges that some people are "particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change," as well as the "specific needs and special situations" of certain countries. The preamble links climate action to poverty eradication, invokes an end to hunger, and affirms the "imperatives of a just transition of the workforce." There is an acknowledgment of the rights of indigenous peoples, migrants, children and others, along with an appeal to "gender equality" and "intergenerational equity." The "integrity of all ecosystems" is "noted," along with the imperative of biodiversity protection, "recognized by some cultures as Mother Earth," and even "the importance for some of the concept of 'climate justice'," albeit safely embedded inside quotation marks. The preamble was carefully crafted to offer something to nearly everyone.

In contrast, the most specific outcomes of the Paris Agreement mainly reflect the process that went into it, i.e. the expectation that countries will continue to present voluntary "Nationally Determined Contributions" toward reducing climate-altering emissions. These quasi-pledges will be renewed periodically (every five years for now), with a loosely-stated expectation of increasing ambition over time. As previously reported in this space [insert link], the "intended contributions" submitted by some 187 countries prior to Paris represent a path toward 3.5 degrees Celsius (6.3 °F) average warming above pre-industrial levels by 2100, or perhaps 2.8 degrees C. if various countries' commitments are strengthened over time in line with current trends. Given the level of climate destabilization we have experienced at just below 1 degree of warming, this is indeed a recipe for global chaos, though the rhetorical nod to 1.5 degrees suggests that it has become unacceptable to nearly everyone – at least in principle.

Still, the means for limiting average warming to 1.5 or 2 degrees are largely aspirational, and this is reflected in the agreement's language throughout. Words like "clarity," "transparency," "integrity," "consistency," and "ambition" appear throughout the text, but there's very little to assure that these aspirations can be realized. UN staff are to create all manner of global forums, working groups and expert panels to move the discussions forward but, as was clear prior to Paris, the main focus is to instill a kind of moral obligation to drive diplomats and their governments to take further steps. Article 15 of the agreement proposes a "mechanism to facilitate implementation and promote compliance," but this takes the form of an internationally representative "expert-based" committee that is to be "transparent, non-adversarial and non-punitive." This compliance "mechanism" is described in three short sentences in the main Agreement and another couple of paragraphs in the Adoption document; as predicted, there's nothing to legally pressure intransigent countries or corporations to do much of anything.

Discussions in the lead-up to Paris did raise some hopes that the world might come to terms with the obligation to end the combustion of fossil fuels by mid-century at the latest. Studies by James Hansen and others suggest that time is of the essence, and that the actual pace of reducing carbon emissions could determine whether destabilizing climate chaos will continue to unfold for decades, or instead persist for many centuries into the future. It appears that an explicit goal of “decarbonization” was even part of the pre-Paris conversation for a time. Article 4 of the final agreement falls far short of that, however, stating that total emissions should peak “as soon as possible,” fall rapidly thereafter, and aim for a “balance” between sources and sinks of greenhouse gases sometime after 2050. Paragraph 17 of the Adoption document admits that current national “contributions” fall considerably short of a 2 degree goal, much less 1.5 degrees and a later paragraph “invites” the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to study the specific impacts of warming above 1.5 degrees. However the Paris Agreement’s emphasis on sources and sinks represents a substantive step back from the goal of decarbonization and echoes the IPCC’s 2014 policy report, which promoted highly speculative carbon capture technologies as a means to compensate for continued fossil fuel use. This approach also bolsters largely fraudulent carbon offset markets (see below) and could enable a host of outlandish geoengineering schemes that would only further destabilize the earth’s climate systems.

The hotly contested issue of how climate mitigations in the global South will be financed was postponed once again to next year’s planned conference in Morocco, with the document “strongly urging” developed countries to fulfill Obama and Hillary Clinton’s 2009 Copenhagen promise of \$100 billion per year in climate-related financing by 2020. By 2025, countries are to “set a new collective quantified goal from a floor of USD 100 billion per year,” but there’s a distinct lack of agreement about what actually counts as climate finance. Global South delegates insist that rich world is obligated to fund non-polluting energy developments in impoverished regions in order to help curtail their continued economic dependence on fossil fuels, but northern diplomats prefer to emphasize “public-private partnerships,” seek credit for existing aid and loan programs, and have proposed countless other loopholes. The documents are full of calls for new information-sharing platforms, but are virtually silent on how rich countries can ever be held to their implied financial commitments.

Even more disappointing was the language on “loss and damage,” i.e. how countries will be compensated for the continuing destruction of life-sustaining infrastructure in the face of accelerating warming. India’s Business Standard reported halfway through the Paris conference that the US had proposed to “recognize the importance of averting and minimizing loss and damage from climate change,” but only “on a cooperative [sic] basis that does not involve liability and compensation.” The final text (Article 8) is a bit more specific in describing those losses and damages, but paragraph 52 of the Adoption text states specifically that “Article 8 ... does not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation.”

A related financial uncertainty in the lead-up to Paris concerned the future of the carbon markets that were established under the now-mordant Kyoto Protocol to nominally help facilitate international emissions reductions. It is well-established by now that carbon markets like the European Trading System have proved virtually useless for reducing emissions, that “cap-and-trade” legislation failed in the US Congress despite an overload of corporate giveaways and loopholes, and that the international offset markets enshrined under Kyoto’s “Clean

Development Mechanism” (CDM) have been riddled with fraud and double-accounting. The value of international carbon credits is an all-time low – well below a dollar per ton of carbon emissions. And the Kyoto principle of “additionality” – the idea that credits to offset domestic emissions growth should support overseas projects that would not otherwise have happened – proved to be a farce. By some estimates, a considerable majority of projects funded by “Certified Emissions Reduction” credits under the CDM were already well underway.

An important warning about the future of the CDM arrived midway through Paris from Bolivian climate activist Pablo Solón. Solón was summarily removed as Bolivia’s chief climate negotiator after the Copenhagen and Cancún conferences, likely as punishment for his highly effective critiques of the US strategy to replace Kyoto’s mandated emissions cuts with the present system of voluntary “contributions.” On December 7th, Solón warned that a new “Mechanism to Support Sustainable Development” was hidden deep inside the conference text. That provision indeed appears in Article 6, albeit only to be used by countries “on a voluntary basis.” While the same article touts the need for unspecified “non-market approaches” in two places, there is a clear mandate to continue to use what are euphemistically referred to as “internationally transferred mitigation outcomes.” In practice this means that the earth’s remaining carbon sinks, including forests, will continue to be managed for the enhancement of carbon markets, and invoked to demonstrate paper compliance with emissions-reduction goals while the planet continues to burn.

A final hidden item in the Agreement is the omission of any steps to regulate rising pollution levels from international shipping and aviation. This was one of the key issues cited by climatologist Kevin Anderson when he compared the Paris outcome unfavorably with Copenhagen’s. While these emissions now amount to only 4.4 percent of the world’s total, according to the Wall Street Journal, they are projected to grow rapidly, even as other emissions sources are beginning to decline.

What’s Next?

On the Monday morning immediately following the Paris conference, the New York Times reported on page 1, “If nothing else, analysts and experts say, the accord is a signal to businesses and investors that the era of carbon reduction has arrived.” Indeed Peabody Energy (formerly Peabody Coal) reported a nearly 13 percent decline in its share value that week and a prominent solar stock index was up 4.5 percent. The Times predicted more bankruptcies in the coal sector and reminded readers of the public support for a carbon tax announced last spring by four leading European oil companies. Major coal-dependent utilities are diversifying into large solar projects and Ford is working to expand its fleet of electric cars. More than \$3 trillion in financial assets have been divested from fossil fuels in just a few years. The recent congressional deal on taxes and spending included an unanticipated five-year extension of tax credits for solar and wind projects, and Bloomberg News predicted that this could spur a doubling of current US capacity.

But energy markets are fickle and levels of renewable energy investment have fluctuated widely in recent years. The persistent decline in oil prices has helped shut down some of the most troubling new exploration efforts, such as in Alaska, but it also makes investments in renewables

appear less favorable. While the expansion of renewable energy promises a boom in “green jobs” and may help facilitate the “just transition” alluded to in the Paris text, large renewable energy projects can be highly resource- and capital-intensive. For example, to meet the ambitious renewable energy goals proposed by Mark Jacobson and his research group at Stanford University would require some 1.7 billion new energy installations worldwide, from modest rooftop systems to massive solar and wind farms. While Jacobson and his colleagues have demonstrated the feasibility of meeting all current energy needs by mid-century with genuinely renewable energy (no nuclear, no biomass, no new mega-hydro), some questions remain as to both the environmental and economic feasibility of an expansion of renewables on that scale.

Meanwhile, it appears that most new renewable capacity may still be adding to the total energy mix rather than replacing fossil fuels. A 2012 study suggested that just a quarter of non-fossil energy replaces fossil fuels, and only a tenth of non-fossil electricity; all the rest is simply adding more capacity to the system. When it comes to saving energy, corporations are still reluctant to commit significant capital; a study described in the New York Times a few years ago concluded that most companies insist on a two-year payback for investments aimed to increase the energy efficiency of their operations. A pre-Paris discussion paper from San Francisco-based Eco-Equity reported that direct fossil fuel subsidies – roughly \$775 billion worldwide in 2012 – equal the combined annual cost of a transition away from fossil fuels in developing countries plus the estimated need to fund adaptation, losses and damages from climate change. Clearly, it will require more than statements of ambitious climate goals to corral the overarching capitalist imperative to grow and expand, or even to rein in political pressures to keep diverting public funds to support fossil fuel corporations.

This, of course, is where the worldwide climate movement comes in. My earlier discussion highlighted the potential convergence of “Blockadia” and “Alternatiba” that public actions in the lead-up to Paris were designed to symbolize. Opposition to new fossil fuel infrastructure has spread throughout the world in recent years, as have an impressive array of practical, grassroots alternatives to business as usual. The 350.org network and its global allies are now planning a worldwide mobilization against the fossil fuel industry for May of 2016. It will be preceded by countless local and regional rallies, marches, and direct actions, culminating in a unified focus on the world’s most destructive sites of fossil fuel extraction. Perhaps if enough people are in the streets to say no to continued fossil fuel dependence and yes to community-centered alternatives, grassroots pressure can succeed where diplomacy continues to fall short.

Brian Tokar is the director of the [Institute for Social Ecology](#) and a lecturer in environmental studies at the University of Vermont. A newly revised and expanded edition of Brian Tokar’s [Toward Climate Justice](#), has just been issued by the New Compass Press.

What *Really* Happened at the Paris Climate Conference

Hilal Elver and Richard Falk

The global media hailed the Paris Climate Change Agreement as a major achievement of multilateral diplomacy under UN auspices. It is truly impressive that the 195 participating governments agreed on a framework to safeguard the planet against the multiple dangers of global warming, and even set ambitious global warming upper limits.

After the conference ended, pictures of world leaders congratulating one another were widely distributed. US President Obama told the peoples of the world that Paris was an ‘historical turning point’. It was a triumph of French diplomacy to establish this general mood of affirmation that contrasted so dramatically with the negative energy released after the conclusion of the Copenhagen conference in 2009, which was the last major effort to address the global challenge of climate change.

When we consider more carefully the actuality of what was agreed upon, we get a cloudier picture. Does the agreement really provide realistic hope that the international community is going to stop human caused (anthropogenic) climate change? Is every one of the 195 signatories at Paris truly committed to upholding the agreement? The answers to such questions varies depending on whom is giving the answers. Fossil fuel (oil and gas) and coal producer countries, and energy companies are not happy with the agreement because it threatens to eliminate them altogether by the end of the century. Clean energy companies (wind, solar) enthusiastically joined in the celebration, anticipating a major surge of demand for their products.

The agreement for the first time ever sets forth a 1.5 to 2 C degrees increase as the acceptable upper limit of global warming. This a principal reason why Paris seems such a brilliant success. However, before cheering too loudly we should sift through the fine print. If we add up the sum total of voluntary commitments made to reduce GHG emissions, the deeply disquieting reality is that even in the unlikely event that every country manages to keep their promises, the average earth temperature will still be at least 3C degrees hotter by the end of the century. With this in mind, the most plausible basis of skepticism about Paris is this gap between the predicted average temperature rise anticipated by a consensus among climate scientists and the results of full compliance with the Paris targets, which is itself an extravagantly optimistic expectation.

We find it strange that nowhere in the agreement does it explicitly say that ‘fossil fuels, or coal and oil are going to be phased out.’ Yet we all know that fossil fuels are the elephant in the room. Drafters of the Paris Agreement were crafty enough not to use provocative language, while still sending the right signals to energy investors to shift to renewables. We need to realize that developing countries will continue to rely on traditional energy resources for a long time, and take into account that the developed world has been relying on fossil fuels without restriction since the industrial revolution. It is not fair to insist that developing countries stop using fossil fuels because it is bad for the climate, without at least shouldering the financial burden of such a costly switch to clean energy. Ideally, this kind of transfer payment would be financed by a tax on transnational financial transactions, hedge fund profits, or international airline flights, but this

seems unlikely to happen so long as the neoliberal ideologues of global capital continue to pull most of the strings.

Of course, the problems associated with making such transfers effective and efficient should not be overlooked. With so many governments in the developing world corrupt or slanted toward benefitting a tiny elite, overcoming the practices of crony capitalism seems beyond international regulatory capabilities at present. This recognition is not meant to endorse even indirectly the World Bank criticisms of the economic behavior of countries in the South in order to shift the blame for poor economic performances and inequities away from neoliberalism.

The climate change regime has a unique structure to differentiate responsibilities among the parties. It supposedly takes account of the needs and situation of developing countries, and assesses the historic responsibility of developed countries to establish unequal obligations. CO₂ stays in the atmosphere for centuries and accumulates over time, making earlier emissions responsible for current levels of global warming, and as much a part of the buildup of greenhouse gasses as have the more recent emissions that are approaching or surpassing thresholds of precautionary safety. Despite this differentiation, the Paris Agreement is careful not to refer openly to the developed countries as having an ‘historical responsibility’ as this would be ‘a red flag’ that would likely induce the Republican-controlled United States Congress, and maybe other governmental actors as well, to repudiate the entire Paris arrangement.

Excluding any reference to historical responsibilities was definitely a psychological victory for developed countries, but whether it was a substantive victory also, only time will tell. These richer countries led by the U.S. also achieved some big victories that were substantive as well as symbolic. Aside from hiding this issue of differentiated accountability, they succeeded in weakening the ‘loss and damage’ principle, which was intended to make the developed countries financially responsible for overcoming the adverse impacts that developing countries are experiencing due to climate change. The concern here is with such hazards as extreme weather events that inflict a variety of devastating harms that are extremely expensive to address in their aftermath. Of similar concern is the recognition that, low-lying coastal countries and several small island states are acutely vulnerable, putting their economic viability and even their physical survival at grave risk.

Without doubt, the biggest, and most disturbing, diplomatic success at Paris for the developed countries was to make the agreement voluntary in all of its aspects. Even the underlying pledges (called ‘Intended Nationally Determined Contributions or INDCs in the agreements) of countries with respect to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) are not mandatory but voluntary. But the language is crafty, and rather misleading. Normally the word ‘commitment’ implies an obligatory undertaking, yet the Paris intent was definitely to avoid such an understanding. In this regard, the ‘commitments’ agreed to by INDCs are on closer inspection not commitments at all, but Orwellian double speak that seeks to close the gap between agreeing to do something and not being obliged to do what was agreed upon. There are many reasons why this feature of the Paris approach is most troublesome, and again it is mainly explained by the degree to which American leadership exerts a downward pressure on the negotiating process, and is largely a reflection of expectation that any truly obligatory arrangement would have to be submitted to the U.S. Senate for ratification, and almost certainly die there.

The better news is that the agreement will make all national commitments transparent and reviewable. After each interval of five years, starting in 2025, there will be occasion to review and revise earlier commitments. If a signatory fails to live up to its commitments it is natural to ask for an explanation and attach some consequences. The somewhat unnerving answer is ‘nothing at all’ – at least nothing is prescribed. At most, a process of ‘naming and shaming’ may be forthcoming that might tarnish the reputation of a state that inexcusably fails to meet its pledge. Of course, if such a non-complying state is the victim of extreme weather events or is in the midst of war or economic crisis, its behavior will not be criticized.

Prospects for compliance resemble in important respects the experience with human rights undertakings, and especially the long story of success and failure associated with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, perhaps the most influential ‘voluntary’ set of commitments ever made. When drafted and approved there was little expectation that the standards set would be met in practice, but what was created, and surprisingly effective, was a normative architecture that provided the human rights community in civil society with a powerful tool for the exertion of pressure that did build compliance incentives. It turned out that most governments, although not all, cared sufficiently about their international reputations that they would try to meet most of the demands of human rights NGOs.

We believe the Paris Agreement creates a similar tool that can be used to great advantage by civil society. At this point it is not clear whether a soft law approach will prove sufficient to curtail the menace of global warming. As with human rights the prospects for implementation will depend on whether NGOs and social activists exert sufficient pressure. We cannot be too hopeful about this. Climate activism varies greatly from country to country, and sometimes where it is needed most, it is either absent or weak, but there are also some positive developments. It is encouraging that the climate movement is becoming transnational, and will be able to highlight the failure of some governments to make INDCs at appropriate levels and to offer criticisms of those that fail to fulfill their pledges. If such activism is effective, it will also encourage governments and international institutions to be more vigilant with respect to implementation.

Settling for a voluntary framework was the biggest departure from the approach taken by the Kyoto Protocol, the previous climate change regime that had also been greeted with great fanfare when negotiated in 1997. In some respects the comparison is misleading. At Kyoto only developed countries were burdened, and the developing countries were not restricted at all. As a result the US and several other important countries gave this as their reason for not adhering to the emissions reduction agreement. As a result Kyoto was stillborn, only engaging 12% of global emissions, and making almost no impact on the dangerous continuing buildup of GHGs despite the favorable attention the agreement initially received.

From this point of view, the Paris Agreement is very different from Kyoto. As mentioned it makes all commitments voluntary, but the undertakings are applicable to all countries, rich or poor, developed or developing. Countries make their own promises depending on their national assessments of specific needs, capabilities, and conditions. It will be important to examine objectively whether some countries made irresponsibly low INDC pledges, as well as to monitor whether the promises made are being kept in good faith.

The Paris solution is reminiscent of the relationship between the UN and its predecessor organization, the League of Nations. The League had treated all countries as having an equal sovereign status, while the UN deferred to geopolitical realities by giving the five winners after World War II a right of veto and permanent membership in the Security Council. In effect, ‘a Faustian bargain’ in which universality of participation was achieved at the price of giving geopolitical actors the discretion of disobey the Charter whenever their interests so dictated and to limit respect for the authority of the UN on an essentially voluntary basis. Paris makes an equivalent tradeoff. In exchange for getting all states to participate, the content of what was agreed upon is seriously compromised, and prospects for compliance diminished.

This is not just a conceptual issue. The grossly different material circumstances of states, together with their great disparities in vulnerability and capacity to withstand climate change damages, makes it more problematic to achieve the collective good of climate stability. In this context, the free rider problem seems seriously to weaken incentives to comply, with countries standing to gain if others act conscientiously while they do less than is expected, either by making an unreasonably small INDC or cheating or falling short in various ways with respect to implementation.

The United States government, at least the White House, most Democrats, and the majority of citizens, are pleased about what emerged from Paris. After all the agreement reflects the American-led insistence on a voluntary approach that is long on rhetoric but short on commitment. The large American delegation provided influential leadership before and during the Paris negotiations, correcting the minutest word changes in the text up to the last minute, and determined to allow nothing to be done that might give the undertaking the appearance of being obligatory. The effort of President Obama and his negotiating team was driven by their priority to deprive the US Congress and the Republican Party of any reasonable arguments for attacking what was agreed upon in Paris. This meant distributing the economic and societal burdens of emissions reductions to all countries, whatever their situation, and keeping the agreed steps subject to national will, and hence voluntary.

Energy companies should also be reasonably content. Despite the basic approach taken in Paris, they avoided serious pressure, at least for now. For one thing, fossil fuels were not targeted despite their responsibility for the GHG buildup. For another, there is enough time until 2020 when the agreement will go into effect, plus the 5 years until an assessment of implementation is made, for bringing to market the petroleum resources that these companies own underground and in the meantime make their own heavy investments in clean energy technology. Taking the longer view, these companies have until the end of the century to become clean technology suppliers, benefitted in the process by government subsidies and a downward trend in production costs.

Transparency and monitoring the fulfillment of the emissions commitment are important provisions. China was somewhat reluctant to accept this oversight, but it went along due to Obama’s success in persuading the Chinese to cooperate and even show dual leadership before the Paris meeting even convened. China at the end seemed satisfied with the agreement and its own prominent role, and appeared to look forward to selling their cheap and efficient solar technology around the world. At the same time the severity of China’s domestic air pollution problem has reached a crisis stage level of emergency, making regulation of urban pollution an

urgent priority, and making the link to controlling emissions for the sake of climate change undeniable.

It is worth noticing that climate change negotiations often seemed to be more about finance, development, and energy policies than about preventing global warming and its attendant harms. The underlying tug of war concerns the distribution of benefits and burdens, which country will receive how much, and which will be made responsible for contributing a certain amount of funds. There is a competition among the developing countries as to which countries are more vulnerable and about what kind and amount of financial help is appropriate and should be provided. There are also voiceless communities that are essentially unrepresented, including 1 billion persons struggling with extreme poverty and hunger, and 350 million indigenous people that form nations that are mainly captive communities in states that alone participate in international lawmaking conferences. For those at the margins, the concern is less about the abstractions of money, than the concrete issues of daily subsistence and even survival. Human rights activists were aware of the plight of those excluded from real representation at Paris, and did manage to insinuate their social concerns in the agreement, but only in the Preamble rather than in the operational articles that comprise the text. In effect, mention in the Preamble gives civil society activism ‘a hook’ in the agreement to raise issues relating to climate justice, and as well establishes an ethical context that is relevant to any judicial interpretation of what was agreed upon.

The Paris Agreement is awkwardly silent about how it will fund its central undertaking to limit global warming at safe levels. There is an estimated need for \$16 trillion over the next 15 years if the average global increase in temperature is to be kept under 1.5 degrees centigrade. The developed world has so far agreed to mobilize \$100 billion per year by 2020 to cover both the costs of emission reductions and to defray the adaptation expenses of steps taken to adjust to rising temperatures. And even this pledge is voluntary, and judging from past experience, is likely to be grossly under fulfilled. From all that we know, a dangerous gap exists between what is needed and what is pledged.

After this closer scrutiny of the Paris outcome shouldn't we be asking ourselves ‘why celebrate’? Is it not more in keeping with the unmet challenge of climate change to be lamenting the weakness of the collective will of the international community to act prudently for the sake of its own future and with a responsible degree of empathy for future generations? Most of us may be too ready to accept the smiles of diplomats and their self-congratulatory enthusiasm. After all the French have a deserved reputation for knowing how to manage complex international issues, which implies a talent for failing to find real solutions without having to admit defeat. This seems to be what happened in Paris. The French conveners listened to what each government, large and small, had to say throughout the conference. But after days of seemingly endless talk, the Foreign Minister who chaired the proceedings made aggressive use of his gavel to hide the suppression of dissent, and then to pronounce in lofty rhetoric the acceptance of the agreement by all those representing the participating governments. With the coolness of retrospective eyes, the Paris Agreement failed to do what was needed, yet pretended that finally the challenge of climate change had been successfully met by the collective energies of multilateral diplomacy under UN auspices.

At the same time, there are some bright shining silver linings. The outcome in Paris did bear witness to a consensus among governments that strong collective action was needed to reduce carbon emissions in coming years if catastrophe is to be avoided. Beyond this, the very obvious shortcomings of the Paris agreement should encourage vigilant transnational activism, and hopefully give rise to a robust climate justice movement. To confine issues of human rights to the Preamble, and to exclude considerations of equity and food security altogether is to reinforce the misleading impression that addressing climate change effectively is only a matter of climate science and economics. In our view, without adding ethics to the policy equation, unacceptable climate suffering will accompany even good faith efforts to avoid further overheating of the planet. In this respect, the woeful saga of desperate waves of refugees perishing at sea or clinging for life to overcrowded boats is a telling metaphor of an inhumane world order.

Part Two

Judgments

Climate justice groups: the Great Escape of the developed world comes at the expense of real lives, real bodies in the South

December 12, 2015

<http://ldcnews.com/climate-just-groups-great-escape-developed-world-comes-expense-real-lives-real-bodies-south/>

Paris, 14 Dec: Climate Justice Groups give the real results:

The self-congratulation in this room is palpable. We've heard that this moment is "a turning point for humankind and a message of light." These are pretty words, meant to provide us only an escape from reality. The denial in this room is palpable. Nobody wants to hear the inconvenient truth, which is no longer climate change itself, but rather the fact that the Great Escape of the developed world comes at the expense of real lives, real bodies in the South.

The lack of ambition in this room is palpable.

You did not "achieve" anything. All you achieved was silencing the voices who stood in your path, and allowing power to run its course. You achieved business as usual.

We are on track for three degrees of warming, mere lip service to fair shares, no new or additional finance, and a crippling exclusion clause in the Loss & Damage mechanism. You have failed the People's test on climate.

But dear delegates and political leadership:

The indignation in this room is also palpable. Though the Agreement is weak, the Climate Justice movement is strong. Today, the climate justice movement came of age. We now know that our political leadership will not deliver what's needed, no matter how many lives are at stake. Onwards, we go united.

We will deliver an energy revolution that serves people and not corporations. We will build the justice that the Paris Agreement did not deliver. Somos semillas, and as you have buried us today, so we will grow to reclaim our power.

Too weak, too late, say climate justice campaigners

Climate Justice Network, Friends of the Earth, Global Justice Now, WWF, Carbon Market Watch, Climate News Network

December 12, 2015

<http://oneworld.org/2015/12/12/too-weak-too-late-says-climate-justice-campaigners/>

The Paris climate change agreement fails to address the needs of vulnerable peoples and the realities of climate science and is no advance on 1992, says climate justice activists.

Climate Justice Groups Respond To The Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement on climate change fails to address the needs of climate-vulnerable peoples and the realities of climate science and is no advance on 1992, says climate justice activists.

“Saving the principle of equity was the single biggest battle. Despite the intense political pressure which the United States put on the leaders of several developing countries, the principle of equity that will take us to climate justice was successfully defended. However, the devil is in the detail.” - **Chee Yoke Ling, Director, Third World Network**

“At the moment the draft Paris agreement still puts us on track for 3 degree world. The reviews are too weak and too late. The political number mentioned for finance has no bearing on the scale of need. It’s empty. The iceberg has struck, the ship is going down and the band is still playing to warm applause.” - **Asad Rehman, Friends of the Earth International**

“The Paris outcome points us towards a 1.5C temperature limit with a long term mitigation goal, but the pledges on the table deliver a 3C world. The gap between the current commitments and where we need to be can only be addressed by rich countries committing to increase action, as well as support for developing countries to do more than their fair share. Highest per-capita polluters such as Australia need to demonstrate the world really has changed, through committing to serious climate actions.” - **Kate Dooley, Doctoral researcher University of Melbourne**

“The US is a cruel hypocrite. Obama spoke about embracing the US’s role of creating the problem and the need to take responsibility. This is all talk and no action. They created a clause that excludes compensation and liability for the losses and damages brought on by climate chaos. This is a deliberate plan to make the rich richer and the poor poorer.” - **Lidy Nacpil, Asian People’s Movement on Debt and Development**

“The Paris Agreement will be known as the Polluters’ Great Escape since it weakens rules on the rich countries and puts the world on a pathway to 3C warming where, so far, only China appears to be doing its “fair share.” Kerry came to town with no confirmed funds for GCF, and an INDC at risk from a hostile U.S. Congress whose two top donors are Charles and David Koch, fossil fuel billionaires with two million acres in the Alberta tar sands and a significant financial stake in free pollution. Correcting this dangerous course requires the U.S. climate movement to go home and work with other constituencies to replace Koch’s pro-carbon candidates with real climate champions in the 2016 elections. Only then will ambition and equity have any hope.” - **Victor Menotti, International Forum on Globalization**

“The price tag for climate damages this century will be in the trillions, with much of that damage in poor and vulnerable countries. The US is responsible for much of that toll, but they don’t care and they won’t pay. With arm twisting of developing countries, they have language now protecting the richest and heaping devastating costs onto the poorest.” - **Doreen Stabinsky, Visiting Professor of Climate Change Leadership, Uppsala University, Sweden and Professor of Global Environmental Politics, College of the Atlantic, Maine, US**

“Close to 100% reductions are needed by developed countries already by 2030 for a reasonable chance of 2°, let alone 1,5° world. Paris had the opportunity to deliver radical pre-2020 action and did none of this. Developed countries refusal to commit to either cuts or necessary finance means we are sleepwalking into climate chaos.” - Niclas Hällström, What Next Forum

“While it may earn pats on the back for US negotiators from the big polluters pulling the strings, this agreement fails the people who need urgent action and may be a death sentence for many. To deliver solutions that work for people and our planet, we must insulate this process from the corrosive influence of big polluting industries.” - **Tamar Lawrence-Samuel, Corporate Accountability International**

“The deal fails to deliver the rules and tools to ensure that climate change doesn’t spiral out of control. Many in Paris seem to have forgotten the very people that this climate agreement was supposed to protect. The deal won’t deliver support to help farmers in developing countries whose crops are failing as a result to climate impacts. It does not ensure that food security is protected, and it could even drive farmers off their land, by allowing dubious climate offsetting strategies

Countries who are struggling to cope with climate impacts, who don’t have the money to undertake adaptation projects, and who certainly don’t have the means to invest in transforming to green economies, will be left behind by this agreement. There is no certainty about finance, there is no real means to ensure that loss and damage will be dealt with.

At least this moment has brought so many people together to understand that climate change is relevant to all our lives. In spite of this result in Paris, people all over the world must push their

governments to go beyond what they have agreed here.” - **Teresa Anderson, Policy Officer, ActionAid International**

“Close to 100% reductions are needed by developed countries already by 2030 for a reasonable chance of 2°, let alone 1.5° world. Paris had the opportunity to deliver radical pre-2020 action and did none of this. Developed countries refusal to commit to either cuts or necessary finance means we are sleepwalking into climate chaos.” - **Niclas Hällström, What Next Forum**

COP21: Draft final agreement - Friends of the Earth reaction

*** Friends of the Earth spokespeople available for interview in Paris and London ***

Commenting on the final climate deal agreed in Paris today, Friends of the Earth CEO Craig Bennett said:

“This climate deal falls far short of the soaring rhetoric from world leaders less than two weeks ago.

“An ambition to keep global temperature rises below 1.5 degrees is all very well, but we still don’t have an adequate global plan to make this a reality. This agreement leaves millions of people across the world under threat from climate-related floods, droughts and super-storms.

“However, this is still a historic moment. This summit clearly shows that fossil fuels have had their day – and that George Osborne’s outdated, backward energy policies must be reversed if he wants to be on the right side of history.

“Energy efficiency and renewable power should form the backbone of Britain’s future energy policy, yet ministers have spent the past seven months undermining investment in these crucial areas at every opportunity.

“The Prime Minister must also end Britain’s scandalous support for fossil fuels, including fracking. This nation is the only G7 country to be actively expanding fossil fuel subsidies.

“People power across the world has forced Governments to start taking this issue seriously – and people power will win the day.”

[Global Justice Now press release](#)

12 December 2015

Paris agreement: 1.5 degrees in the text, but 3 degrees in reality

Responding to the UN climate talks reaching a final agreement, Nick Dearden the director of Global Justice Now said:

“The Paris negotiators are caught up in a frenzy of self-congratulation about 1.5 degrees being included in the agreement, but the reality is that the reductions on the table are still locking us into 3 degrees of global warming. This will have catastrophic impacts on some of the most vulnerable countries and communities. And yet the deal seems to be shifting more responsibility on those countries who are least responsible for the problem, and the finance that has been agreed on is just a fraction of what is broadly agreed is necessary for those countries to cope with the impacts of climate catastrophe. The bullying and arm twisting of rich countries, combined with the pressure to agree to a deal at all costs, has ensured that the agreement will prevent poor countries from seeking redress for the devastating impacts of a crisis that has been thrust upon them.

“What has been inspiring in Paris is the multitude of action on climate being taken by a huge cross section of global civil society, from small farmers, to indigenous people, to trade unions, to direct action groups. As politicians fail to respond to the crisis, people power is stepping up to meet the challenge.”

WWF:

Governments Set Course for Ambitious Action on Climate Change; More Immediate Steps Needed

An ambitious plan emerged from Africa to develop renewable energy sources by 2020

PARIS, France, December 12, 2015/ – World governments finalized a global agreement today in Paris that lays a foundation for long-term efforts to fight climate change. More effort is needed to secure a path that would limit warming to 1.5C. This new agreement should be continuously strengthened and governments will need to go back home and deliver actions at all levels to close the emissions gap, resource the energy transition and protect the most vulnerable. The Paris talks also created a moment that produced announcements and commitments from governments, cities and business that signalled that the world is ready for a clean-energy transition.

Governments arrived in Paris on a wave of momentum with more than 180 countries bringing national pledges on climate action. This progress was bolstered by impassioned speeches from more than 150 heads of state and governments and unprecedented mobilisations around the world that included hundreds of thousands of citizens demanding action on climate change. After two weeks of negotiations, governments reached an agreement that represents some progress in the long-term. This must urgently be strengthened and complemented with accelerated action in the near-term if we are to have any hope of meeting the ultimate goal of limiting global warming well below 2C or 1.5C. Additionally, the finance for adaptation, loss and damage and scaled up emission reductions should be the first order of work after Paris.

While the Paris agreement would go into effect in 2020, science tells us that in order to meet the global goal of limiting warming to 1.5C or well below 2C, emissions must peak before 2020 and sharply decline thereafter. The current pledges will provide about half of what is needed, leaving a 12 to 16 gigatonne emissions gap.

Tasneem Essop, head of WWF delegation to the UN climate talks:

“The Paris agreement is an important milestone. We made progress here, but the job is not done. We must work back home to strengthen the national actions triggered by this agreement. We need to secure faster delivery of new cooperative efforts from governments, cities, businesses and citizens to make deeper emissions cuts, resource the energy transition in developing economies and protect the poor and most vulnerable. Countries must then come back next year with an aim to rapidly implement and strengthen the commitments made here.”

Samantha Smith, leader of WWF’s global climate and energy initiative:

“We are living in a historic moment. We are seeing the start of a global transition towards renewable energy. At the same time, we’re already witnessing irreversible impacts of climate change. The talks and surrounding commitments send a strong signal to everyone – the fossil fuel era is coming to an end. As climate impacts worsen around the world, we need seize on the current momentum and usher in a new era of cooperative action from all countries and all levels of society.”

Yolanda Kakabadse, president of WWF-International (www.WorldWildlife.org):

“The climate talks in Paris did more than produce an agreement – this moment has galvanized the global community toward large-scale collaborative action to deal with the climate problem. At the same time that a new climate deal was being agreed, more than 1,000 cities committed to 100 per cent renewable energy, an ambitious plan emerged from Africa to develop renewable energy sources by 2020, and India launched the International Solar Alliance, which includes more than 100 countries to simultaneously address energy access and climate change. These are exactly the kind of cooperative actions we need to quickly develop to complement the Paris agreement.”

The Paris agreement needed to be fair, ambitious and transformational. Results in these key areas for WWF were mixed:

Create a plan to close the ambition gap, including finance and other support to accelerate action now and beyond 2020

The agreement includes some of the elements of an ambition mechanism such as 5 year cycles, periodic global stock-takes for emission reduction actions, finance and adaptation, and global moments that create the opportunity for governments to enhance their actions. However, the ambition and urgency of delivering climate action is not strong enough and will essentially be dependent on governments to take fast and increased action, and non-

state actors, including cities, the private sector and citizens, to continue ambitious cooperative actions and to press governments to do more.

Deliver support to vulnerable countries to limit climate impacts and address unavoidable damage.

The inclusion of a Global Goal on Adaptation as well as separate and explicit recognition for Loss and Damage are important achievements in the agreement. This goes a long way in raising the profile and importance of addressing the protection of those vulnerable to climate change. The Agreement, however, does not go far enough in securing the support necessary for the protection of the poor and vulnerable.

Establish a clear long-term 2050 goal to move away from fossil fuels and to renewable energy and sustainable land use.

By including a long-term temperature goal of well below 2C of warming and a reference to a 1.5C goal, the agreement sends a strong signal that governments are committed to being in line with science. In addition the recognition of the emissions gap and the inclusion of a quantified 2030 gigatonne goal should serve as a basis for the revision of national pledges ahead of 2020.

The agreement sets 2018 as a critical global moment for countries to come back to the table and take stock of their current efforts in relation to this global goal and this should result in stronger and enhanced actions on emission reductions, finance and adaptation.

The Paris agreement made good progress by recognising, in a unique article, that all countries must act to halt deforestation and degradation and improve land management. The agreement also included a process that can provide guidance for land sector accounting. Adequate and predictable financial support for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation could have been stronger.

Paris forges momentum towards enduring climate action

Paris, 12 December 2015 – Today, at the UN climate talks in Paris a global deal where all countries have agreed to take action on climate change was adopted. Carbon Market Watch comments on the long-term goal, the ambition ratcheting mechanism, provisions for the use of markets, the establishment of a new mechanism, human rights provisions, bunker emissions, pre-2020 action and the impact of the Paris treaty on EU's climate policies.

The Paris Agreement marks a major step forward on climate action. While it is still early to absorb all the implications of the 31 pages of text, in mitigation, there have been seismic shifts, particularly:

- Aiming to limit global warming to 1.5C
- Working to increase ambition every five years
- Developing robust rules for the use of carbon markets
- Establishing a new mechanism that moves beyond offsetting
- Recognizing the need to protect human rights
- Increasing recognition of the importance of international aviation and shipping emissions
- Adding quality rules for the cancellation of carbon credits pre-2020
- Sending signals to strengthen the EU's climate policies

“The French Presidency achieved a miracle in presenting a detailed treaty acceptable to all Parties. At first reading, the new global climate treaty is surprisingly positive. We are still looking for the loopholes.” commented Eva Filzmoser, director at Carbon Market Watch.

Long term goal

Five years ago, Parties agreed that the global average temperature should be limited to 2 degrees celsius. In Paris, following a two-year review of science, the agreement is now “holding the increase in global average temperature to well below 2C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels”.

Dr. Katherine Watts, global climate policy advisor commented:

“It is great to see that Parties have embraced a spirit of solidarity with the most vulnerable in agreeing to try to limit warming to 1.5C. Countries will now have to make it happen, but this should be easier than ever as costs of clean technologies are falling rapidly and innovation creates new opportunities to decarbonize.”

Ambition ratcheting

The current INDCs only limit warming to around 3C, far higher than the newly-agreed 1.5C goal. It is therefore extremely important that countries enhance their current INDCs, and also look to far greater ambition in future.

Dr. Katherine Watts, global climate policy advisor commented:

“The Paris Agreement creates common moments when countries are expected to bring forward their contributions. This helps to make countries do their homework to decide what they can bring to the table. It is very gratifying to see that these will happen every 5 years, in line with political cycles to increase accountability for achieving the goals”.

Role of markets under the Paris agreement

The Paris agreement contains several provisions related to carbon pricing and markets. Countries can use and transfer “mitigation outcomes” to other countries, which opens the door to the linking of Emissions Trading Systems. The accounting rules for such transfers will be developed in the coming years and will include guidance on how to avoid the “hot air” trading of bogus pollution permits, including the avoidance of doubled-counted emission reductions. The agreement also obliges countries to promote environmental integrity and to pursue domestic climate measures to achieve their targets, thereby limiting the amount of international carbon credits that can be used.

Eva Filzmoser, director at Carbon Market Watch commented:

“Paris has enshrined the core principles for using carbon markets, though much work remains. The challenge is now to learn from past mistakes that led to billions of hot air credits when elaborating guidance for markets over the next years”.

New mechanism to contribute to mitigation and sustainable development

Similar to the establishment of the UN’s carbon offsetting mechanism Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) in Kyoto, the Paris climate deal established a new mechanism, entitled ‘mechanism to contribute to the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions and support sustainable development’. The new mechanism, considerably widens the scope, compared to the CDM, with a number of additional key elements that are yet to be defined in subsequent modalities and procedures:

- Moves beyond pure offsetting, including a net mitigation element
- Moves away from being project based to a mechanism including policies and measures, e.g. “mitigation activities”
- All countries, including developed and developing countries, can participate in the mechanism, meaning, they can generate or use carbon offsets
- Needs to ensure environmental integrity and transparency, including in governance, and apply robust accounting rules to avoid double counting

Eva Filzmoser, director at Carbon Market Watch commented:

“We very much welcome that the new market provisions include robust accounting rules and a shift of the new mechanism beyond pure offsetting. However, the new mechanism is very complex so a watchful eye will be required when developing the modalities and procedures in the course of the next few years.”

Human rights

Following calls from numerous countries that wanted to see human rights recognized in the operative part of the agreement, compromise was found with detailed preambular language that specifies that parties, when taking action to address climate change, have to respect, promote and consider respective human rights obligations. This also includes the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development,

as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity.

Juliane Voigt, human rights policy researcher commented:

“The new Paris agreement recognizes the interconnectivity of climate change and human rights and sets the foundation to make the new sustainable development mechanism accountable to human rights obligations.”

Emissions from international aviation

International aviation and shipping are not included in national emissions reduction targets. The Kyoto Protocol called on the International Civil Aviation Organization and International Maritime Organization to work on developed countries’ emissions, but progress has been intangible. The Paris agreement ideally would have called upon these sectors to reduce their emissions in line with the 1.5C goal and explicitly have brought them into the global stocktake.

Dr. Katherine Watts, global climate policy advisor commented:

“The world’s diminishing carbon budget requires immediate and ambitious action from the fast growing international aviation and shipping sectors. Together, they already account for 5% of global CO2 emissions and their other emissions cause even greater warming. The 1.5°C temperature goal places an obligation on all sectors to act, and aviation and shipping are no exceptions.”

Pre-2020 carbon credit cancellation

After a push for the cancellation of carbon credits to increase ambition pre-2020, Paris stipulated quality criteria for such an action.

Eva Filzmoser, director at Carbon Market Watch commented:

“Quality of cancelled carbon offsets is essential. The decision text is a good starting point but it needs to be clear that the vintage restrictions and accounting rules apply not only to CDM offset credits but all carbon credits alike”.

Impacts on the EU’s climate policies

The Paris agreement implements a 5-year review of the climate pledges guided by a global stocktake that assesses the collective progress towards achieving the long-term 1.5°C objective. Since the EU’s 2030 climate target is currently calibrated to limit global temperature rise to only 2°C, rather than 1.5°C, the EU will need to submit an updated target to the UNFCCC before 2020.

Femke de Jong, EU climate policy advisor:

“The momentum in Paris should be translated into higher ambition in Europe, as reductions far beyond the -40% target by the year 2030 are required to stay within the newly adopted 1.5C goal. Also the EU’s mitigation cycles must be synchronized to those agreed in the Paris climate agreement by adopting five-year periods.”

ENDS.

Climate News Network

COP21: “It is rare in any lifetime to have a chance to change the world”, declared France’s President François Hollande as the UN climate talks finally closed.

By Paul Brown

PARIS, 12 December, 2015 – When 196 nations agreed a new treaty aimed at preventing dangerous climate change, mass rejoicing broke out, and signs of celebration still fill the bleak halls and corridors where the deal was finally hammered out.

Politicians and some climate change campaigners believe it will alter the course of history, while others fear it may still be a case of “too little, too late”.

But after years of failures and wrangling it was a breakthrough to get a treaty on which the whole world agreed. It was a tense day, because until the last second some delegate, somewhere in the hall, could object, thus destroying the consensus the treaty needed in order to be accepted.

The treaty binds all nations to change fundamentally their economies and put protection of the environment, particularly reduction of their greenhouse gas emissions, at the forefront of policy. It will come into force on 1 April 2017, when enough countries have ratified it, and there will be a five-year review process to make further emissions cuts.

In the meantime countries are urged not to wait until 2020 to cut emissions, but to act now to avoid even deeper cuts later on.

These cuts are needed immediately because the agreement states that there is a “significant gap” between countries’ plans to reduce greenhouse gases and what is actually required to keep the world safe.

In fact the agreement acknowledges that the risks of global warming are far greater than previously understood, and it aims to keep temperatures “well below” the 2°C previously agreed and to pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C.

To achieve this lower level, there must no net increase in emissions in the second half of this century – effectively spelling the end for the coal industry, and major reductions in the use of all fossil fuels.

Historic moment

Lord Stern, president of the British Academy, who has repeatedly warned that climate

change is getting out of control, was delighted. He said: “This is a historic moment, not just for us and our world today, but for our children, our grandchildren and future generations. The Paris Agreement is a turning point in the world’s fight against unmanaged climate change, which threatens prosperity and wellbeing among both rich and poor countries.”

Laurent Fabius, the French foreign minister and president of the conference, who was in large part the architect of the agreement, having worked tirelessly for many months meeting world leaders, received a long standing ovation.

He had made an impassioned plea before the final text was issued for none of the delegates to object. “Our responsibility to history is immense”, he said. The agreement was not just about climate: it was about food security, public health, combatting poverty, the essential rights of people, and ultimately world peace.

Both Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary-general and François Hollande, the French president, also exhorted delegates to put aside their differences and agree the compromise text. A month after the Paris shootings, Hollande said, it was a chance to send a different message to the world: “12 December 2015 will be a date to go down in history as a major leap for mankind.”

He said the credibility of the international community was at stake and told delegates: “It is rare in any lifetime to have a chance to change the world. I ask you to grasp it.”

Whether the Paris agreement proves to be a turning point in human history will certainly take a few years to judge. The national climate plans of 186 countries logged in advance of the talks will not prevent the planet from dangerous overheating, but they are a massive change in policy and can be ramped up to cut emissions dramatically.

The agreement boosts energy efficiency and renewables like solar, wind, biomass and geothermal energy. Business representatives attending the conference said this was an important signal that investments in green technology would be a safe bet, and anyone with investments in coal, in particular, and other fossil fuels in general would be sensible to get their money out as quickly as possible.

For many countries attending the conference this was still not enough. Even if the 1.5°C target was reached, which scientists say is highly unlikely, a number of low-lying small island states in the Pacific and Caribbean will disappear off the map. Sea level rise is already threatening their existence and forcing some of their citizens to migrate.

Among the glaring omissions in the agreement is its failure to tackle the ever-growing emissions from shipping and aircraft. Shipping, which uses particularly dirty oil, could be improved with technology, but for aviation there is currently no reduction strategy or alternative fuel.

The conference simply accepted early on that there was no chance of reaching any

meaningful agreement on the subject, leaving it out altogether and placing the planet in great jeopardy of overheating as a result.

Helen Szoke, executive director, Oxfam, summed up for the doubters: “This deal offers a frayed life-line to the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people.

Only the vague promise of a new future climate funding target has been made, while the deal does not force countries to cut emissions fast enough to forestall a climate change catastrophe. This will only ramp up adaptation costs further in the future.”

And this was the summing-up from one leading British scientist, Professor Chris Rapley, of University College London: “Time will reveal the true nature of the COP21 deal. From epic turning point, to naive expression of hope, it is the real-world actions that follow which will decide.

“The transformation of the energy system, the economic system and politics that must now follow will be fought by the risk-blind and powerful forces of the status quo. The tide has turned, and they can either swim with it, or against it. But the current has surged.” – Climate News Network



Image by [Roberto Rizzato](#)

Réaction d'Attac France à l'Accord de Paris

samedi 12 décembre 2015, par [Maxime Combes](#)

<https://france.attac.org/se-mobiliser/changeons-systeme-pas-climat/article/reaction-d-attac-france-a-l-accord-de-paris>

Les États ne sont pas prêts à enclencher la « révolution climatique »
L'accord de Paris franchit les « lignes rouges » fixées par la société civile !



Dans des moments difficiles, on attend d'une conférence internationale qu'elle prenne des décisions courageuses et visionnaires. Ce n'est pas le cas à la COP 21, avec un accord très en dessous du changement de cap requis. **A l'État d'urgence climatique, l'accord de Paris oppose un bricolage constitué de la somme des égoïsmes nationaux, aussi bien en matière de financements que d'objectifs de réduction des émissions.** Il ne faut pas oublier l'essentiel : l'accord de Paris entérine un réchauffement climatique supérieur à 3°C, sans se doter des dispositifs pour revenir sur une trajectoire inférieure à 1,5°C ou même 2°C.

François Hollande souhaitait qu'on se souvienne de la COP 21 comme du moment déclenchant une « révolution climatique » [1]. Par bien des points, l'accord de Paris tranche en faveur des options les plus conservatrices et les moins ambitieuses qui étaient présentes dans le texte de négociation. L'accord de Paris valide une chose positive : les 195 États de la planète sont d'accord pour maintenir un cadre international et multilatéral – bien que très affaibli – de

« gouvernance du climat » : pour véritablement changer la donne, il devient urgent que les règles et principes d'organisation de l'économie mondiale et du commerce international soient soumises à l'objectif climatique.

Analyse du texte sur la base des adjectifs utilisés par Laurent Fabius et François Hollande

L'accord de Paris est-il ambitieux ?

- En entérinant des contributions nationales (INDCs) qui conduisent vers un réchauffement supérieur à 3°C, la COP 21 se montre incapable de désamorcer la bombe climatique.
- L'objectif d'1,5°C, qui n'est pas un objectif contraignant, ne saurait masquer l'absence d'engagements chiffrés de réduction d'émissions de GES pour les années à venir (art. 2) ;
- Aucune date n'est mentionnée pour le pic des émissions et, l'objectif de long-terme, attendu pour 2050, ne concerne que la seconde partie du siècle ; la formulation de l'objectif de long-terme ouvre la porte à l'utilisation massive de techniques inappropriées telles que le stockage et la séquestration du carbone, la compensation carbone et la géo ingénierie.

Sans feuille de route clairement établie, sans mention des points de passage en 2020 et 2050 fixés par le GIEC pour revenir sur une trajectoire inférieure à 2°C, l'accord de Paris met en danger le simple droit à vivre de nombreuses populations à travers la planète.

L'accord de Paris est-il doté des moyens suffisants ?

- Absence des 100 milliards comme plancher de financement dans l'accord de Paris, renvoyé dans le texte de décision de la COP 21 et donc soumis à de nouveaux arbitrages futurs, sans force contraignante et sans amélioration par rapport à Copenhague ;
- Manque de transparence et de prévisibilité des financements pour l'après 2020 : aucune mention des termes « nouveaux » et « additionnels » pour évoquer les financements futurs, en contradiction la Convention, pas plus que les termes « adéquats » et « prévisibles » ;
- Absence de rééquilibrage au profit de l'adaptation.

Après 25 ans de négociation, et alors qu'ils n'ont jamais débloqué les financements nécessaires, les pays riches historiquement responsables du réchauffement climatique tentent se dédouaner de leurs responsabilités !

L'accord de Paris fait-il oeuvre de « justice climatique » ?

- Suppression des références aux droits humains et des populations indigènes et à la transition juste dans les articles de l'accord de Paris, références renvoyées dans les préambules ;
- Très net affaiblissement du mécanisme de « Pertes et dommages » puisque tout ce qui concerne les responsabilités juridiques (« liabilities ») est retiré de cet l'accord.

L'affaiblissement du mécanisme de pertes et dommages sonne comme un aveu de culpabilité des pays responsables du dérèglement climatique.

L'accord de Paris est-il universel ?

- Les secteurs de l'aviation civile et du transport maritime, près de 10 % des émissions mondiales (= Allemagne + Corée du Sud) sont exemptés de tout objectif ;
- De nombreuses contributions des États (INDCs), notamment des pays les plus démunis, dépendent de financements additionnels pour mener à bien leur transition énergétique et politiques d'adaptation : ces financements ne sont pas là et pas garantis pour le futur.

L'Accord de Paris ne se donne pas les moyens d'être universel et refuse de s'attaquer à la machine à réchauffer la planète que constitue la globalisation économique et financière.

L'accord de Paris est-il juridiquement contraignant ?

- L'accord de Paris ne transforme par les INDCs en des engagements contraignants et les mécanismes de révision des engagements sont faiblement contraignants ;
- Aucun mécanisme de sanction n'est mis en oeuvre pour sanctionner les États qui ne prendraient pas des engagements insuffisants, qui ne les mèneraient pas à bien ou qui refuseraient de revoir à la hausse leur ambition.

Alors que les accords de libéralisation du commerce et de l'investissement sanctionnent les pays lorsqu'ils ne respectent pas les règles établies, encore rien de tel en termes de lutte contre les émissions de gaz à effet de serre.

L'accord de Paris est-il dynamique ?

- Il sera impossible de rajouter dans les années futures tout ce qui n'est pas dans le texte de l'accord de Paris (100 milliards comme plancher, ...) ;
- Des inventaires (stocktaking) sont prévus tous les 5 ans, mais la mise en oeuvre des révisions à la hausse reste dépendante de l'interprétation du texte et de la bonne volonté des États.

L'accord de Paris est-il différencié ?

- Avec la mise en oeuvre des INDCs, les États ont accepté à Lima une auto-différenciation en matière de réduction d'émissions de GES : chaque pays met sur la table ce qu'il souhaite ;
- En matière de financements, alors que la Convention-cadre prévoit que les pays historiquement les plus émetteurs débloquent les financements nécessaires à l'adaptation et la mitigation des pays qui en ont besoin, les États-Unis et leurs alliés ont essayé de poursuivre leur oeuvre de démolition des principes de la Convention.

L'accord de Paris est-il équilibré ?

- Aucun mécanisme clairement défini pour faciliter le transfert des technologies, notamment pour lever les barrières à l'accès générées par les droits de propriété intellectuelle ;
- Possibilité est laissée aux pays, notamment les plus émetteurs, d'utiliser des mécanismes de compensation carbone pour atteindre leurs objectifs, au détriment d'une réduction domestique des émissions.
- Maintien de la référence à « la croissance économique » (art. 10)

Citations d'Attac France et d'autres Attac en Europe et partenaires

Maxime Combes, porte-parole d'Attac France sur les enjeux climatiques

« Un accord à n'importe quel prix n'était pas le mandat confié à la COP 21, François Hollande et Laurent Fabius. Utiliser les termes "ambitieux", "juste" et "juridiquement contraignant" pour présenter l'accord de Paris est une escroquerie intellectuelle. Y accoler la référence à la "justice climatique", sans contenu, est méprisant envers toutes celles et ceux qui se mobilisent en ce sens depuis des années. Faut-il rappeler que cet accord de Paris entérine des INDCs qui préparent un réchauffement climatique supérieur à 3°C, sans se doter des dispositifs pour revenir sur une trajectoire inférieure à 1,5°C ou même 2°C ? L'accord de Paris n'apporte rien de plus que les engagements individuels des États : c'est un accord à la carte qui permet à chaque État de faire ce qu'il veut en matière d'émissions de GES. Il est temps de tourner la page des énergies fossiles. Pas de faire semblant. »

Geneviève Azam, porte-parole d'Attac France

« Par un jeu de vocabulaire, l'accord de Paris, « universel contraignant » affaiblit un peu plus l'un des piliers de la Convention de 1992 et du protocole de Kyoto : la responsabilité climatique est commune mais différenciée, elle suppose des engagements contraignants pour les pays les plus pollueurs, aussi bien en termes de niveau d'émission que de financement. Le souffle éthique et politique qui manque est celui des mouvements de base, des résistances, des alternatives, dont l'énergie et la vision relient les expériences locales à des enjeux qui les dépassent ».

Thomas Coutrot, porte-parole d'Attac France

« Le très pâle accord reflète l'impuissance des gouvernements à s'attaquer aux causes réelles des dérèglements climatiques. Rien d'étonnant : l'avidité des multinationales, les énergies fossiles et l'obsession de la croissance sont considérées comme des données intouchables. La France se prétendait exemplaire, elle ne remet pas en cause ses propres projets climaticides. Ce samedi 12 décembre au cœur de Paris, nous envoyons un message d'espoir et d'action aux citoyens du monde entier : "ils" ont failli, décrétons ensemble l'état d'urgence climatique, ayons le dernier mot et construisons la justice climatique ! ».

Alexandra Strickner (Attac Autriche)

« Les gouvernements de l'UE ont une fois de plus clairement montré qu'ils se tiennent du côté des multinationales. L'accord qu'ils ont poussé pour est bon pour les entreprises. Il est mauvais pour le climat et les personnes affectées par le changement climatique. Pour nous, il est clair que nous devons élargir nos résistances contre le réchauffement climatique et stopper les TTIP, AECG ou Tisa, l'expansion de l'extraction des combustibles fossiles ou la construction de nouvelles infrastructures s'appuyant sur les combustibles fossiles. Plus que jamais, nous devons

multiplier les initiatives et les alternatives venant du terrain pour sauver le climat et développer des modes de vie socialement justes et écologiquement acceptables. »

Nick Dearden (Global Justice UK – partenaire d’Attac France au Royaume-Uni)

« Il est scandaleux que l’accord soit présenté comme un succès alors qu’il sape les droits des communautés les plus vulnérables de la planète et qu’il ne comprend à peu près rien de contraignant qui garantisse un climat sain et vivable pour les générations futures. Il y a des années, ce sont les États-Unis qui ont fait du Protocole de Kyoto un accord inefficace. L’histoire se répète à Paris, puisque les États-Unis, avec le soutien de l’UE et des autres pays riches, ont veillé à ce que les parties les plus importantes du traité soient dépouillées et édulcorées au point de devenir absurdes. Les personnes sont descendues dans les rues de Paris aujourd’hui avec un mélange de colère et de détermination. Une détermination visant à poursuivre leurs mobilisations sur l’action climatique ».

**The Paris Climate Talks
A Victory for President Obama,
A Defeat for the Planet,
and a
Challenge to the Climate Justice Movement**

**By Eric Mann
Back from the Paris
Climate Conference**

“The battle over Paris is not at all over. In fact, it is just beginning and the battle of the sum-up is the critical ideological and scientific baseline in the battle between hope and despair.”

December 2015

http://www.blackcommentator.com/634/634_cover_paris_climate_talks_analysis_mann_guest.html

The just concluded Paris Climate Conference—the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)—was a critical juncture in human and planetary history. Could the world’s governments, all representing Homo sapiens often at war with each other, come together to stop the capitalist and carbon-based catastrophe that in only 200 years is destroy all that God and nature produced for millions of years—since the last mass extinction.

As the world’s emperors in varying degrees of clothes congratulated themselves we face a 3 degree world in which 775 million people in Sub Saharan Africa are facing a world of catastrophic heat, droughts, floods, and famine. The pre-determined outcome in Paris was that the United States and President Obama needed a political victory more than the planet needed one and that all the parties, despite enormous antagonisms and conflicts of interests, would yield to the will of the world’s policeman and sole superpower. President Obama’s unique combination of charm, diplomacy, charisma, political will, and brute force gave him the victory he needed. But for a climate justice movement that does is just coming into being the challenge is can we convince people to give a damn enough to want to know the truth— and then can we get them to bring real structural demands on the President.

The battle over Paris is not at all over. In fact, it is just beginning and the battle of the sum-up is the critical ideological and scientific baseline in the battle between hope and despair.

Let me summarize some of the key battles that we have to fight and win that were not won in Paris.

The Paris Agreement—unless overturned by other movements and structures—is locking in a 3 Degree Celsius world.

The Intended Nationally Determined Contributions in Paris (in which, under U.S. pressure, cannot be enforced through treaty language) will lead to a 3 degree planet by 2050 if not sooner. For decades scientists have warned that the world’s average temperature cannot exceed 2 degrees Celsius. But that would involve stopping the oil and gas energy world in its tracks. Today, as the world temperature already averages almost 1 degree, enormous climate suffering is already taking place all over the world. The United States and its closest allies—Japan, Canada, Australia, New Zealand—and apparently most of the world’s governments, are celebrating that the text refers to keeping temperature “well below 2 degrees” and says they will try to “limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C.”

But why celebrate if there are no pledges let alone binding commitment to make that even remotely possible. If it is now agreed upon that if every Intended Nationally Determined Contribution—and even those are not legally enforceable—will lead to a Three Degree World then why boast about mentioning levels of 1.5 degrees or 3 degrees when everyone knows they cannot be met. How can we turn this hypocrisy from celebration to outrage? This was a victory for President Obama, a defeat for the planet, and a challenge to the Climate Justice Movement.

The United States prevented any language for climate reparations.

The U.S. representatives, John Kerry and Todd Stern, carrying out President Obama’s orders—adamantly opposed any language to hold the U.S. and E.U. responsible for the Industrial Counter-revolution of their own making and the astounding role the U.S. has played and is still playing in warming the planet. Nations of the Third World have been calling on the Global North to pay for what is called “loss and damages” so that those most responsible for the climate crisis pay reparations to those who are suffering its catastrophic impacts—in particular the nations of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and small island states. But John Kerry, who once spoke out against U.S. war crimes in Vietnam, threatened a U.S. walk-out if there was any language in the text about loss and damages. The Obama administration’s victory exceeded these reprehensible objectives. The final document states, that “any discussion of loss and damages *does not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation.*”

The Bush administration walked out of the World Conference Against Racism because of resolutions condemning Israeli violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people and resolutions calling on the United States and Europe to pay reparations to the nations and peoples of Africa, Black people in the United States, and all those in the African Diaspora for the crimes of the TransAtlantic slave trade. This time the Obama administration, more powerful than the Bush administration in suppressing the voice of the Third World, first threatened to walk out, and then averted it by browbeating nations into giving away their rights to “liability or compensation.” But, how in the world can poor nations dependent on coal for energy make a transition to cleaner fuels without major funding from the arch polluters? Why won’t the U.S. accept responsibility for both liability and compensation? Because once they opened that door it might cost them hundreds of billions of dollars in damages. The only saving grace is that this language is not controlling in front

of any international body or court—in that, also under U.S. pressure, this U.N. document is not legally binding. Thus, it can be challenged in other public and international arenas. Still, it is a massive victory in the realm of ideology and precedent, another political victory for the Obama administration—and yes, another defeat for the planet and challenge to the Climate Justice Movement.

President Obama, John Kerry, and chief U.S. negotiator Todd Stern effectively put the blame on China and India and all those still in the developing world.

In the 1992 U.N. Rio Conference that first set goals on climate change the Third World put forth the view of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities. (CBDR.) Under this view, the “Developed” and most polluting countries had a unique responsibility to solve the climate crisis of their own making. You have to go to the U.N. to fully grasp that virtually every country in Latin America (Spanish) Africa (English and French) and Asia (English and French) is speaking the language of the occupying powers that colonized their societies. Most of these nations just won their formal independence after World War II and many are still occupied or dominated by the U.S. and the E.U. India and China are two rising world economic powers who are burning enormous amounts of coal and have profound income disparities in their societies. But while demands on India and China to cap and reduce their emissions—especially by their own people—are absolutely on target the U.S. has a far bigger target—to destroy the entire concept of CBDR and as such to equate its own historically destructive role and present obscene GHG emissions with those of the newly emerging Asian industrial societies—as well as virtually every other Third World nation. The U.S. is now arguing that this is not 1992 and “we” are now all in this together and the past does not matter. This allows the U.S. to remain the world’s military superpower (that does not allow its military emissions to be even counted) as it goes on the ideological and military offensive. Again, a great victory for the Obama administration, a defeat for the planet, and a challenge to the Climate Justice Movement.

The President’s actual stated commitments to reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions in Paris are only 14 percent of 1990 levels—one of the weakest proposals of a major power let alone the world’s still greatest polluter by per capita emissions.

President Obama has told the world he plans to cut U.S. emissions by 28 percent. But he has achieved that through a math trick in the long tradition of American Deceptionalism. While the rest of the world has pledged to reduce emissions from 1990 levels the President just asserted that the U.S. would use 2005 as its base. As a result, a 28 percent reduction, already so weak on its own terms, is actually 14 percent. And again, a victory for President Obama, a defeat for the Planet, and a challenge to the Climate Justice Movement.

The United States imposed its will on the world’s nations and, in Paris, broke the back of any effective resistance to its domination of the United Nations.

The United Nations has long been a center of international public opinion where resolutions, while not binding, can in fact be a factor in world history. This is why the U.S. invested so much in the UNFCCC—it understood that it had to win the ideological argument to in fact restrict its commitment to fight climate change against far more demanding plans. In 2009 President Obama, just a year into office, strong-armed the nations of the world in Copenhagen, at the last major U.N. Climate

Conference, to blame China, isolate those calling for more stringent measures, and let the U.S. off the hook.

President Obama has upped his game in Paris to truly become the world's most intimidating political figure. He has manipulated the resistance of Small Island and African nations who see him as a sympathetic figure—if not really a friend. His plea that the world must help him avert defeat in front of the racist Republicans, an argument that baffles the mind on its face, has had some resonance—combined with 800 military bases, economic “incentives” aka bribes, threats, and a nuclear arsenal. His electoral victories in 2008 and 2012 were the product of a deep anti-racist sentiment in the U.S., the victories of the civil rights movement, and his own deceptive but still far more progressive campaign—and all of our hopes for his success. He used that credibility and good will to bring great attention to himself and the U.S. as the savior of the planet—at the same time knowing that U.S. actions will bring inordinate suffering into the world and especially to the nations and peoples of Africa, Asian, Latin America, and the small island states. This is a victory for himself but a terrible defeat for the civil rights and climate justice movements but far more important, a terrible defeat for the planet. And yes, a monumental challenge to the dissenting voices who are fighting to get our point of view heard let alone our plans carried out in history.

So Where is the Hope?

Many environmental and climate justice groups came to Paris with plans and hopes to influence its outcome. Some are declaring victory and joining in the celebrations. For those of us who disagree, and see it as a life and death disagreement, we must soberly look at the results and ask the hard question, “Where do we go from here.” Let me give just one example, the work of my own organization, because right now it is the only work I can explain on its own terms—as part of a far larger puzzle and plan of groups working all over the world.

Our organization, the Labor/Community Strategy Center, came to Paris with an aggressive tactical plan. We wanted to bring four major demands in front of President Obama and the United States at UNFCCC.

The United States must cut its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50 percent of 1990 levels by 2025 – starting now!

The United States must contribute \$10 billion a year into the United Nations Green Climate Fund – starting now!

The United States must Bring Back 100,000 Black internally displaced residents to New Orleans – with jobs, housing, and medical benefits – starting now!

The United States must end the federal Department of Defense 1033 Program that gives military grade weapons to local and state police forces including school police.

Five of us from the Strategy Center, Manuel Criollo, Barbara Lott-Holland, Channing Martinez, Ashley Franklin and I worked day and night to bring these demands to the attention of NGO delegates, activists in France, members of world governments, and to visitors to the Climate

Generations Space in the Le Bourget facility next to the U.N. meetings. We had hoped, as part of a larger NGO and grassroots Climate Justice Movement, to create a counter-narrative to the president's premature celebration and to put some public pressure on the president.

In our view, we fell far short of our expectations.

The main problem was that given what often appeared as the unbroken unity of the world's governments, even though we knew of course there were massive struggles taking place behind the scenes, there was no focused or coherent resistance in Paris in any of the spheres and no agreement on demands, tactics, or a common plan of action. The Climate Justice Movement is trying to become a real movement—and is composed of many good people doing good work and trying, like we are, to make a difference. But until there is some real agreement on demands, tactics, political perspective and real forms of organization to carry them out we are all running uphill with lead weights on.

Similarly, there was no coherent public agreement on demands by the world's governments—not the E.U., not the G 77 and China. As such, there were no world governments to ally with either — because none of them wanted to wage an open and aggressive fight with the U.S.

So, we go back to Los Angeles exhausted but actually inspired. We met a lot of great people doing very inspiring work. We learned how to function effectively under very difficult objective conditions and we return to our work in Los Angeles and with other groups in Black and Latino communities in the U.S. with a lot more optimism and determination. We appreciate the work of Demand Climate Justice, the Third World Network, and the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice organizing in Historically Black Colleges and Universities with whom we worked, for helping to lead the most coherent alternative narrative possible under the circumstances.

We said our main objective in Paris was to learn—and damn, learn we did staying up half every night to read, write, plot and plan with others. We come back with more wisdom from all the work we did trying to swim in such deep waters. And like running up a hill with lead weights, our legs have gotten stronger for the long distance run.

The fight over the historical record in Paris is a critical frontier for the climate justice movement. It is essential in the next days, weeks, and months to explain to people that the great hopes of the United Nations Framework Climate Change Conference were brought to a massive defeat by the power of the U.S. and the Obama administration and a lack of political clarity, political will, and at times, lack of political courage by other world governments

But the moral, political, and ecological imperatives of the climate crisis are creating a very volatile world climate—and the many contradictions inside the world that the U.S. was temporarily able to suppress can erupt, like a volcano or a Category 5 hurricane, at any moment. We need to be organized for when, not if, that historical opportunity comes. This article, and its effort to challenge the president's master narrative, is a small tactic to help bring the climate revolution onto center stage. And for that, Paris was a great success, because there is now a far greater world audience that does give a damn and wants to know and shape the future of the planet and all living things on it.

BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator Eric Mann was an NGO delegate to the United Nations Framework Climate Change Conference representing the [Labor/Community Strategy Center](#). He produced daily “Posts from Paris” for Pacifica and his KPFK radio show, [Voices from the Frontlines](#). His new book, *Katrina’s Legacy: White Racism and Black Reconstruction in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast* will have its international opening in Paris in December 2015 and its U.S. opening in Los Angeles in January 2016. He is also the author of: *Comrade George an Investigation into the Life, Political Thought, and Assassination of George Jackson*, *Dispatches From Durban: Firsthand Commentaries on the World Conference Against Racism and Post-September 11 Movement Strategies*, and *Katrina’s Legacy: White Racism and Black Reconstruction in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast*. He is working on his next book, Revolutionary Organizing in the Age of Reaction, featuring The 25 Qualities of the Successful Organizer. [Contact](#) Mr. Mann, visit his blog (ericmannblog.blogspot.com) or Follow him on Twitter: www.twitter.com/EricMannSpeaks.

After Paris, Is Another World Possible?

Yeb Saño

Former chief climate negotiator of the Philippine
Member, Philippine Movement for Climate Justice

January 4, 2016

When governments were scrambling in the dying days of the COP21 climate summit in Paris to forge a new climate agreement, typhoon Melor (Nonoy) was approaching the Philippines, again uncharacteristically a few days before Christmas. As the politicians continued to celebrate the agreement, the out-of-season storm left many communities in shambles. This leads us to reflect on how words on a piece of paper crafted in diplomacy matter little to real people on the ground confronting climate impacts.

We have fairly entrusted some hope in the larger UN climate process, and in effect the Paris Agreement, as a way for the international community to take significant albeit small steps forward in confronting the climate crisis. The process through which the accord was painstakingly crafted was also a manifestation of a triumph of effective stewardship by the French hosts. But we should guard our sense of jubilation, because the Agreement is not just far from being perfect; it is far from what the world requires. It was more of a coup de grace than a victory. While the agreement provides placeholders for important fundamental issues and the preamble contains keywords that can make climate diplomats declare triumph, real people and communities on the ground impacted by the ravages of climate disruption and fossil-fueled development aggression, would find this tokenism woeful. The nations that agreed to this outcome cannot take sanctuary under a diplomatic resolution that risks trivializing the suffering of the world's poorest and most vulnerable.

The word "commitment" does not appear in the Paris Agreement. This is so because the most powerful nations on earth, developed and developing alike, refused to use this word in order to achieve a political compromise that would be expedient for governments. The endeavor of the United Nations was to enhance the implementation of the 1992 climate treaty. Instead, compounded by serious inaction, it has slipped and stumbled over the years. The Paris Agreement is a weaker agreement than the 1992 Climate Change Convention. It is also weaker than the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. What this agreement represents is the sheer avoidance of rich countries to be accountable for the climate crisis and the acquiescence of others to the weakening of the climate regime, again gravely ignoring the importance of equity, fairness, adequacy and genuine ambition.

The issue of "loss and damage" was clearly a lost cause when rich countries treated it with perfunctory interest, and was even further lost with the brutal qualifier that the issue "does not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation".

Promises are best measured by how one proposes to achieve them. On this count, the agreement is big on goodwill, but very scarce on concrete actions that can make good on the promises. On

the means of implementation, the accord merely rehashes previous agreements and rich countries were again hugely reluctant to boost the scale of financial resources to bolster the transformation of the global economy that will save the climate, allow human and natural ecosystems to cope, and that would address the development crisis. Treating the promise of the inadequate US\$100Bn per year by 2020 as a floor is no reason to be ecstatic because climate finance is already watered down by definition, and how we even get to US\$100Bn is an enigma, with only 10% of this amount pledged so far, with many strings attached.

As to ambition, the aim of strengthening the global response by “holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels” is again a diplomatic sleight of hand to appease the clamor for higher ambition but falling back on a six year old agreed threshold and spinning it publicly as a novel milestone.

Heralded as the “start of a new beginning” and the spark of a continuing process, it is global procrastination notwithstanding. If we are to be truly honest about the Paris Agreement, we will see why the Paris Agreement is a shameless euphemism for the betrayal of the world’s most vulnerable. It is akin to a new year’s resolution. It is high on promises, but suspect on realization.

Do we remain hopeful? Indeed our hearts are filled with hope, because even if the Agreement changes some things, the people will change everything. Despite being treated largely as spectators on the sidelines, the people’s global movement for climate justice has put itself in the forefront and has become stronger than ever. And especially for people of goodwill, the beautiful awakening marches on.

Nations have eked out what they are despondently apparently capable of. It would still be fair enough to say that after Paris we see some glimmer of hope for addressing the climate crisis, and we must continue to be watchful and confront our leaders to move more swiftly and boldly. We must hold our governments and industries to account for their inaction. Confronting the climate crisis is not just about saving the planet. It is about changing the system. The journey continues, and every step counts. Another world is possible, and we will be unstoppable. And another world is not only possible, it is imperative.

From Paris with love for lake Poopó

By Pablo Solón

diciembre 21, 2015

<http://obccd.org/2015/12/21/from-paris-with-love-for-lake-poopo/>

Lake Poopó becomes a desert while in Paris, governments conclude an agreement they call “historic” to address climate change. Will the Paris Agreement save over 125,000 lakes that are in danger of disappearing in the world due to climate change?

The second largest lake in Bolivia did not disappear by magic. The causes of their demise are many and complex, but among them is the rise in temperature and increased frequency of natural disasters like El Niño caused by climate change. The lake Poopó that had an expanse of 2,337 km² and a depth of 2.5 meters, is now a desert with a few puddles in the middle with no more than 30 centimeters of water depth.

If the average temperature rose globally by 0.8 °C due to climate change, on the lake Poopó the increase went to 2.5 °C leaving in its path thousands of dead fish, dead flamingos, fishing boats anchored to the ground, and hundreds of indigenous people, who for centuries were devoted to fishing, that now roam for help thinking of a very uncertain future. That is the true face of climate change that expands like a cancer throughout the world.

Paris and the break with reality

Schizophrenia is a mental disorder in which a person breaks with reality and thinks he is doing one thing while in practice he is doing something very different. Something very similar is happening with the governments and the Climate Paris Agreement. In its Article 2 that agreement says the goal is to limit “the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C”. These words makes us think that the spirit of Lake Poopo and thousands of other lakes, glaciers, islands and hundreds of thousands of people who die each year from climate change has finally touched the hearts of the governments of the planet.

But wait! Paragraph 17 of the decision that approved the “historic” Paris Agreement states “with concern that the estimated aggregate greenhouse gas emission levels in 2025 and 2030 resulting from the intended nationally determined contributions do not fall within least-cost 2 °C scenarios”. In other words, one thing is love professed by the political world to lakes like Poopó and a very different thing is what they are actually willing to do.

To really limit the increase of the temperature and prevent the planet from burning with an increase of more than 2 °C governments must agree to leave 80% of the known fossil fuels reserves under the ground. This includes hydrocarbons (oil and gas) and coal. But when one

reads carefully the Climate Agreement there is no reference to put a limit on the extraction of fossil fuels.

The other urgent measure to prevent more greenhouse gases from going into the atmosphere is to eliminate deforestation. However, in its so-called “contributions” countries with large forests are not committed to halt this crime even in the next 15 years.

Overall, thanks to the “contributions” of emission reductions presented in Paris, global emissions of greenhouse gases that in 2012 were 53 Gt CO₂e, will continue to climb up to around 60 Gt CO₂e by 2030. If governments really want to limit the temperature increase to less than 2 °C they should commit to reduce global emissions to 35 Gt of CO₂e by 2030. Governments know this and yet do the opposite and even shout: “Victory! The planet is saved!” Is it or is not a particular type of schizophrenia?

Meanwhile more than 10,000 kilometers away from Paris the increase in the temperature continues to evaporate a lake where the Urus, indigenous people also known as “the men from the water”, struggle to survive. These ancient inhabitants that some researchers say came thousands of years from Polynesia soon will be “the men from the desert”.

Impunity and climate crimes

If we can be sure of something is that the Urus are not guilty at all of climate change. Per capita, their greenhouse gas emissions are among the lowest in the world, yet they are one of the first victims of climate change. Could it be that the Paris Agreement will allow the Urus to sue the countries and corporations responsible for this ethnocide? Ultimately Article 8 mentions a loss and damage mechanism, but paragraph 52 of the decision that approved the agreement clarifies “that Article 8 of the Agreement does not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation”. The Urus, along with millions of people around the world that did not cause climate change have been totally silenced by this schizophrenic agreement that mentions the “rights of indigenous peoples” in its preamble and at the same time negates their right to demand those responsible for this climate crime. What kind of rights are these that are not enforceable? And all “made in Paris” which is the city of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, 1789.

Some will say, that they are not given the right to make legal demands but there will be a multi-million fund for mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage. Will this fund be provided by the countries that are mainly responsible for climate change? The truth is that developed countries in a very clever way replaced the word “provide” with “mobilize”. Article 9 of the Agreement states that “developed country Parties should continue to take the lead in mobilizing climate finance from a wide variety of sources, instruments and channels, “such as public funding, private investment, loans, carbon markets and even developing countries.

And how much will the developed countries “mobilize”? A similar amount as the military and defense budget of the world that is around 1,500 billion dollars? Or maybe half of that? After all the more important issue of human security in present days is climate change. The Paris Agreement is silent in relation to the figure of climate finance, but the decision which approves

the agreement is very clear in paragraphs 54 and 115. Developed countries will mobilize just 100 billion dollars for the year 2020-2025, which is 7% of the military budget worldwide.

While the tragedy of Lake Poopó is a small sample of what is yet to come, the climate summit in Paris teaches us that the real solutions will not come from international negotiations where the interests of large corporations and governments are predominant. The future of life as we know it depends on what we do today as the grassroots inhabitants of the blue planet.

Paris climate agreement: a terror attack on Africa

Supporters of the climate deal reached at the Paris Conference of Polluters are endorsing a plan that will kill millions

Patrick Bond

December 17, 2015

http://climateandcapitalism.com/2015/12/17/paris-climate-agreement-a-terror-attack-on-africa/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+climateandcapitalism%2FpEtD+%28Climate+and+Capitalism%29

Patrick Bond is director of the Centre for Civil Society at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa

Paris witnessed both explicit terrorism by religious extremists on November 13 and a month later, implicit terrorism by carbon addicts negotiating a world treaty that guarantees catastrophic climate change. The first incident left more than 130 people dead in just one evening's mayhem; the second lasted a fortnight but over the next century can be expected to kill hundreds of millions, especially in Africa.

But because the latest version of the annual United Nations climate talks has three kinds of spin-doctors, the extent of damage may not be well understood. The 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) generated reactions ranging from smug denialism to righteous fury. The first reaction is 'from above' (the Establishment) and is self-satisfied; the second is from the middle ('Climate Action') and is semi-satisfied; the third, from below ('Climate Justice'), is justifiably outraged.

Guzzling French champagne last Saturday, the Establishment quickly proclaimed, in essence, "The Paris climate glass is nearly full – so why not get drunk on planet-saving rhetoric?" The *New York Times* reported with a straight face, "President Obama said the historic agreement is a tribute to American climate change leadership" (and in a criminally-negligent way, this is not untrue).

Since 2009, US State Department chief negotiator Todd Stern successfully drove the negotiations away from four essential principles: ensuring emissions-cut commitments would be sufficient to halt runaway climate change; making the cuts legally binding with accountability mechanisms; distributing the burden of cuts fairly based on responsibility for causing the crisis; and making financial transfers to repair weather-related loss and damage following directly from that historic liability. Washington elites always prefer 'market mechanisms' like carbon trading instead of paying their climate debt even though the US national carbon market fatally crashed in 2010.

In part because the Durban COP17 in 2011 provided lubrication and – with South Africa’s blessing – empowered Stern to wreck the idea of Common But Differentiated Responsibility while giving “a Viagra shot to flailing carbon markets” (as a male Bank of America official cheerfully celebrated), Paris witnessed the demise of these essential principles. And again, “South Africa played a key role negotiating on behalf of the developing countries of the world,” according to Pretoria’s environment minister Edna Molewa, who proclaimed from Paris “an ambitious, fair and effective legally-binding outcome.”

Arrogant fibbery. The collective Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) – i.e. *voluntary* cuts – will put the temperature rise at above 3 degrees. From coal-based South Africa, the word ambitious loses meaning given Molewa’s weak INDCs – *ranked* by Climate Action Tracker as amongst the world’s most “inadequate” – and given that South Africa hosts the world’s two largest coal-fired power stations now under construction, with no objection by Molewa. She regularly approves increased (highly-subsidized) coal burning and exports, vast fracking, offshore-oil drilling, exemptions from pollution regulation, emissions-intensive corporate farming and fast-worsening suburban sprawl.

A second narrative comes from large NGOs that mobilized over the past six months to provide mild-mannered pressure points on negotiators. Their line is, essentially, “The Paris glass is *partly* full – so sip up and enjoy!”

This line derives not merely from the predictable back-slapping associated with petit-bourgeois vanity, gazing upwards to power for validation, such as one finds at the Worldwide Fund for Nature and Climate Action Network, what with their corporate sponsorships. All of us reading this are often tempted in this direction, aren’t we, because such unnatural twisting of the neck is a permanent occupational hazard in this line of work.

And such opportunism was to be expected from Paris, especially after Avaaz and Greenpeace endorsed G7 leadership posturing in June, when at their meeting in Germany the Establishment made a meaningless commitment to a decarbonized economy – in the year 2100, *at least fifty years too late*.

Perhaps worse than their upward gaze, though, the lead NGOs suffered a hyper-reaction to the 2009 Copenhagen Syndrome. Having hyped the COP15 Establishment negotiators as “Seal the Deal!” planet-saviours, NGOs mourned the devastating Copenhagen Accord signed in secret by leaders from Washington, Brasilia, Beijing, New Delhi and Pretoria. This was soon followed by a collapse of climate consciousness and mobilization. Such alienation is often attributed to activist heart-break: a roller-coaster of raised NGO expectations and plummeting Establishment performance.

Possessing only an incremental theory of social change, NGOs toasting the Paris deal now feel the need to confirm that they did as best they could, and that they have grounds to continue along the same lines in future. To be sure, insider-oriented persuasion tactics pursued by the 42-million member clicktivist group Avaaz are certainly impressive in their breadth and scope. Yet for Avaaz, “most importantly, [the Paris deal] sends a clear message to investors everywhere:

sinking money into fossil fuels is a dead bet. Renewables are the profit centre. Technology to bring us to 100% clean energy is the money-maker of the future.”

Once again, Avaaz validates the COP process, the Establishment’s negotiators and the overall incentive structure of capitalism that *are the proximate causes of the crisis*.

The third narrative is actually the most realistic: “The Paris glass is full of toxic fairy dust – don’t dare even sniff!” The traditional Climate Justice (CJ) stance is to delegitimize the Establishment and return the focus of activism to grassroots sites of struggle, in future radically changing the balance of forces locally, nationally and then globally. But until that change in power is achieved, the UNFCCC COPs are just Conferences of Polluters.

Via Campesina was clearest: “There is nothing binding for states, national contributions lead us towards a global warming of over 3°C and multinationals are the main beneficiaries. It was essentially a media circus.”

Asad Rehman coordinates climate advocacy at the world’s leading North-South CJ organization, Friends of the Earth International: “The reviews [of whether INDCs are adhered to and then need strengthening] are too weak and too late. The political number mentioned for finance has no bearing on the scale of need. It’s empty. The iceberg has struck, the ship is going down and the band is still playing to warm applause.”

And not forgetting the voice of climate science, putting it most bluntly, James Hansen called Paris, simply, “bullshit.”

Where does that leave us? If the glass-half-full NGOs get serious – and I hope to be pleasantly surprised in 2016 – then the only way forward is for them to apply their substantial influence on behalf of solidarity with those CJ activists making a real difference, at the base.

Close to my own home, the weeks before COP21 witnessed potential victories in two major struggles: opposition to corporate coal mining – led mainly by women peasants, campaigners and lawyers – in rural Zululand, bordering the historic iMfolozi wilderness reserve (where the world’s largest white rhino population is threatened by poachers); and South Durban residents fighting the massive expansion of Africa’s largest port-petrochemical complex. In both attacks, the climate-defence weapon was part of the activists’ arsenal.

But it is only when these campaigns have conclusively done the work COP negotiators and NGO cheerleaders just shirked – leaving fossil fuels in the ground and pointing the way to a just, post-carbon society – that we can raise our glasses and toast humanity, with integrity. Until then, pimps for the Paris Conference of Polluters should be told to sober up and halt what will soon be understood as their fatal attack on Mother Earth.

Talks in the city of light generate more heat

Rather than relying on far-off negative-emissions technologies, Paris needed to deliver a low-carbon road map for today, argues Kevin Anderson.

Kevin Anderson

21 December 2015

<http://www.nature.com/news/talks-in-the-city-of-light-generate-more-heat-1.19074>

The climate agreement delivered earlier this month in Paris is a genuine triumph of international diplomacy. It is a tribute to how France was able to bring a fractious world together. And it is testament to how assiduous and painstaking science can defeat the unremitting programme of misinformation that is perpetuated by powerful vested interests. It is the twenty-first century's equivalent to the victory of heliocentrism over the inquisition. Yet it risks being total fantasy.

Let's be clear, the international community not only acknowledged the seriousness of climate change, it also demonstrated sufficient unanimity to define it quantitatively: to hold "the increase in ... temperature to well below 2 °C ... and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C".

To achieve such goals demands urgent and significant cuts in emissions. But rather than requiring that nations reduce emissions in the short-to-medium term, the Paris agreement instead rests on the assumption that the world will successfully suck the carbon pollution it produces back from the atmosphere in the longer term. A few years ago, these exotic Dr Strangelove options were discussed only as last-ditch contingencies. Now they are Plan A.

Governments, prompted by their advisers, have plumped for BECCS (biomass energy carbon capture and storage) as the most promising 'negative-emissions technology'.

What does BECCS entail? Apportioning huge swathes of the planet's landmass to the growing of bioenergy crops (from big trees to tall grasses) — which absorb carbon dioxide through photosynthesis as they grow. Periodically, these crops are harvested, processed for worldwide travel and shipped around the globe before finally being combusted in thermal power stations. The CO₂ is then stripped from the waste gases, compressed (almost to a liquid), pumped through large pipes over potentially very long distances and finally stored deep underground in various geological formations (from exhausted oil and gas reservoirs through to saline aquifers) for a millennium or so.

The unquestioned reliance on negative-emission technologies to deliver on the Paris goals is the greatest threat to the new agreement. Yet BECCS, or even negative-emission technologies, received no direct reference throughout the 32-page package. Despite this, the framing of the 2 °C goal and, even more, the 1.5 °C one, is premised on the massive uptake of BECCS sometime in the latter half of the century. Disturbingly, this is also the case for most of the temperature estimates ascribed to the outcome of the voluntary emissions cuts made by nations before the Paris meeting.

“The almost euphoric atmosphere that accompanied the drafts could not be squared with the content.”

The scale of the assumption is breathtaking. It would be the equivalent of decades of planting and harvesting of energy crops over an area of one to three times that of India. At the same time, the aviation industry envisages powering its planes with biofuel, the shipping industry is seriously considering biomass to propel its ships and the chemical sector sees biomass as a potential feedstock — and by then there will be 9 billion or so human mouths to feed. This crucial assumption deserves wider scrutiny.

Relying on the promise of industrial-scale negative-emissions technologies to balance the carbon budget was not the only option available in Paris — at least in relation to 2 °C.

Reducing emissions in line with 2 °C remains a viable goal — just. But rather than rely on post-2050 BECCS, deciding to pursue this alternative approach would have begged profound political, economic and social questions. Questions that undermine a decade of mathematically nebulous green-growth and win-win rhetoric, and questions that the politicians have decided cannot be asked.

Move away from the cosy tenets of contemporary economics and a suite of alternative measures comes into focus. Technologies, behaviours and habits that feed energy demand are all amenable to significant and rapid change. Combine this with an understanding that just 10% of the population is responsible for 50% of emissions, and the rate and scope of what is possible becomes evident.

The allying of deep and early reductions in energy demand with rapid substitution of fossil fuels by zero-carbon alternatives frames a 2 °C agenda that does not rely on negative emissions. So why was this real opportunity muscled out by the economic bouncers in Paris? No doubt there are many elaborate and nuanced explanations — but the headline reason is simple. In true Orwellian style, the political and economic dogma that has come to pervade all facets of society must not be questioned. For many years, green-growth oratory has quashed any voice with the audacity to suggest that the carbon budgets associated with 2 °C cannot be reconciled with the mantra of economic growth.

I was in Paris, and there was a real sense of unease among many scientists present. The almost euphoric atmosphere that accompanied the circulation of the various drafts could not be squared with their content. Desperate to maintain order, a club of senior figures and influential handlers briefed against those who dared to say so — just look at some of the Twitter discussions!

It is pantomime season and the world has just gambled its future on the appearance in a puff of smoke of a carbon-sucking fairy godmother. The Paris agreement is a road map to a better future? Oh no it's not.

Nature 528, 437 (24 December 2015) doi:10.1038/528437a

Part Three

Interpretations

Too Little, Too Late

John Michael Greer, originally published by The Archdruid Report |

December 24, 2015

<http://www.resilience.org/stories/2015-12-24/too-little-too-late#>



Last week, after a great deal of debate, the passengers aboard the *Titanic* voted to impose modest limits sometime soon on the rate at which water is pouring into the doomed ship's hull. Despite the torrents of self-congratulatory rhetoric currently flooding into the media from the White House and an assortment of groups on the domesticated end of the environmental movement, that's the sum of what happened at the COP-21 conference in Paris. It's a spectacle worth observing, and not only for those of us who are connoisseurs of irony; the factors that drove COP-21 to the latest round of nonsolutions are among the most potent forces shoving industrial civilization on its one-way trip to history's compost bin.

The core issues up for debate at the Paris meeting were the same that have been rehashed endlessly at previous climate conferences. The consequences of continuing to treat the atmosphere as a gaseous sewer for humanity's pollutants are becoming increasingly hard to ignore, but nearly everything that defines a modern industrial economy as "modern" and "industrial" produces greenhouse gases, and the continued growth of the world's modern industrial economies remains the keystone of economic policy around the world. The goal pursued by negotiators at this and previous climate conferences, then, is to find some way to do something about anthropogenic global warming that won't place any kind of restrictions on economic growth.

What that means in practice is that the world's nations have more or less committed themselves to limit the rate at which the dumping of greenhouse gases will increase over the next fifteen years. I'd encourage those of my readers who think anything important was accomplished at the Paris conference to read that sentence again, and think about what it implies. The agreement that came out of COP-21 doesn't commit anybody to stop dumping carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, now or at any point in the future. It doesn't even commit anybody to set a fixed annual output that will not be exceeded. It simply commits the world's nations to slow down the rate at which they're increasing their dumping of greenhouse gases. If this doesn't sound to you like a recipe for saving the world, let's just say you're not alone.

It wasn't exactly encouraging that the immediate aftermath of the COP-21 agreement was a feeding frenzy among those industries most likely to profit from modest cuts in greenhouse gas consumption—yes, those would be the renewable-energy and nuclear industries, with some efforts to get scraps from the table by proponents of “clean coal,” geoengineering, fusion-power research, and a few other subsidy dumpsters of the same sort. Naomi Oreskes, a writer for whom I used to have a certain degree of respect, published [a crassly manipulative creed](#) insisting that anybody who questioned the claim that renewable-energy technologies could keep industrial society powered forever was engaged in, ahem, “a new form of climate denialism.” She was more than matched, to be fair, by a chorus of meretricious shills for the nuclear industry, who were just as quick to insist that renewables couldn't be scaled up fast enough and nuclear power was the only alternative.

The shills in question are quite correct, as it happens, that renewable energy can't be scaled up fast enough to replace fossil fuels. The little detail they're evading is that nuclear power can't be scaled up far enough or fast enough, either. What's more, however great they look on paper or PowerPoint, neither nuclear power nor grid-scale renewable power are economically viable in the real world. The evidence for this is as simple as it is conclusive: no nation anywhere on the planet has managed either one without vast and continuing government subsidies. Lacking those, neither one makes enough economic sense to be worth building, because neither one can provide the kind of cheap abundant electrical power that makes a modern industrial society possible.

Say this in the kind of company that takes global climate change seriously, of course, and if you aren't simply shouted down by those present—and of course this is the most common response—you can expect to hear someone say, “Well, *something* has to do it.” Right there you can see the lethal blindness that pervades nearly all contemporary debates about the future, because it's simply not true that something has to do it. No divine providence nor any law of nature guarantees that human beings must have access to as much cheap abundant electricity as they happen to want.

Stated thus baldly, that may seem like common sense, but that sort of sense is far from common these days, even—or especially—among those people who think they're grappling with the hard realities of the future. Here's a useful example. One of this blog's readers—tip of the archdruidical hat to Anthropocene—made an elegant short film that was shown at a climate-themed film festival in Paris while the COP-21 meeting was slouching toward its pointless end. The film is titled [A Message from the Past](#), and as the title suggests, it portrays an incident from a future on the far side of global climate change. I encourage my readers to click through and

watch it now; it's only a few minutes long, and its point will be perfectly clear to any regular reader of this blog.

The audience at the film festival, though, found it incomprehensible. The nearest they came to making sense of it was to guess that, despite the title, it was about a message from our time that had somehow found its way to the distant past. The thought that the future on the far side of global climate change might have some resemblance to the preindustrial past—that people in that future, in the wake of the immense collective catastrophes our actions are busy creating for them, might wear handmade clothing of primitive cut and find surviving scraps of our technologies baffling relics of a bygone time—seems to have been wholly beyond the grasp of their imaginations.

Two factors make this blindness to an entire spectrum of probable futures astonishing. The first is that not that long ago, plenty of people in the climate change activism scene were talking openly about the possibility that uncontrolled climate change could stomp industrial society with the inevitability of a boot descending on an eggshell. I'm thinking here, among other examples, of the much-repeated claim by James Lovelock a few years back that the likely outcome of global climate change, if nothing was done, was heat so severe that the only human survivors a few centuries from now would be "a few hundred breeding pairs" huddled around the shores of the Arctic Ocean.

It used to be all the rage in climate change literature to go on at length about the ghastly future that would be ours if global temperatures warmed far enough to trigger serious methane releases from northern permafrost, tip one or more of the planet's remaining ice sheets into rapid collapse, and send sea water rising to drown low-lying regions. Lurid scenarios of civilizational collapse and mass dieoff appeared in book after lavishly marketed book. Of late, though, that entire theme seems to have dropped out of the collective imagination of the activist community, to be replaced by strident claims that everything will be just fine if we ignore the hard lessons of the last thirty years of attempted renewable-energy buildouts and fling every available dollar, euro, yuan, etc. into subsidies for an even more grandiose wave of uneconomical renewable-energy powerplants.

The second factor is even more remarkable, and it's the existence of that first factor that makes it so. Those methane releases, rising seas, and collapsing ice sheets? They're no longer confined to the pages of remaindered global warming books. They're happening in the real world, right now.

Methane releases? Check out [the massive craters blown out of Siberian permafrost](#) in the last few years by huge methane burps, or the way the Arctic Ocean fizzes every summer like a freshly poured soda as underwater methane deposits get destabilized by rising temperatures. Methane isn't the world-wrecking ultrapollutant that a certain class of apocalyptic fantasy likes to imagine, mostly because it doesn't last long in the atmosphere—the average lifespan of a methane molecule once it seeps out of the permafrost is about ten years—but while it's there, it traps heat much more effectively than carbon dioxide. The Arctic is already warming far more drastically than any other region of the planet, and the nice thick blanket of methane with which it's wrapped itself is an important part of the reason why.

Those methane releases make a great example of the sudden stop that overtook discussions of the harsh future ahead of us, once that future started to arrive. Before they began to occur, methane releases played a huge role in climate change literature—Mark Lynas’ colorful and heavily marketed book *Six Degrees* is only one of many examples. Once the methane releases actually got under way, as I noted in [a post here some years ago](#), most activists abruptly stopped talking about it, and references to methane on the doomward end of the blogosphere started fielding dismissive comments by climate-change mavens insisting that methane doesn’t matter and carbon dioxide is the thing to watch.

Rising seas? You can watch that in action in low-lying coastal regions anywhere in the world, but for a convenient close-up, pay a visit to [Miami Beach, Florida](#). You’ll want to do that quickly, though, while it’s still there. Sea levels off Florida have been rising about an inch a year, and southern Florida, Miami Beach included, is built on porous limestone. These days, as a result, whenever an unusually high tide combines with a strong onshore wind, salt water comes bubbling up from the storm sewers and seeping right out of the ground, and the streets of Miami Beach end up hubcap-deep in it. Further inland, [seawater is infiltrating the aquifer from which southern Florida gets drinking water](#), and killing plants in low-lying areas near the coast.

The situation in southern Florida gets some press, but I suspect this is because Florida is a red state and the state government’s frantic denial that global warming is happening makes an easy target for humor. The same phenomenon is happening at varying paces elsewhere in the world, as a combination of thermal expansion of warming seawater, runoff from melting glaciers, and a grab-bag of local and regional oceanographic phenomena boosts sea level well above its historic place. Nothing significant is being done about it—to be fair, it’s unlikely that anything significant can be done about it at this point, short of a total moratorium on greenhouse gas generation, and the COP-21 talks made it painfully clear that that’s not going to happen.

Instead, southern Florida faces a fate that’s going to be all too familiar to many millions of people elsewhere in the world over the years ahead. As fresh water runs short and farm and orchard crops die from salt poisoning, [mass migration will be the order of the day](#). Over the short term, southern Florida will gradually turn into salt marsh; look further into the future, and you can see Florida’s ultimate destiny, as a region of shoals, reefs, and islets extending well out into the Gulf of Mexico, with the corroded ruins of skyscrapers rising from the sea here and there as a reminder of the fading past.

Does this sound like science fiction? It’s the inescapable consequence of changes that are already under way. Even if COP-21 had produced an agreement that mattered—say, a binding commitment on the part of all the world’s nations to cut greenhouse gas emissions immediately and lower them to zero by 2030—southern Florida would still be doomed. The processes that are driving sea levels up can’t turn on a dime; just as it took more than a century of unrestricted atmospheric pollution to begin the flooding of southern Florida, it would take a long time and a great deal of hard work to reverse that, even if the political will was available. As it is, the agreement signed in Paris simply means that the flooding will continue unchecked.

A far more dramatic series of events, meanwhile, is getting under way far north of Florida. Yes, that’s [the breakup of the Greenland ice sheet](#). During the last few summers, as unprecedented

warmth gripped the Arctic, rivers of meltwater have begun flowing across Greenland's glacial surface, plunging into a growing network of chasms and tunnels that riddle the ice sheet like the holes in Swiss cheese. This is new; discussions of Greenland's ice sheet from as little as five years ago didn't mention the meltwater rivers at all, much less the hollowing out of the ice. Equally new is the fact that the vast majority of that meltwater isn't flowing into the ocean—scientists have checked that, using every tool at their disposal up to and including legions of yellow rubber ducks tossed into meltwater streams.

What all this means is that in the decades immediately ahead of us, in all likelihood, we'll get to see a spectacle no human being has seen since the end of the last ice age: the catastrophic breakup of a major ice sheet. If you got taught in school, as so many American schoolchildren were, that the great glacial sheets of the ice age melted at an imperceptible pace, think again; glaciologists disproved that decades ago. What happens, instead, is a series of sudden collapses that kick the pace of melting into overdrive at unpredictable intervals. What paleoclimatologists call [global meltwater pulses](#)—sudden surges of ice and water from collapsing ice sheets—send sea levels soaring by several meters, drowning large tracts of land in an impressively short time.

Ice sheet collapses happen in a variety of ways, and Greenland is very well positioned to enact one of the better documented processes. The vast weight of all that ice pressing down on the crust through the millennia has turned the land beneath the ice into a shallow bowl surrounded by mountains—and that shallow bowl is where all the meltwater is going. Eventually the water will rise high enough to find an outlet to the sea, and when it does, it will begin to flow out—and it will take much of the ice with it.

As that happens, seismographs across the North Atlantic basin will go crazy as Greenland's ice sheet, tormented beyond endurance by the conflict between gravity and buoyancy, begins to break apart. A first great meltwater surge will vomit anything up to thousands of cubic miles of ice into the ocean. Huge icebergs will drift east and then south on the currents, and release more water as they melt. After that, summer after summer, the process will repeat itself, until some fraction of Greenland's total ice sheet has been dumped into the ocean. How large a fraction? That's impossible to know in advance, but all other things being equal, the more greenhouse gases get dumped into the atmosphere, the faster and more complete Greenland's breakup will be.

Oh, and did I mention that [the West Antarctic ice sheet is beginning to break up as well?](#)

The thing to keep in mind here is that the coming global meltwater pulse will have consequences all over the world. Once it happens—and again, the processes that will lead to that event are already well under way, and nothing the world's industrial nations are willing to do can stop it—it will simply be a matter of time before the statistically inevitable combination of high tides and stormwinds sends sea water flooding into New York City's subway system and the vast network of underground tunnels that houses much of the city's infrastructure. Every other coastal city in the world will wait for its own number to come up. No doubt we'll hear plenty of talk about building vast new flood defenses to keep back the rising waters, but let us please be real; any such project would require years of lead time and almost unimaginable amounts of money, and

no nation anywhere in the world is showing the least interest in doing the thing now, when it might still be an option.

There's a profound irony, in other words, in all the rhetoric from Paris about balancing concerns about the climate with the supposed need for perpetual economic growth. Imagine for a moment just how the coming global meltwater pulse will impact the world economy. Countless trillions of dollars in coastal infrastructure around the world will become "sunk costs" in more than a metaphorical sense; millions of people in low-lying areas such as southern Florida will have to relocate as their homes become uninhabitable, and trillions of dollars of real estate will have its value drop to zero. A galaxy of costs for which nobody is planning will have to be met out of government and business revenue streams that have been hammered by the direct and indirect effects of worldwide coastal flooding.

What's more, it won't be a single event, over and done with in a few weeks or months or years. Every year for decades or centuries to come, more ice and meltwater will go sluicing into the oceans, more coastal cities and regions will face that one seawater surge too many, more costs will have to be met out of what's left of a global economy that's running out of functioning deepwater ports among many other things. The result, as I've noted [in previous posts here](#), will be the disintegration of everything that counts as business as usual, and the opening phases of the bleak new reality that Frank Landis has sketched out in his harrowing new book [Hot Earth Dreams](#)—the best currently available book on what the world will look like in the wake of severe climate change, and thus inevitably ignored by everyone in the current environmental mainstream.

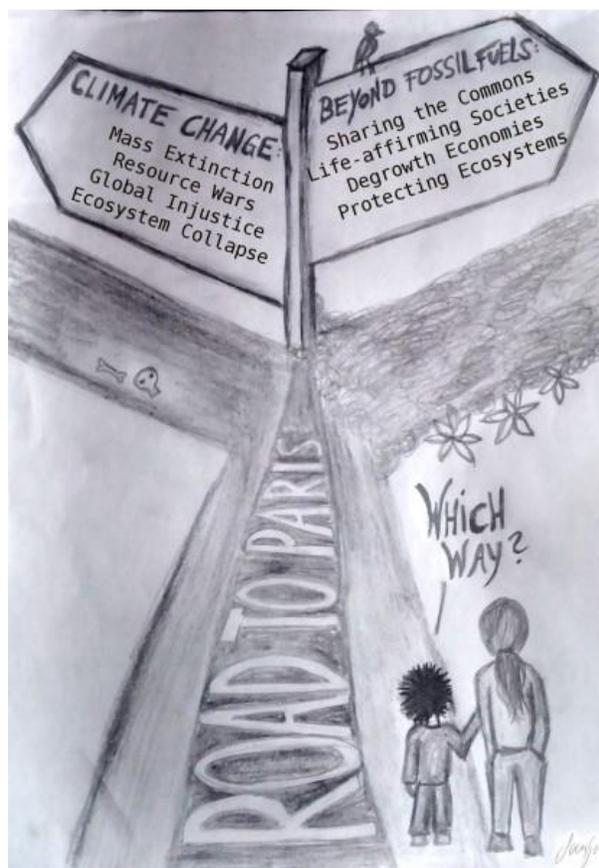
By the time COP-21's attendees convened in Paris, it was probably already too late to keep global climate change from spinning completely out of control. The embarrassingly feeble agreement that came out of that event, though, has guaranteed that nothing significant will be done. The hard political and economic realities that made any actual cut in greenhouse gas emissions all but unthinkable are just layers of icing on the cake, part of the predicament of our time—a predicament that defines the words "too little, too late" as our basic approach to the future looming up ahead of us.

"Stöwer Titanic" by Willy Stöwer, died on 31st May 1931 - Magazine Die Gartenlaube, en: Die Gartenlaube and de: Die Gartenlaube. Licensed under Public Domain via [Commons](#).

Everyone is the Mother of Victory

Justin Kenrick, originally published by Bella Caledonia | Dec 16, 2015

<http://www.resilience.org/stories/2015-12-16/everyone-is-the-mother-of-victory>



Everyone is the mother of victory; No one is the father of defeat. Do we claim COP21 as a success, and risk watching it being used by fossil fuel failures to carry on burning humanity, and so become complicit in defeat? Do we claim COP21 was a failure, and risk being the naysayers who didn't recognise the work needed to bring fossil fuels (instead of humanity) to an end? This Loki-esque question about our motives, about our fears for how we might appear, may seem beside the point if the fundamental question is “*Was the COP a success or a failure?*” And there are screeds of excellent articles assessing the outcome of the Paris COP Agreement, the Agreement that is now the world's governments' roadmap for addressing climate change.

On the side saying it has been a failure, we have [Friends of the Earth](#), [Climate Code Red](#), the [New Internationalist](#), [Kevin Anderson](#), and a zillion other campaigning groups and scientists:

- The [New Internationalist](#) describes the Paris deal as an ‘Epic fail on a planetary scale’ (see their [cartoon history](#) of climate negotiations) and conclude that, although “The Paris Agreement aims to keep the global average temperature rise to ‘well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C” in fact “the emission cuts contained in the agreement are based on *voluntary pledges* called ‘Intended Nationally Determined Contributions’ (INDCs) that governments [drew up individually before the talks](#), . . . [and] are going to lead us to 3.7° warming of the planet.”
- [George Monbiot](#) superbly sums up the talks, saying: “**By comparison to what it could have been, it’s a miracle. By comparison to what it should have been, it’s a disaster.**” He writes that: “A maximum of 1.5C, now an aspirational and unlikely target, was eminently achievable when the first UN climate change conference took place in Berlin in 1995. Two decades of procrastination, caused by lobbying – overt, covert and often downright sinister – by the fossil fuel lobby, coupled with the reluctance of governments to explain to their electorates that short-term thinking has long-term costs,

ensure that the window of opportunity is now three-quarters shut. The talks in Paris are the best there have ever been. And that is a terrible indictment.”

- **Climate Code Red** say the “plan is nothing more than business as usual. Worse, all possible gains of increased efficiency in vehicles or energy use in buildings will be negated because of increased and **growing consumption** [emphasis added]”. They argue: “The *coup de grace* in Paris was the formation of the ‘High Ambitions Group’, a grouping of developed countries led by the United States and the European Union and developing countries like the Marshall Islands and the Philippines”. While pushing for a “legally binding, ambitious and fair deal that would set out long-term targets reflecting current scientific knowledge about climate change”, this group secured ambitious targets, while allowing the USA and others to get “rid of the long-standing principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibility’ (CBDR), which became subordinated to the idea that “all parties must share” in the load regardless of its historical emissions”.

On the side saying it has been, or could be, a success, we have **WWF**, the **Economist**, **Avaaz**, and a whole host of mainstream politicians, diplomats and journalists:

- **The Economist** says that “the agreement surpassed what had been anticipated, delivering a range of compromises that all parties could live with” and, most crucially, sending a signal to **investors** [emphasis added] that “the united governments of the world say that the age of fossil fuels has started drawing to a close”. However, they point out that the Agreement “says nothing concrete about how much anyone has to do”, and that “bottom-up processes, rather than unenforceable UN mandates” are needed to “drive up the level of action”.
- Similarly, Tasneem Essop, head of the **WWF** delegation, says “The Paris agreement is an important milestone”, but WWF adds: “While the Paris agreement would go into effect in 2020, science tells us that in order to meet the global goal of limiting warming to 1.5C or well below 2C, emissions must peak before 2020 and sharply decline thereafter. The current pledges will provide about half of what is needed, leaving a 12 to 16 gigaton emissions gap.” However, echoing the point that a crucial signal is being sent to **investors**, WWF’s Samantha Smith concludes: “We are seeing the start of a global transition towards renewable energy. At the same time, we’re already witnessing irreversible impacts of climate change. The talks and surrounding commitments send a strong signal to everyone – the fossil fuel era is coming to an end.”
- And **Avaaz’s** positive reaction had me welling up as I read their optimistic take on the talks. It was unbearable reading what I hoped was true while being fully aware that the ‘3.7 degrees and rising’ trajectory continues. Avaaz titled its response ‘Victory! The end of fossil fuels has begun . . .’ Following up with: “World leaders at the UN climate talks have just set a landmark goal that can save everything we love! This is what we marched for, what we signed, called, donated, messaged, and hoped for: a brilliant and massive turning point in human history.” Reading this I allowed myself to feel – as they no doubt intended – the unbelievable relief I would feel if/ when we collectively side step this mass murder on a scale Dr Strangelove and other terrorists can only dream of. Feeling

that, welling up, I realised how much effort goes into remaining numb in the face of this, how much collective effort, hope and care is locked away in the coping strategy of frozen numbness.

What if the fundamental question is not *“Was the COP a success or a failure?”* but *“Can we use the COP to make fundamental change?”* and if so: *What change and how?*

The fossil fuel lobby will be delighted if our painting the COP as a failure means that it signals no change to the market, does not damage their share price and future projects, and so changes nothing.

Likewise, they’ll be delighted if our painting the COP as a success means nothing changes because we think that governments will take significant action without unprecedented pressure.

Either response means allowing them to continue to define the future, which means there won’t be one.

As ever, the trick is to refuse the way those in power seek to frame the question.

Meeting a Parliamentary committee in Kenya last month, one MP asked me “Are you here to protect Mt Elgon or help the squatters?” He was framing the question in the way both sides frame the [real] climate change debate: *“Are you going to protect the environment, or help the poor?”*



Here is 350’s Bill McKibben, following up on the Avaaz positive clarion call to arms with a powerful article in today’s Guardian titled [‘Climate deal: the pistol has fired, so why aren’t we running?’](#)

“With the [climate talks](#) in Paris now over, the world has set itself a serious goal: limit temperature rise to 1.5C. Or failing that, 2C. Hitting those targets is absolutely necessary: even the one-degree rise that we’ve already seen is wreaking havoc on everything from ice caps to ocean chemistry. But meeting it won’t be easy, given that we’re currently on track for between 4C and 5C. Our only hope is to decisively pick up the pace . . . the only important question, is: how fast . . .

“You’ve got to stop fracking right away (in fact, that may be the greatest imperative of all, since methane gas does its climate damage so fast). You have to start installing solar panels and windmills at a breakneck pace – and all over the world. The huge subsidies doled out to fossil fuel have to end yesterday, and the huge subsidies to renewable energy had better begin tomorrow. You have to raise the price of carbon steeply and quickly, so everyone gets a clear signal to get off of it . . .

“The world’s fossil fuel companies still have five times the carbon we can burn and have any hope of meeting even the 2C target – and they’re still determined to burn it. The [Koch Brothers](#) will spend \$900m on this year’s American elections. As we know from the ongoing Exxon scandal, there’s every reason to think that this industry will lie at every turn in an effort to hold on to their power – they’re clearly willing to break the planet if it means five or perhaps 10 more years of business as usual for them.”

What Avaaz, Bill McKibben’s 350 movement, and all the committed campaigners and scientists seek to create is a global mood/ movement/reality in which it is clear that investments in fossil fuels are going to be left stranded on a shrinking sandbank, while renewables surf into the economy of the future.

That is one of the two most urgent tasks we face. When a boat springs a leak, almost all attention needs to be on fixing that small but utterly significant hole, while some needs also be paid to the direction of travel – the second task. There’s no point fixing the hole, or securing renewable energy, if the boat is still powering us towards the rocks of social and ecological chaos.

In contrast to the action Bill McKibben invites us to get our teeth into right NOW, Kevin Anderson sums up the fantasyland of business as usual. He talks of the “techno-utopian framing of the Paris Agreement”. One that is “premised on future technologies removing huge quantities of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere” rather than on binding agreements for immediate cuts to emissions now. He concludes that we have to make:

“Fundamental changes to the political and economic framing of contemporary society. This is a mitigation challenge far beyond anything discussed in Paris – yet without it our well-intended aspirations will all too soon wither and die on the vine. We owe our children, our planet and ourselves more than that. So let Paris be the catalyst for a new paradigm – one in which we deliver a sustainable, equitable and **prosperous** [emphasis added] future for all.”

Andy Skuce stated this very clearly a few days ago in ‘[The Road to 2 degrees](#)’:

“If we are to achieve a stable climate, we will need to reverse this growth in emissions over a much shorter time period, **while maintaining the economies of the developed world and, crucially, allowing the possibility of economic growth for the majority of humanity** [emphasis added] that has not yet experienced the benefits of a developed-country middle-class lifestyle.” And he concludes that: “Had the world got its act together twenty years ago it could have adopted climate policies that were effective, feasible and fair. Of those three characteristics of good policy, at best, we now only get to pick two.”

Last week, George Marshall, in explaining ‘[Why we fear terrorism more than climate change](#)’, wrote:

“Climate change struggles to find a compelling narrative because it has no external enemy. We are all responsible, simply by living our lives and caring for our families [emphasis added].”

I’ll now pick up on all those places I’ve added emphasis.

It’s not just whether or not we choose to return wholeheartedly to the fray of this battle for a future, it is also the way we frame the debate, the direction of travel, that determines the outcome.

George Marshall, having argued that campaigning on climate change is so hard because we are all causing it, and because its consequences are so vast and measured in scientific data, but not yet, for most of us, experienced as immediate and specific, says:

“We are, above all, storytelling animals. Climate-change campaigners and scientists . . . mobilise narratives of imminent threat by focusing on enemies with clear intentions, be that Exxon, Shell, billionaire deniers or politicians, hoping to turn base data into emotional gold.”

But this is not a strong enough story on its own: a story of enemies out there, when we know just how deeply our actions implicate us in this process.

We need a far stronger story, but if so, then that story is going to challenge each of us as much as it challenges the 1%/ fossil fuel failures/capitalism/ whatever we choose to call ‘them’ . .

The words and phrases I’ve highlighted point to the assumption that our well-being depends on a system of economic growth. They point to our having been persuaded to believe that this growth is essential for prosperity, and that the ‘Global North’ has benefited from it and therefore the ‘Global South’ should too. How dare anyone ask the poor to forgo the emissions benefits of the rich?

As mentioned above, at a meeting with a Parliamentary committee in Kenya last month (and, yes, I fly there regularly), one MP asked me “Are you here to protect Mt Elgon or help the squatters?” I noted, above, that he was framing the question in the way both sides frame the [real] climate change debate: “*Are you going to protect the environment, or help the poor?*”

However, the real story of prosperity and well-being is quite different, almost the opposite. But to say ‘the opposite’ is to fall into the trap the paradigm sets you.

Luckily, we had to go and have a cuppa before the Parliamentary committee could see us, so I had the time to think how to respond, the time one normally only has afterwards – in fantasy – when it is too late.

Returning to the room I suggested that the real question was:

“Will we protect Mt Elgon in the only way possible: by securing the community lands of those whose ways of life has protected, sustained and been sustained by it?”

There is no opposition between the needs of the environment and the *needs* of the poor and the rest of us. Believing there is such an opposition is the first move in the old colonial game of divide and rule.

Resources are infinite if we treat them as finite, but vanish if we treat them as infinite.

There is plenty to go round if we limit the amount billionaires take for themselves, but not if we believe that our prosperity relies on their wealth.

Believing that in the end power and life comes down to money, means being persuaded that scarcity is the order of the day, that we must strive to have more than enough just to be sure to have enough (“your house is at risk”, “shares can go down as well as up”, “what about your pension”, “be realistic, knuckle down and do what you’re told”). In that framing, the question is: who has money, who doesn’t, and it’s never enough.

Remembering, instead, that in the end it all comes down to humanity, to how we live and how we die. That it comes down to making choices about the kind of society we live in and are willing to work for. In that framing, there can always be far more than enough of the effort, collective action, and achievement, more than money alone could ever be able to buy.

There are so many straightforward solutions that – implemented – would mean creating a society we could all relax and work hard in; and by doing so, take care of other societies, places and people. The contrast between that world, and living in the way we currently are (in a system so designed that we are daily implicated in the exploitation and death of other people, places, societies and ecologies), is maybe similar to the contrast between living in a war zone and living in peace: a zone that cuts right through us.

Here are just a few of the straightforward solutions that I’ve tripped over in the last few days:

- [Solving flooding](#) doesn’t need more investment in defences, just less investment in offences.
- The [basic income for all](#) has been tried and succeeded before. We can do away with poverty rather than the planet.

- There are other straightforward ways to end poverty, even (or especially) in the worst economic times. One town in Austria demonstrated this in the midst of the Great Depression. Their solution was so simple it was made illegal.

The solutions are in front of us: Do we revitalise and renew our world, or allow the enrichment juggernaut to persuade us to remain part of it, as it uses us up and spits us out?

Do we continue to frame this as the needs of the environment vs the needs of the poor, or do we see how this is just divide and rule, and decide to refuse the deception and instead to end poverty in a way that recognises what true wealth is, and in a way that secures our ecologies too?

As George Marshall says, we need to change the story we are telling ourselves.

But the story needs to go far deeper than defeating enemies.

- We need to overturn the story we have been told about what ‘reality’ is, when the story we have been told is so clearly the opposite of realistic.
- We need to be clear about campaigning with all our might against the fossil fuel lobby, but know that they are the tip of the iceberg, an iceberg that is so much deeper, that cuts through, numbs and freezes our hearts.
- Above all, we need to remember that progressive change never happens from above, it happens from below through an ability to sustain each other and resist.

Change happens by contagion.

Suddenly realising that we are not isolated and alone, one among billions, but head over heels, hundreds to zillions, connected and effective, our every act – helpful or unhelpful – rippling out.

Looking deeply into the despair of what we are doing to our world, yet taking the leap of action grounded in hope despite all that.

That is what the fossil fuel system doesn’t want. And this is what we are capable of.

Why Most of What You Think You Know About The Paris Climate Deal Is Wrong: An Annotated News Story

Avi Lewis and Rajiv Sicora

December 18, 2015

<http://theleap.thischangeeverything.org/why-most-of-what-you-think-you-know-about-the-paris-climate-deal-is-wrong-an-annotated-news-story-2/>



Photograph by Francois Mori/AP.

With a little distance from the COP21 climate negotiations in Paris, it's clear that the meaning of the deal struck there is deeply contested. From the euphoric pronouncements of politicians like U.S. President Obama (this is “the best chance we have to save the one planet that we’ve got”) to the scathing dismissal of climate scientist James Hansen (it’s a “fraud”), lots of people reading the coverage of the agreement are understandably confused about what to make of it.

As independent journalists who were in Paris for the duration of the talks, following the twists and turns of the negotiations, we’ve been dismayed (if not surprised) by how faithfully large news organizations have reported spin as fact.

So in the spirit of correcting the record, we’ve annotated parts of a typical news story on the deal. While we chose the *New York Times*, we could easily have done the same for any of the major wire services or other big news organizations: the coverage was by and large as homogenous as it was inaccurate.

Nations Approve Landmark Climate Accord in Paris

By CORAL DAVENPORT

DEC. 12, 2015

LE BOURGET, France — With the sudden bang of a gavel Saturday night, representatives of 195 nations reached a landmark accord that will, for the first time, commit nearly every country to lowering planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions to help stave off the most drastic effects of climate change.

If only this were true. In fact, the agreement does not commit countries to lowering emissions. To be sure, the text “invites,” “recommends,” “encourages,” “requests,” “further requests,” and even “urges” countries to do a number of procedural things. And there are reporting requirements. But the key obligation on each one is to submit goals that it “intends to achieve.” As long as a country’s goals are regularly updated, and as long as governments “pursue” actions “with the aim of achieving the objectives,” they are all free to completely fail to lower emissions without consequence.

The deal, which was met with an eruption of cheers and ovations from thousands of delegates gathered from around the world, represents a historic breakthrough on an issue that has foiled decades of international efforts to address climate change.

Given that the deal just binds countries to a process, rather than actual results, the smog of self-congratulation has been surprisingly thick. John Kerry boasted that it would “prevent the worst, most devastating consequences of climate change from ever happening.” Al Gore called it a “universal and ambitious agreement,” and insisted that the era of “sustainable economic growth is now firmly and inevitably underway.”

We learned from Richard Branson that “the course of history has shifted”—thanks to “the world’s greatest diplomatic success,” as a headline in *The Guardian* proclaimed. Bloggers like Jonathan Chait called it “one of the great triumphs in history.” Economists like Jeffrey Sachs said that “agreements such as these appeal to our better angels” and called on us to “hail the Paris climate change agreement and get to work.”

Traditionally, such pacts have required developed economies like the United States to take action to lower greenhouse gas emissions, but they have exempted developing countries like China and India from such obligations.

The accord, which United Nations diplomats have been working toward for nine years, changes that dynamic by requiring action in some form from every country, rich or poor.

Actually, the deal changes the dynamic by all but erasing the crucial principle of equity from the climate regime.

The Paris deal pays lip service to the idea of “common but differentiated responsibilities” (CBDR), which was a bedrock of the UN climate convention that began these talks in 1992. It says that the richest, long-time polluters are obligated to cut emissions first and deepest, while providing climate finance for poor countries, where people are the least culpable and the most vulnerable.

But inside the Paris talks, wealthy countries launched a determined assault on that idea, waging a successful campaign to shift far more of the burden onto the countries of the global South. That’s not going to be a helpful “dynamic” in the years ahead, particularly because many of those developing countries are already leading on climate policy—another under-reported fact that is key to understanding the true nature of the Paris deal.

According to a landmark civil society review of current climate pledges, when you factor in each country’s responsibility for historical emissions and its capacity to pay for climate action, developing countries—including China and India—are already doing their fair share (or even more). Rich countries are not. The US and EU have each pledged roughly a fifth of their fair shares.

“This is truly a historic moment,” the United Nations secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, said in an interview. “For the first time, we have a truly universal agreement on climate change, one of the most crucial problems on earth.”

What Does a Climate Deal Mean for the World?

A group of 195 nations reached a landmark climate agreement on Saturday. Here is what it means for the planet, business, politics and other areas.

President Obama, who regards tackling climate change as a central element of his legacy, spoke of the deal in a televised address from the White House. “This agreement sends a powerful signal that the world is fully committed to a low-carbon future,” he said. “We’ve shown that the world has both the will and the ability to take on this challenge.”

As Obama crafts his climate legacy, the U.S. role in the negotiations has been woefully under-reported. One of the key U.S. goals in Paris was to rule out liability or mandatory compensation for climate damages in poor countries. To help push through that and other demands, Obama’s negotiators cynically dangled support for a temperature target of 1.5 degrees Celsius—the goal that low-lying island and African nations have long fought for, given that their survival is at stake.

It seems that was enough to convince many poor countries to drop their demand for a strong “loss and damage” mechanism that could have been an immediate, concrete lifeline for countries hardest hit by the climate crisis. And in the end, of course, the “carrot” of 1.5 degrees was withdrawn and the very weakest language related to the temperature target was adopted. The final deal sets a goal of “well below” 2 degrees Celsius, adding only that governments should “pursue efforts” to meet the 1.5 target.

But the damage to “loss and damage” had been done.

The U.S. was also behind a last-minute “technical correction” announced at the scene of celebration at the final plenary. While this was presented in many news accounts as the great grammatical catch that saved a global climate deal, it actually marked the final watering down of the text. The U.S. insisted on changing the word “shall” (legally binding) to “should” (clearly not) in a crucial section: the duty of industrialized countries like the U.S. to take the lead on cutting emissions. From the beginning of the negotiations process in Paris, developing countries found themselves outmaneuvered and outnumbered, with smaller delegations struggling to keep up with the dozens of closed-door sessions happening at any one time. Civil society organizations and frontline voices, meanwhile, were often simply shut out.

Scientists and leaders said the talks here represented the world’s last, best hope of striking a deal that would begin to avert the most devastating effects of a warming planet.

Mr. Ban said there was “no Plan B” if the deal fell apart. The Eiffel Tower was illuminated with that phrase Friday night.

The new deal will not, on its own, solve global warming. At best, scientists who have analyzed it say, it will cut global greenhouse gas emissions by about half enough as is necessary to stave off an increase in atmospheric temperatures of 2 degrees Celsius or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit. That is the point at which, scientific studies have concluded, the world will be locked into a future of devastating consequences, including rising sea levels, severe droughts and flooding, widespread food and water shortages and more destructive storms.

In fact, one of the most remarkable features of the agreement is that it makes a point of highlighting its own inadequacy, noting that “much greater emission reduction efforts will be required” to meet even the 2 degree temperature target—and that current country commitments will likely lead to a 3 or even 4 degree temperature rise. That level of climate change, experts say, is “incompatible with any reasonable characterization of an organized, equitable and civilized global community.”

No major news organization felt that this fact might serve as a strong lead. But even buried deep in a news story, it puts all the triumphalism in a different light. This is a special breed of “historic breakthrough,” one that asserts itself as totally insufficient and that happens to put us on a path to apocalypse.

But the Paris deal could represent the moment at which, because of a shift in global economic policy, the inexorable rise in planet-warming carbon emissions that started during the Industrial Revolution began to level out and eventually decline.

At the same time, the deal could be viewed as a signal to global financial and energy markets, triggering a fundamental shift away from investment in coal, oil and gas as primary energy sources toward zero-carbon energy sources like wind, solar and nuclear power.

This is an interpretation shared by both politicians and many large environmental groups. It is clear that climate campaigners will be using the deal to pressure governments to make precisely this kind of historic shift.

But again, the text itself tells a different story. It never mentions fossil fuels. Not once. The phrase “renewable energy” appears a single time.

In fact, in the definition of the long-term emissions reduction goal (the absolute weakest option that had been on the table in Paris), we catch a glimpse of the future envisioned by the parties. The text says that countries will “aim” for a “balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century.”

First of all, experts are pretty unequivocal that we should be entirely off of fossil fuels by mid-century. By introducing the notion that, post 2050, we can balance emissions with the removal of carbon from the atmosphere, the Paris deal keeps the door wide open for fossil fuel corporations to continue polluting, as long as they try to develop unproven and risky technologies to capture carbon and store it somewhere. This language also throws a lifeline to carbon trading schemes with so-called “offsets,” which have failed miserably at reducing emissions, while too often displacing communities from their traditional lands to clear the way for monocrop plantations.

Inside the Paris Climate Deal

There’s a lot we could say about the historical and political context of these talks, but we’ll stick to the deal itself. Skip ahead a bit for the next comment.

Highlights from the final draft text of a climate agreement submitted to the delegates in Paris.

“The world finally has a framework for cooperating on climate change that’s suited to the task,” said Michael Levi, an expert on energy and climate change policy at the Council on Foreign Relations. “Whether or not this becomes a true turning point for the world, though, depends critically on how seriously countries follow through.”

Just five years ago, such a deal seemed politically impossible. A similar 2009 climate change summit meeting in Copenhagen collapsed in acrimonious failure after countries could not unite around a deal.

Unlike in Copenhagen, Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius of France said on Saturday, the stars for this assembly were aligned.

The changes that led to the Paris accord came about through a mix of factors, particularly major shifts in the domestic politics and bilateral relationships of China and the United States, the world’s two largest greenhouse gas polluters.

Since the Copenhagen deal collapsed, scientific studies have confirmed that the earliest impacts of climate change have started to sweep across the planet. While scientists once warned that climate change was a problem for future generations, recent scientific reports have concluded

that it has started to wreak havoc now, from flooding in Miami to droughts and water shortages in China.

In a remarkable shift from their previous standoffs over the issue, senior officials from both the United States and China praised the Paris accord on Saturday night.

Representatives of the “high-ambition coalition,” including Foreign Minister Tony de Brum of the Marshall Islands, left, wore lapel pins made of dried coconut fronds, a symbol of Mr. de Brum’s country.

Secretary of State John Kerry, who has spent the past year negotiating behind the scenes with his Chinese and Indian counterparts in order to help broker the deal, said, “The world has come together around an agreement that will empower us to chart a new path for our planet.”

Xie Zhenhua, the senior Chinese climate change negotiator, said, “The agreement is not perfect, and there are some areas in need of improvement.” But he added, “This does not prevent us from marching forward with this historic step.” Mr. Xie called the deal “fair and just, comprehensive and balanced, highly ambitious, enduring and effective.”

Negotiators from many countries have said that a crucial moment in the path to the Paris accord came last year in the United States, when Mr. Obama enacted the nation’s first climate change policy — a set of stringent new Environmental Protection Agency regulations designed to slash greenhouse gas pollution from the nation’s coal-fired power plants. Meanwhile, in China, the growing internal criticism over air pollution from coal-fired power plants led President Xi Jinping to pursue domestic policies to cut coal use.

In November 2014 in Beijing, Mr. Obama and Mr. Xi announced that they would jointly pursue plans to cut domestic greenhouse gas emissions. That breakthrough announcement was seen as paving the way to the Paris deal, in which nearly all the world’s nations have jointly announced similar plans.

The final language did not fully satisfy everyone. Representatives of some developing nations expressed consternation. Poorer countries had pushed for a legally binding provision requiring that rich countries appropriate a minimum of at least \$100 billion a year to help them mitigate and adapt to the ravages of climate change. In the final deal, that \$100 billion figure appears only in a preamble, not in the legally binding portion of the agreement.

The way it treats climate finance is another major failing of the Paris deal, though it has received little attention in the reporting. In fact, a little context makes this development even starker.

For developing countries, this issue has been one of the crucial sticking points in negotiations for the last decade. The Paris deal represents a huge step backwards.

First of all, the goal of \$100 billion a year has been weakened, with developed countries striking any mention of “new” or “additional” funding from the legally-binding part of the agreement. There is no real process for strengthening existing finance commitments.

And even those existing commitments are not being honoured. Not even close. Much of the \$100 billion was supposed to be channeled through the “Green Climate Fund,” created in 2010. It took 4 years for pledges to the fund to reach a mere \$10 billion. By the start of the Paris talks, less than \$1 billion had actually been collected, and a first round of projects amounting to a grand total of \$168 million was hurriedly approved.

Finally, the goal of raising \$100 billion per year was woefully inadequate to begin with. According to the International Energy Agency, in order to meet the 2 degree goal, annual green energy and efficiency investments need to be approaching \$1 *trillion* by 2020, with most new spending happening in the developing world.

“We’ve always said that it was important that the \$100 billion was anchored in the agreement,” said Tosi Mpanu-Mpanu, a negotiator for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the incoming leader of a coalition known as the Least Developed Countries coalition. In the end, though, they let it go.

Despite the historic nature of the Paris climate accord, its success still depends heavily on two factors outside the parameter of the deal: global peer pressure and the actions of future governments.

The core of the Paris deal is a requirement that every nation take part. Ahead of the Paris talks, governments of 186 nations put forth public plans detailing how they would cut carbon emissions through 2025 or 2030.

Those plans alone, once enacted, will cut emissions by half the levels required to stave off the worst effects of global warming. The national plans vary vastly in scope and ambition — while every country is required to put forward a plan, there is no legal requirement dictating how, or how much, countries should cut emissions.

Thus, the Paris pact has built in a series of legally binding requirements that countries ratchet up the stringency of their climate change policies in the future. Countries will be required to reconvene every five years, starting in 2020, with updated plans that would tighten their emissions cuts.

Countries will also be legally required to reconvene every five years starting in 2023 to publicly report on how they are doing in cutting emissions compared to their plans. They will be legally required to monitor and report on their emissions levels and reductions, using a universal accounting system.

We can’t afford to wait years for our global political class to “ratchet up” its ambition. Thankfully, countless movements around the world are already leading the way, today, where the real action is—keeping fossil fuels in the ground and championing alternatives, whether it’s kicking Shell out of the Arctic or building community wind and solar from Germany to Bangladesh. Every week, these movements are racking up new victories, building pressure from below for governments to take the kind of ambitious action that the crisis—and the science—demands.

And that is where we see the best hope of urgent, immediate climate action: local victories building momentum and power, politicians taking their cue and implementing scaled-up policy frameworks that translate those breakthroughs to the regional and national levels.

A great example is the city of Portland, where years of local victories against coal export terminals and Arctic drilling schemes have culminated in the municipal government passing a resolution against any new fossil fuel infrastructure. And now cities across the Pacific Northwest of the U.S. are discussing doing the same.

There is nothing triumphant about declarations of intent at diplomatic confabs. But as movements ratchet up the pressure on the politicians who spoke such fine words in Paris, history could indeed be written in the wake of this deal.

And it better be. We need to see signs of genuine, real-world progress before the “Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement...take[s] stock of the implementation of this Agreement to assess the collective progress towards achieving the purpose of this Agreement and its long-term goals” in eight long, hot years’ time.

Journalist and documentary filmmaker Avi Lewis is director of the feature documentaries This Changes Everything (2015), inspired by the 2014 book by Naomi Klein, and The Take (2004). Rajiv Sicora edits The Leap, and worked with Naomi Klein as leader of the research team on This Changes Everything from 2010-14.

James Hansen, father of climate change awareness, calls Paris talks ‘a fraud’

The former NASA scientist criticizes the talks, intended to reach a new global deal on cutting carbon emissions beyond 2020, as ‘no action, just promises’

‘Many of the conservatives know climate change is not a hoax,’ James Hansen says. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod for the Guardian

Oliver Milman

Saturday 12 December 2015

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/12/james-hansen-climate-change-paris-talks-fraud>

Mere mention of the Paris climate talks is enough to make [James Hansen](#) grumpy. The former NASA scientist, considered the father of global awareness of climate change, is a soft-spoken, almost diffident Iowan. But when he talks about the gathering of nearly 200 nations, his demeanour changes.

“It’s a fraud really, a fake,” he says, rubbing his head. “It’s just bullshit for them to say: ‘[We’ll have a 2C warming target](#) and then try to do a little better every five years.’ It’s just worthless words. There is no action, just promises. As long as fossil fuels appear to be the cheapest fuels out there, they will be continued to be burned.”

The talks, intended to reach a new global deal on cutting carbon emissions beyond 2020, have spent much time and energy on two major issues: whether the world should aim to contain the temperature rise [to 1.5C or 2C](#) above preindustrial levels, and [how much funding](#) should be doled out by wealthy countries to developing nations that risk being swamped by rising seas and bashed by escalating extreme weather events.

But, according to Hansen, the international jamboree is pointless unless greenhouse gas emissions are taxed across the board. He argues that only this will force down emissions quickly enough to avoid the worst ravages of climate change.

Hansen, 74, has just returned from Paris where he again called for a price to be placed on each tonne of carbon from major emitters (he’s [suggested](#) a “fee” – because “taxes scare people off” – of \$15 a tonne that would rise \$10 a year and bring in \$600bn in the US alone). There aren’t many takers, even among “big green” as Hansen labels environment groups.

Hansen has been a nagging yet respected voice on climate change since he shot to prominence in the summer of 1988. The [NASA](#) scientists, who had been analyzing changes in the Earth’s climate since the 1970s, told a congressional committee that something called the “greenhouse effect” where heat-trapped gases are released into the atmosphere was causing global warming with a 99% certainty.

A New York Times [report of the 1988 testimony](#) includes the radical suggestion that there should be a “sharp reduction in the burning of coal, oil and other fossil fuels that release carbon dioxide”, a plea familiar to those who have watched politicians who have traipsed up to the lectern or interviewer’s microphone in Paris over the past two weeks.

After that, things started to get a little difficult for Hansen. He claims the White House altered subsequent testimony, given in 1989, and that NASA appointed a media overseer who vetted what he said to the press. They held practice press conferences where any suggestion that fossil fuels be reduced was considered political and unscientific, and therefore should not be uttered.

“Scientists are trained to be objective,” Hansen says. “I don’t think we should be prevented for talking about the implications of science.” He retired from NASA in 2013. “That was a source of friction. I held on longer than I wanted, by a year or two. I was in my 70s, it was time for someone else to take over. Now I feel a lot better.”

A man rides his bicycle on yellow paint poured on the street during a protest by activists from environmental group Greenpeace on the Champs-Elysee in Paris. Photograph: Christophe Ena/AP

From being possibly America’s most celebrated scientist, Hansen is now probably its most prominent climate activist. He’s been [arrested](#) several times in protests outside the White House over mining and the controversial Keystone pipeline extension.

He is also an adjunct professor at Columbia University. When he’s in New York, he lives near the campus, surrounded by books piled on groaning shelves. Hansen’s not slowing down – he’s involved in a [climate lobbying group](#) and still undertakes the sort of scientific endeavor which helps maintain his gravitas.

One [particular paper](#), released in July, painted a particularly bleak future for just about anyone living near the coast. Hansen and 16 colleagues found that Earth’s huge ice sheets, such as those found in Greenland, are melting faster than expected, meaning that even the 2C warming limit is “highly dangerous”.

The sea level could soon be up to five meters higher than it is today by the latter part of this century, unless greenhouse gases aren’t radically slashed, the paper states. This would inundate many of the world’s cities, including London, New York, Miami and Shanghai.

“More than half of the world’s cities of the world are at risk,” Hansen says. “If you talk to glaciologists privately they will tell you they are very concerned we are locking in much more significant sea level rises than the ice sheet models are telling us.

“The economic cost of a business as usual approach to emissions is incalculable. It will become questionable whether global governance will break down. You’re talking about hundreds of millions of climate refugees from places such as Pakistan and China. We just can’t let that happen. Civilization was set up and developed with a stable, constant coastline.”

The paper has yet to be fully peer reviewed and some of Hansen's colleagues, including his protégé at NASA, Gavin Schmidt, have [voiced their doubts](#) whether sea level rise will be quite this bad, with the IPCC projecting up to a meter by 2100.

Brickbats are thrown in a bipartisan way. Hansen feels Obama, who has made climate change a legacy issue in his final year in office, has botched the opportunity to tackle the issue.

“We all foolishly had such high hopes for Obama, to articulate things, to be like Roosevelt and have fireside chats to explain to the public why we need to have a rising fee on carbon in order to move to clean energy,” he says. “But he's not particularly good at that. He didn't make it a priority and now it's too late for him.”

Hansen is just as scathing of leading Republicans who have embraced climate science denialism to the chagrin of some party elders.

Leading presidential candidates Donald Trump, Marco Rubio and Ben Carson have all derided evidence that the world is warming due to human activity while Ted Cruz, another contender, has taken time out from his campaign to sit on an inquiry into climate science that [has heard testimony](#) from a rightwing radio host who has no scientific background.

“It's all embarrassing really,” Hansen says. “After a while you realise as a scientist that politicians don't act rationally.”

“Many of the conservatives know climate change is not a hoax. But those running for president are hamstrung by the fact they think they can't get the nomination if they say this is an issue. They wouldn't get money from the fossil fuel industry.”

There is a positive note to end on, however. Global emissions have [somewhat stalled](#) and Hansen believes China, the world's largest emitter, will now step up to provide the leadership lacking from the US. A submerged Fifth Avenue and deadly heatwaves aren't an inevitability.

“I think we will get there because China is rational,” Hansen says. “Their leaders are mostly trained in engineering and such things, they don't deny climate change and they have a huge incentive, which is air pollution. It's so bad in their cities they need to move to clean energies. They realise it's not a hoax. But they will need co-operation.”

[Comments 762](#)

AGU 2015: Scientists react to Paris agreement on climate change



Main image: The AGU Fall meeting, 2012. Credit: Euphro/Flickr.

Roz Pidcock

18 December 2015 16:52

http://www.carbonbrief.org/agu-2015-scientists-react-to-paris-agreement-on-climate-change?utm_source=Daily+Carbon+Briefing&utm_campaign=61b2672363-cb_daily&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_876aab4fd7-61b2672363-303461217

With the ink only just dry on the agreement signed in Paris to curb global carbon emissions, scientists at this year's [American Geophysical Union](#) conference in San Francisco have been reacting to the landmark deal and digesting some of the finer details.

Here are a few scientists Carbon Brief found at the conference to share their thoughts on what the Paris agreement means and where the world goes from here.

- [Dr Jason Box](#) – Professor at the Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland on countries' pledges and meeting the 2C target.
- [Prof Ram Ramanathan](#) – Professor of atmospheric and climate sciences at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography and member of the Holy See delegation at COP21 on a global achievement.

- [Dr Friederike Otto](#) – Senior researcher on extreme weather attribution at the Environmental Change Institute at the University of Oxford on recognising the threat to developing countries.
- [Dr Dáithí Stone](#) – Research scientist in the detection and attribution of extreme weather at the Lawrence Berkeley Lab on loss and damage.
- [Zeke Hausfather](#) – Energy systems analyst and environmental economist at Berkeley Earth on the carbon budget for 1.5C, the ratchet mechanism and carbon capture.
- [Dr Ricarda Winkelmann](#) – Junior professor of climate system analysis at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Change Impacts on tipping points in the Antarctic ice sheet.

Sharelines from this story

- [#AGU15: Scientists react to Paris agreement on climate change | #ParisAgreement #COP21](#)

Carl Pope: Paris Agreement ‘Greatest Single Victory Since Emergence of Modern Environmental Movement’

Carl Pope | December 14, 2015

[Comments](#)

http://ecowatch.com/2015/12/14/paris-agreement/?utm_source=EcoWatch+List&utm_campaign=8b4680b31d-Top_News_12_14_2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_49c7d43dc9-8b4680b31d-85960137

Dear friends,

[The world acted](#). Not perfectly, not timely, but with seriousness and gravity. The metaphor of the day was some variant on turning point/pivot/fork in the road/hinge of history. No one proclaimed “mission accomplished.”

Beyond ratifying the substantial but inadequate voluntary national commitments to lower climate emissions which had already emerged as the first major Paris contribution to climate progress, the [final Paris agreement](#) opened three major avenues for climate advocates and solutions.

First, perhaps most important, the entire world, including Iran and Venezuela and Saudi Arabia, agreed that the fossil fuel era will end this century. It will thus end while most of the world’s already identified fossil fuel reserves are still in the ground. The end of the carbon era in human economics may or may not come in time to avoid the worst climate chaos, but come it will and the pace of market adjustment to this shocking new reality will now accelerate. The collapse in the market value of coal companies was just the early warning signal of a sudden shift in economic power and importance. It may be too late for most institutional investors to avoid taking a bath on their fossil fuel portfolios.

Second, this reality will unlock a freshet of new investment in a huge variety of low carbon solutions. Some—like rail—mature but newly valued; some—like the emerging technologies to be incubated by Bill Gates’ new [Clean Tech Initiative](#)—still unproven and others—like the [solar panels](#) which Narendra Modi’s [Solar Alliance](#) will perfect and deploy—on the verge of sweeping away their fossil fuel competitors. As this new wave of investment drives the price of low carbon infrastructure down even lower, the requirement that national goals be regularly and transparently updated every five years guarantees that, nations will further cut emissions to capture the new economic opportunities. We are only half way to closing the 2 degree emissions gap, still further from the needed (and now formally aspired) to 1.5 degrees goal. But the new economics of clean energy in 2020 should take us where we need to go.

Third, the Paris Accord plucked most of the low-hanging fruit for climate diplomacy. The remaining issues—how to create a reliable environment for massive, private north to south low-carbon investment; who pays for damages and losses which result from [climate change](#) not

avoided; how cities, particularly in the global south, access capital to build resilient infrastructure to withstand a less friendly climate are much harder. But they also now stand out starkly as the focus for dialogue and the benchmarks for further progress. The unwillingness of global elites to revisit outmoded institutional assumptions—for example that nation states don't need to make a seat at the climate table for their cities, that the U.S. and Europe can ration the flow of development finance to the Global South or that ad hoc, after the fact disaster relief is a reasonable global mechanisms to deal with massive and growing natural disasters—is now clear as the focus for urgent attention.

Thus far we have stumbled in the diplomatic arena towards modest indeed levels of agreement, amidst massive mistrust in an atmosphere polluted by [climate denia](#)list's (until today successful) effort to delay collective recognition. The aha moment has come. Now we are free—if we choose—to race towards first climate stability and then, once we reach that plateau and stand poised to actually lower concentrations of greenhouse gasses, climate recovery.

My own deep engagement with this effort begin in 2005, when the Sierra Club's grassroots leadership decided to pour everything we had into confronting climate. We took on preventing America from doubling down on its reliance on coal as our first challenge—a campaign whose success made a substantial contribution to the ability of the U.S. to follow the [road to Paris](#). It has been ten years—but this weekend's announcement is, I think without doubt, the greatest single victory since the emergence of the modern environmental movement.

Thank you everyone.

Why we should feel positive about Paris

*Though the deal was a dud, this was no Copenhagen, argue **Jess Worth** and **Danny Chivers**.*

December 13, 2015

<http://newint.org/features/web-exclusive/2015/12/13/why-we-should-feel-positive-about-paris/>



'D12' day of action, Paris, France, 12 December 2015. Yann Levy / 350.org under a [Creative Commons Licence](#)

As the final text of the Paris deal was being wrestled into shape, we were standing near the Arc de Triomphe, underneath a huge red line. This stretch of scarlet fabric was one of many held aloft by chanting and singing members of a 15,000-strong crowd. They – we – were there to demand climate justice; to condemn an international deal that we already knew would cross crucial red lines for the climate.



‘D12’ day of action, Paris, France, 12 December 2015. Yann Levy / 350.org

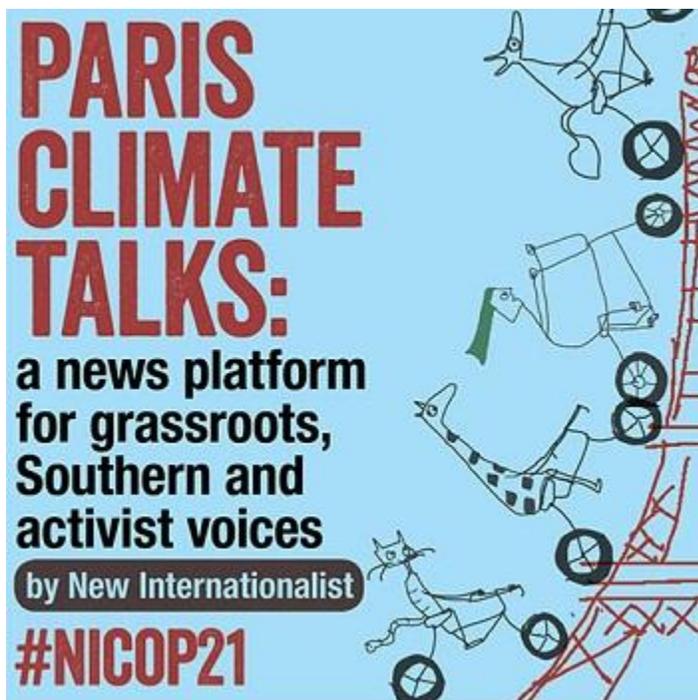
At the front of the #redlines demonstration, representatives from Indigenous and frontline communities gave powerful speeches, explaining how the Paris deal contained nothing to prevent the pollution and destruction of their lands and cultures. At the same time, [mainstream media outlets](#) – and supposedly ‘progressive’ NGOs like [Avaaz](#) – were preparing to announce a ‘historic deal’ that would signal the end of the fossil fuel age and catapult us into a bright, clean energy future.

In reality, [the details of the Paris deal are dreadful](#). The contrast between the [analysis from people on the frontlines of climate change](#), and the triumphant rhetoric of governments and many NGOs, could not be more stark. Indigenous peoples at the talks condemned it as a package of ‘[false solutions](#)’. The peasant farmers’ movement La Via Campesina called it a ‘[masquerade](#)’. Friends of the Earth International called it a ‘[sham](#)’. Our email inboxes are full of quotes from frontline representatives horrified at a deal that – if followed to the letter – would mean at least a 2.7 degree temperature rise and the utter devastation of their communities.

We understand why so many people want to celebrate this deal. There’s precious little good news on the climate change front. There is a risk that too much negativity [will make people switch off](#) and succumb to the same cold wind of despair that swept across climate change campaigns in the North after the collapse of Copenhagen. But the thing is, we’re not feeling negative. Despite the dire details of the deal, we’re feeling uplifted and hopeful from our time in Paris. That positivity comes not from the negotiation chambers, but from the incredible activities out on the streets of Paris and around the world over these last two weeks.

Of course there are elements of the deal that climate justice activists can use. The fact that governments have theoretically signed up to a 1.5 C degree warming limit does provide, in the words of ActionAid, ‘[an important hook on which people can hang their demands](#)’. The vague promise of ‘balancing’ carbon emissions by the second half of the century gives added weight to arguments that the fossil fuel industry is ultimately doomed. Our movements should, and must, use these statements as tools in our struggles. But to openly celebrate this deal would be a kick in the teeth to the hundreds of millions of people for whom its wording spells out the end of their homes and livelihoods.

To praise governments for achieving this agreement would implicitly endorse the bullying and misinformation tactics that were used to create it. From the myth of the ‘[high-ambition hundred](#)’ [who were really only 15](#), to the [demonising of developing countries](#) for attempting to defend their development rights, to the [shameful last-minute attempts by the US](#) to bust the whole deal and go home; by calling Paris a ‘success’ we imply that these methods were acceptable.



Visit our [#NICOP21 Paris media hub](#)

The climate justice movement has learned and grown since Copenhagen. Activists went into these talks with their eyes open, [knowing in advance](#) that our politicians (and the corporations [who massively influence them](#)) would not deliver an adequate deal. Rather than focus their hopes and energies on the summit itself, people have used it as an opportunity to organize, to mobilize, to build new links, strengthen existing networks and announce ambitious future [plans for action](#).

Despite the French government’s opportunistic protest ban, people have come together with courage, creativity and determination to make their dissent known. Despite [house arrests](#) and [police crackdowns](#), thousands [took to the streets without permission](#) at the start of the talks. Six hundred advertisements across Paris were replaced with works of [revolutionary climate art](#). An

unofficial critical tour of the ‘Solutions 21’ [corporate greenwash fair](#) was met by an over-the-top police response; our film of the event has now been viewed [more than 7 million times](#). A new global movement for ‘fossil free culture’ was launched with a [rebel performance at the Louvre](#) that saw ten arrests and a daring [illicit video message](#) from inside a police cell. Hundreds took part in the [Climate Games](#), launching creative stunts from [vegetable invasions](#) to [toilet-roll hijacks](#).

Frontline communities have played a leading role in these activities. La Via Campesina [targeted Danone’s headquarters](#) in a challenge to agribusiness’ false climate solutions. Indigenous representatives from the incredible [It Takes Roots](#) grassroots delegation opened the Paris demonstrations with a [powerful healing ritual](#). Alongside other Indigenous and frontline representatives they held [a series of events and actions](#) throughout the fortnight, including a [flotilla](#) of kayaks challenging fossil fuel extraction and an [outspoken protest](#) at the headquarters of oil company Total.

By December 12th, the ‘state of emergency’ protest restrictions had been largely shown up as unenforceable and - with huge numbers expected - the French government had little choice but to give permission for the [#redlines](#) action by the Arc de Triomphe. Thousands of people chose to push things further, with an unauthorised march to the Eiffel Tower and a sit-in on the Pont des Arts bridge. None of this would have seemed possible a fortnight ago – the tens of thousands gathered in Paris had effectively overturned the protest ban and taken back the streets.

Yesterday’s red lines represented the basic criteria for survival that the Paris deal has failed to meet. The protest was a clear statement of intent: if governments won’t defend these lines, then we, the people, will. Unlike Copenhagen – which ended with a freezing, frustrated gathering hemmed in by riot police – people will be flooding home from Paris with renewed determination, connections, and inspiration, ready to bring the fight back to where they live.

Most important of all are the steps that have been taken to build solidarity between Northern campaigners and Southern, Indigenous and frontline activists. To take just one example: an extraordinary gathering called [‘Frontline Fightback’](#) brought together over 100 people from 30 different countries, from South Africa to El Salvador to Palestine, to share strategies of resistance and build common ground. There is still a long way to go – and some Northern organizers are still getting things [disastrously wrong](#) – but the understanding is growing that the true leaders of the climate movement are the people [fighting fossil fuel extraction and false climate solutions](#) in their own communities and on their own lands. In the words of [Kandi Mossett](#) in yesterday’s Indigenous bloc, ‘we are the frontlines, we are the red lines’.



Indigenous bloc at 'red lines' actions, Paris, France, 12 December 2015. Allan Lisner / Indigenous Environment Network

It is in these global alliances, in building a true movement of movements, that real hope now lies. So when we see well-intentioned Northern campaigners hailing the Paris deal as a success, or a 'good first step' we feel serious concern. If we promote this narrative, then we are shutting out the voices of those [whose rights and lives have been trampled](#) by the text of the agreement.

To say that this is a bad deal is not giving in to despair. It is opening the door to a different kind of hope. The Paris deal lays down a marker – it tells us how far our governments have come, and how much further things now need to be pushed. Yes, we can use elements of the Paris deal as tools in the struggle, but most of us know that even a perfect deal on paper would not deliver the real changes we need without serious pressure from below. We need to take our dreams away from politicians and invest them in ourselves.

Through our own actions, we can make fossil fuels politically, economically, physically impossible to extract. We can delegitimize destructive industries through divestment and sponsorship campaigns, and strip them of their power. We can [take control of the real clean energy solutions](#) ourselves and [force governments to act](#) on their responsibilities. We can [defend the forests](#) and [small farms](#) that will cool the planet, by fighting for the rights of Indigenous peoples, peasants and local communities. We can challenge the [neo-colonial narratives](#) that sacrifice the lives of people of colour around the world to enrich wealthy white elites.

These struggles are already underway, and people around the world are winning important victories, from [North American pipelines](#) to [Indian coal plants](#) to the rights of forest peoples.

Meanwhile, elements of the economic and financial context we are acting in have shifted dramatically since Copenhagen. The slump in oil prices has dealt a potentially catastrophic blow to the oil industry. Suddenly, the most expensive and polluting sources of oil are no longer economically viable. We are seeing [fracking companies go under](#), tar sands pipelines and projects [cancelled](#), and most famously, [Shell pull out of Arctic drilling](#). The low price of coal is having a similarly devastating impact on the coal industry. Meanwhile, the boom in renewables has meant that they are starting to be able to compete with fossil fuels on price in some parts of the world. Even Mark Carney, the governor of the Bank of England, has warned investors that they face ‘[potentially huge](#)’ losses from investing in vast reserves of oil, coal and gas that are becoming ‘literally unburnable’.

If the climate justice movement can seize these opportunities in 2016, victories could snowball, leading to a significant change in the political context in which future climate negotiations take place. Imagine a COP where industrialized countries are no longer beholden to fossil fuel giants, and democratically-controlled renewable energy is the main game in town. Imagine a COP where the voices of frontline and affected people hold more sway than the demands of the corporations. Then, and only then, might we get a climate deal worthy of the name.

We the movement – not governments – have taken a step in that direction in Paris. See you in 2016.

See more at: <http://newint.org/features/web-exclusive/2015/12/13/why-we-should-feel-positive-about-paris/#sthash.c6zlolnY.dpuf>

The Fraudulent Science at COP21 Exposed

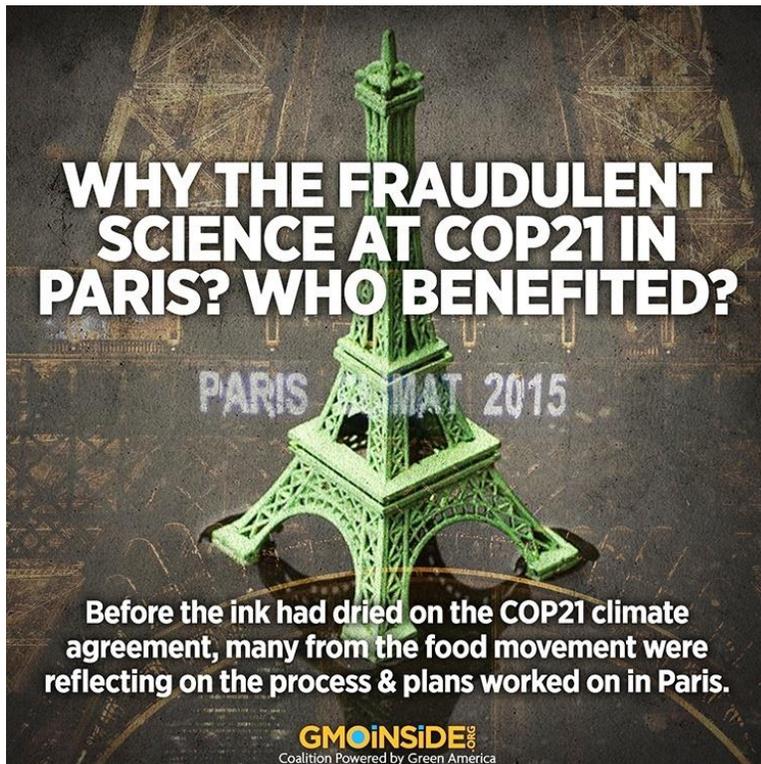
John W. Roulac | December 17, 2015 8:17 am | [Comments](#)

http://ecowatch.com/2015/12/17/fraudulent-science-cop21/?utm_source=EcoWatch+List&utm_campaign=09bd0265f5-Top_News_12_20_2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_49c7d43dc9-09bd0265f5-85960137



Before the ink had dried on the [COP21](#) climate agreement, many from the food movement were reflecting on the process and plans worked on in Paris.

In their co-authored Washington Post [op-ed piece](#), *A Secret Weapon to Fight Climate Change: Dirt*, [Michael Pollan](#) and Debbie Barker wrote, "Unfortunately, the world leaders who gathered in Paris this past week have paid little attention to the critical links between [climate change](#) and agriculture. That's a huge mistake and a missed opportunity."



Before we explore the case of fraud in Paris, let's first review the definitions of fraud:

1. Wrongful or criminal deception intended to result in financial or personal gain.

2. A person or thing intended to deceive others, typically by unjustifiably claiming or being credited with accomplishments or qualities.

Following decades of public misinformation, today we know that the tobacco industry committed fraud by attempting to disconnect lung cancer from the smoking of cigarettes. And the state of New York is now investigating [ExxonMobil](#) for allegedly [misleading the public](#) about climate change.

So, following along on this idea of fraudulence, why has virtually every COP21 media article repeated the mistaken idea that the only strategy to fight climate change is the failed one to stop burning fossil fuels?

Why Would Industrial Ag Cover Up This Inconvenient Truth?

Yes, tobacco and [Big Oil](#) have been well compensated for committing “deception intended to result in financial or personal gain.” So it’s vital for the public to identify the latest corporate shenanigans using deception and black hat PR to deceive public officials for financial gain.

These would be the giants of the industrial agriculture industry, including [Monsanto](#), Dow, DuPont, Syngenta, Bayer, McDonald’s and the entire synthetic fertilizer industry—the corporations that have undercounted and misrepresented America’s agricultural greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Is the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Committing Accounting Fraud by Stating 10 Percent GHG From Ag When It’s Known to Be Above 25 Percent?

Sadly, thanks to Big Ag’s backroom political dealings in Washington, DC, the USDA and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have agreed on the ludicrous statement that agriculture [contributed only about 10 percent](#) of U.S. GHG emissions in 2013, when in fact it was more than 25 percent.

When this erroneous conclusion is corrected and the formerly hidden facts are well understood by policy leaders and the public, we’ll be able to shift policies toward more [regenerative, soil-honoring practices](#) and then we’ll see sales of pesticides and chemical fertilizers plummet.

It’s plain to see why Monsanto and friends, via their high-level political appointees, influenced the U.S. and United Nations delegates at COP21. They [eliminated agriculture and soils from the COP21 agenda](#) and thus the final agreement—despite overwhelming evidence that soil sequestration (carbon farming) is the [number one solution](#) to stop the rise of CO₂.

Luckily, There’s a Secret Weapon

Barker and Pollan describe how “a third of the carbon in the atmosphere today used to be in the soil and modern farming is largely to blame.” They point out that “practices such as the overuse of chemicals, excessive tilling and the use of heavy machinery disturb the soil’s organic matter, exposing carbon molecules to the air, where they combine with oxygen to create carbon dioxide.

Put another way: Human activity has turned the living and fertile carbon system in our dirt into a toxic atmospheric gas.”

“It’s possible to halt and even reverse this process,” the writers add, “through better agricultural policies and practices.” They go on to explain how “restoring carbon to the soil is not nearly as complicated as rethinking our transportation systems or replacing coal with [renewable energy](#).”

Watch Pollan’s narration of [Soil Solutions to Climate Problems](#) video:

[Ronnie Cummins](#) and Katherine Paul of the [Organic Consumers Association](#) pursued this same point in their recent piece [How World Leaders Can Solve Global Warming with Regenerative Farming](#). They describe how the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change ([UNFCC](#)) set out to achieve “a legally binding and universal agreement to make sure the Earth doesn’t get warmer than 2C above pre-industrial levels.”

Quoting Cummins and Paul: “To meet that goal, the French government launched the [4/1000 Initiative](#) which, distilled to simplest terms, says this: If, on a global scale, we increase the soil carbon content of the soil by .04 percent each year for the next 25 years, we can draw down a critical mass of excess carbon from the atmosphere and begin to reverse global warming.”

Is the French initiative realistic? Yes, even by conservative estimates.

Industrial, degenerative farming practices—which include tilling, deforestation, wetlands destruction and the use of massive amounts of synthetic and toxic fertilizers and pesticides—have stripped 136 billion tons of carbon out of the soil and sent it up into the atmosphere. Using the French government’s modest estimates, we can transfer, via enhanced plant photosynthesis, 150 billion tons of this carbon back into the soil in the next 25 years.

How do we achieve those numbers? All we have to do is help just 10 percent of the world’s farmers and ranchers adopt [regenerative organic agriculture](#), holistic grazing and land management practices ...”

[For some reason](#), Greenpeace, 350.org and the climate movement think putting close to 100 percent of our policy and educational efforts into shutting down oil is our one last hope to stop climate change. This is madness. Can they really believe that fewer people will be driving cars in 2020 than in 2015? And don’t they realize that every new hybrid or 100 percent electric car in its making will contribute as much greenhouse gas emissions as would driving a five-year-old Toyota?

Part Four

Advice for Movements

Climate Games challenge Paris protest ban with peer-to-peer disobedience

Kate Aronoff

December 11, 2015

<http://wagingnonviolence.org/2015/12/climate-games-challenge-paris-protest-ban-peer-peer-disobedience/>



An activist makes moss graffiti in Bordeaux with the slogan of the Climate Games. (Twitter/@JEBA_JE)

The 21st Conference of Parties, or COP21, has taken place under unusual circumstances, which is saying a lot given the history of international climate negotiations. Following the attacks on Paris on November 13, French President Francois Hollande declared a nationwide state of emergency that the French legislature then extended to three months. Relevant to COP21, that includes a wholesale ban on protests and “outside events.” Tomorrow, thousands in Paris are planning to defy it.

At D12 — “D” standing for both December and disobedience — activists plan to form a massive “red line” with their bodies, symbolizing how they and others around the world will hold

governments accountable to the climate commitments negotiators will theoretically agree to tomorrow.

Plans to mobilize around this year's talks had been brewing for months before November's attacks, if not since the last landmark climate talks collapsed in Copenhagen in 2009. When the Global Climate March, planned for November 29, was canceled, an umbrella coalition of NGOs, unions and social movement representatives called Coalition Climat 21 went into deep negotiations to figure out their next steps. Long beforehand, however, a small group of European climate activists had been planning a series of demonstrations called the Climate Games, which seemed ready-made to defy the government's protest ban prohibiting public gatherings of more than two people. Their plan was for creative, decentralized direct actions organized in small groups with no discernible nexus beyond shared messaging: "We Are Nature Defending Itself."

Over 100 Climate Games actions have rolled within and without France for the last two weeks, and its originators are part of the network of seasoned organizers determining next steps on an hour-by-hour basis. With the penultimate public briefing on tomorrow's action happening yards behind us, I spoke with Climate Games co-organizer Selj Balamir to hear more about the state of emergency, the strategy behind the games and what organizers plan to do next.

How did the Climate Games come together?

The Climate Games started in Amsterdam to target the coal plant and harbor there. The Netherlands, as you might know, is home to two of Europe's major coal ports. After some disappointing actions that nobody showed up to, we reconsidered our mode of action. From that came the idea of games: Something that brings together different tactics and people with different levels of experience, presenting different styles of actions rather than imposing one type that we choose as organizers.

Games are universal, and so is disobedience. The shift worked fantastically: On the one hand, we had experienced, Earth First!-style direct action groups doing blockades. Next to them were flashmobs by new divestment groups. All of that being together in the same space at the same time showed the physical presence of the larger array of movements acting together. That presence is proof that we are a rich and diverse convergence of movements that support one another, not just people saying "we are a big climate movement."

What was the plan for mobilizations in Paris before the attacks on November 13?

There is a big coalition (Coalition Climat 21) containing more than 150 organizations — an unprecedented feat — that came together to figure out the choreography of the two weeks of COP. To a certain extent, it also exists to support disobedient action at the end of the talks. Some elements that took charge of the disobedient acts had agreed on having a broad, accessible mass civil disobedience which would be many people's entry point to those types of actions.

We were very inspired by the Ende Gelände action last summer, when 1,000 people entered the Lignite mines in Germany and stopped digging for a day. Eight hundred people were arrested, all of them released and most of them first timers. We were also inspired by the history of so many

rights not being granted, but earned through disobedient acts. At that point, the Games were still planning to overlap with this massive action.

What happened after November 13?

We started from scratch. From my understanding, what happened was that a recombination of actors within Coalition Climat 21 repositioned themselves in the state of emergency, not stepping back at all. In fact, in moments where everything is forbidden everyone is disobedient, so actually it becomes much easier to organize a disobedient act. And yet — given the general mood and changing sensibilities — it seemed unwise to go for La Bourget and a traditional mass action.

It was a moment with a lot of creative thinking: How, in a very short period of time, do you reimagine what was promised to be the largest-ever civil disobedience around climate? And here we are now, one day before D12, having the redlines briefed and revealed as a complete plan right behind us. I think the emphasis on those strong, creative visual elements have taken center stage as a way to inspire, empower and communicate some of the elements of the action that have been present the whole time.

Ultimately, the movements' goal in Paris was not to influence the COP. It wasn't to stop the COP, or force negotiators to do something. It was supposed to be a moment for the movements to come together to reinforce and consummate their efforts, and to launch — most importantly — the escalation of their actions in the spring. In that sense, nothing has changed. It will be an attempt — a successful one — to steal the spotlight from leaders shaking hands and pretending to save a world in a state of emergency at an airport. We'll make it clear that that's not where the solutions are. The solutions will be in those mass actions next year.

What has the state of emergency been like for you?

For organizers in Paris, the situation was tense. Knowing history, those kinds of crises are never missed as an opportunity for states and the powerful to act against people. The state of emergency was absolutely deployed as a shock doctrine against climate mobilizations in Paris.

The attacks gave the government the legitimacy, legal grounds and power to target the organizers of the climate movement, to place them under house arrest and to raid squats as an intimidation tactic. And, of course, to attack the unauthorized march in Place de la République before the first day of the COP.

But this is the superficial level of what the state of emergency means. What the attacks have revealed — or rather reinforced — is our commitment to climate justice being about deepening conversations about security, about safety, about freedom and about emergencies.

This is supposed to be a civil society-driven two week summit, not a NATO meeting where cities get locked down and become a playground for the military. The sheer disjuncture between the social movements' calling, "It takes everyone to change everything," and the state of emergency declaring that you can't convene more than two people is absurd.

How do you think the design of the Climate Games lends itself to doing confrontational action within a state of emergency, where these big demonstrations that police are trained to look for are officially prohibited?

It's ambiguous. On the one hand, since the state of emergency bans any mass public gatherings, it means that there is more space for affinity group-led decentralized actions. The space for Climate Games-type actions has been increased. But at the same time, of course, surprise acts made by little groups carry connotations that are closer to terrorist attacks. We encouraged teams to revise their plans in light of recent events.

We also realized that big organizations tend to break down when they are hit by a shock. As a small affinity group, you can revise your plans over a bottle of wine in the evening. In terms of plasticity and response to situations, we find that small groups are much more resilient because you don't need to reinvent everything in a short amount of time. Something we observed in these two weeks is that there is even more interest and reason to pursue those types of actions. If this is the shadow of a future that we want to avoid, but that is creeping, nonetheless, we can reinvent our modes of actions and our tactics while maintaining elements of broad support.

What kinds of instruction do potential Climate Games participants need to have before they can go out and plan and participate in an action?

The first step is becoming an affinity group and starting to make decisions, deciding what kind of actions you want to do and what kind of team you are. The second is to consult a map, and the points of interest of all the "manifestations of the mesh," as we call it — capitalism, authoritarianism, colonialism — and all the manifestations of fossil fuel industries: lobbyists, false solutions, greenwashers and so on. After picking your targets, you are encouraged to design and realize your own adventure.

The beauty of it is that we have no idea who is planning actions, what kinds of actions they are planning and when they are going to happen. You can't just stop us and stop the Games from happening. It is truly distributed through network-based politics — it's peer-to-peer disobedience. Our job as organizers is ultimately to channel and amplify those messages, and create the understanding that these are not isolated acts happening in little bubbles, but global blockadia happening everywhere and taking so many different forms.

What have the Climate Games looked like so far?

We have seen three main typologies of action. The first are blockades of concrete sites of emissions or extraction, the most significant of those being in Germany. The second type would be softer and very creative disruptions; exposures of false solutions like those happening in Belgium. The third I would call "poetic resistance": All the culture jamming, banner drops, anything that has messaging content applied in a public space. The major one of these was from Brandalism, taking over 600 billboards across Paris.

What have the conversations been like among different organization in figuring out how to plan actions in the state of emergency?

My impression is that because of the influence of big NGOs, the mission the coalition set for itself from the beginning was to build up numbers: to have the largest march in history with 500,000 people marching in Paris. That made the coalition a bit too large for my taste, with pro-nuclear unions, and NGOs that collaborate with corporations. But as a construction effort the coalition is definitely admirable.

We have seen that this strategy — of only going for numbers — meant that after the first shock (the state of emergency) it fell apart. The reason it fell apart was because the unions didn't want to do security for the march. Therefore, there wasn't enough counter-power in the hands of the coalition to go forward with their plans. That gave the authorities the legitimate grounds to ban it. From there, it already seemed like there would be a splinter into three actions on November 29: a very clicktivist shoes photo-op; an interesting but limited human chain; and a clear, bold call-out for disobeying the ban with a rally, which was still overwhelmed by the police and gave them the grounds to point to good protesters and bad protesters.

It was an indication that if you don't bring groups together with a deeper agenda and political common ground, you can't adapt to situations that will be thrown at you. And if we are talking about the climate we should be prepared for all kinds of instabilities, political or environmental. As the slogan goes, "it takes roots to weather the storm." And the coalition wasn't really strengthening those roots, from my understanding.

Still, there wasn't a total breakdown of the coalition, which is very admirable and respectable. We'll see how that process will go in the long-term. We will see which actors we have been able to trust in this process and build upon those relationships in the next year. It doesn't have to be under the coalition. I've been following the groups organizing disobedient RedLines actions around D12 more closely, and I can say that, there, links have been strengthened. It has been a remarkably constructive and respectful process.

Why do you think it's important for people to defy the ban tomorrow?

I like the twisted version of the People's Climate March slogan: "To change everything, we have to step out of line." True progress has only been achieved by disobedient acts. There is no better moment than moments of emergency to declare counter-emergencies. In other words, it's not only up to states to declare states of emergency. It's really up to people. You cannot really declare a people's emergency — a climate emergency — simply with marching and petitions.

We are more committed to empowering movements to take those steps, not only in symbolic and temporary spaces or events like the COP, but — most importantly — where the problems lie and where the solutions lie: at the grassroots and on the frontlines, and all the sites of global blockadia. This is only a moment of coming together, where we reinforce each other, share our experience and take a common stance as the eyes of the world are on Paris. Any deal they produce cannot go unchallenged, and we will achieve the deal we need with peaceful yet determined means.

Paris: the Untold Story

by Charlotte Du Cann, originally published by Bella Caledonia |

December 23, 2015

<http://www.resilience.org/stories/2015-12-23/paris-the-untold-story#>



The last time I filed from Paris I was covering the Spring Collections. It's a long way from where I am now, perched on a high stool in the lounge of a reconfigured hostel by the *Gare du Nord*, discussing Why the Message Doesn't Get Across with a sociologist called Jean-Baptiste.

This is a report about COP21 that didn't make the headlines, nor even the small print, when for two weeks in December, thousands of activists, campaigners and grassroots communicators converged on the capital to disseminate their messages of defiance, hope and renewal, in spite of a heavily-policed clampdown on gatherings and demonstrations.

'Refresh the climate, rewrite the story'

I've never seen so many people online in one room before – blogging, tweeting, texting, emailing, Skyping, videoing – and it's only 7am. Six hundred of us are having breakfast in the co-working space of the alternative media hub of Place to B. We know we can't just fix the climate by twiddling with the temperature dial as 197 world leaders are now doing at Le Bourget. We know we need to address its deeper causes; a debt-bound economic system, the myth of progress and our millennia-long separation from wild nature on which we depend for everything.



The millions of grassroots responses around the planet are too small and undramatic to fit into the dominant mainstream narrative. Nevertheless we're busy sharing them across tables – stories about restoring soil, challenging fracking, bearing witness from communities under fire and under water. None of us are here just for ourselves. We are speaking on behalf of organisations and networks which have brought us together in a way that no conventional social meeting or workplace could ever do.

The first thing you notice is that everything connects. The second that there's no hostility.

'What I am waiting for is sincerity', says Jeremy from the BBC, as we discuss how the story we're here to rewrite looks more like a global communications system, firing on all cylinders. What I'm waiting for is a way to frame my convincing argument, my pitch. But I can't. Because when push comes to shove what really matters is something that bears no relation to a newspaper opinion, and it's hard to describe how it feels when suddenly you don't have to fight the person you are talking with anymore.

When you realise you are not on your own.



Boulevard Voltaire

Ten thousand people are holding hands along Boulevard Voltaire. Angels flex their wings, a stream of bicycles flies past, a brass band plays; a newt-headed man from the occupation at *La Zad* gives an interview to a citizen with a video camera. Vans of riot police wait in side streets for the clashes that will come later in a flower-strewn *Place de la Republique*. I join the human chain between a row of Tibetan men, one of whom hands me a badge saying ‘The Third

Pole’, and feel strangely at home.

Afterwards I step back into the calm, cobbled back streets of Paris on a Sunday. You could think nothing had changed if you look at the cafes and shops and knobbly plane trees. You could think that nothing had changed when the demi-gods at *Le Bourget* congratulate themselves on coming to a historic agreement.

It may appear to be the same but it isn’t the same behind the facade. The Tibetan plateau, the biggest reservoir of fresh water outside the Arctic and Antarctica, is warming at twice the global rate. We have been living as if our fossil-fuelled lifestyles have no consequences, but the consequences are now blowing back towards us. Some of us are no longer looking at hemlines.

Rue de Dunkerque

I could report on the [Climate Games](#), the People’s Assembly, the [Global Village of Alternatives](#), the [documentary Demain](#), or any number of the workshops, talks or actions that are taking place on the edge of the official negotiations, but I have decided to stay here in the [Place to B’s Creative Factory](#), where I work with an opera singer, two dancers, a novelist, an anthropologist and a cartoonist amongst others to create projects that explore ways to *Dismantle the Buying Imperative*.



There's a challenge we all face with this rewrite. We're embedded in a culture of market fundamentalism, just as we are in the 'wicked problem' of climate change. A capitalist economy is our default common ground, no matter how connected we are to 'nature'. It's hard to communicate without feeling the pressure to convince and propagandise in a way that goes against our craft. It's hard not to sound like an ad.

Scientists' plea for their terrifying data to be rendered into an acceptable narrative for people to 'get'. We know we need a story that holds a 'radical dreaming' and touches the hearts of people, and that climate change is a symptom of a cause that corporate media cannot admit. Industrial civilisation has brought the living systems on which we depend to a breaking point – systems that do not operate according to our 21st technology, 18th century reason, nor our 4000 BC sense of godlike control.

In the COP21 deal there are blue sky pledges but no mention of how carbon reduction might be achieved on the ground in a world where everything we consume is made possible by oil. The obvious 'solution' to power-down our whole way of life was never on the table. At the COP21 'fringe' however it's clear we need to do exactly that, and undergo what some call *decroissance* (degrowth). To walk in the opposite direction of Empire.

This story is made up of humble things: of cargo bikes and community orchards, of handmade bread and local assemblies, big picture vision, small everyday actions, a tale of sharing and restoration and sincerity and many other things besides. It doesn't fit into a hash tag. It takes time to listen to. It challenges all the assumptions we were taught by our parents and teachers, and most avowedly, by our governments. There is no happy ending.

But there is [*] a door to the future we can open that doesn't depend on a mythical technology, that recognises, unlike the agreement, the rights of indigenous peoples, the forests, the oceans, all creatures: a culture that not only engages in letting go of its addiction to energy, but also in dismantling its powerbase from within, divesting its sense of entitlement, of superiority over all species, its extractive ego, its will to conquer, its baseline hostility.

On the walls of the bar there are small messages written by thousands of individuals to everyone in Paris. They are written on bunting (from Scotland) and coloured ribbons (from USA). The people were asked:

What do you love and never hope to lose to climate change?

- *The Great Barrier Reef*
- *My country, Syria*
- *Kindness between strangers.*

Here's mine:

The sound of a robin singing in midwinter.

Naomi Klein's speech on the Champ de Mars in front of the Eiffel Tower

December 12, 2015

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhYIA7E3JsY>

Our leaders have shown themselves willing to set our world on fire and we will not let that happen. Our mood today is not one of despair but rather a clarifying sense of commitment and purpose. We knew that these were not the real leaders. We knew that the leaders were in the streets, that the leaders were in the fields, that this city is filled with climate heroes.

Despite their beautiful words, our leaders remained trapped in a broken system and a crashing worldview based on dominance of people and the planet and that worldview simply does not allow them to align their words, their goals, with their actions.

And so the gap is increased between the rhetoric and the goal of safety and they reality of the epic danger they are allowing to unfold. And the gap is increased between the expressions of solidarity with the most vulnerable and the reality of those leaders consistently putting the interests of the rich and powerful before the interest if the vulnerable, and indeed the interests of all humanity.

Our leaders have none of the courage that it takes to stand up to the corporate interests that are responsible for this crisis. They can't even say the words "fossil fuels" in this text. So it is up to us to do what they so clearly refuse to do, which is to stand up to the polluters and make them pay.

And we will do this everywhere, using every tool that we can. We will do it in the streets with protests like this one, and we will do it in the face of every single polluting project that they decide to try to roll out.

We are doing this already, and we're winning.... This is a global movement. Some of us call it Blockadia. So we will take them on in the streets, the forests, and in the water. In our schools, in our places of worship, and in our cities. And we're going after them with our art, with our culture, because as we know, the logic of austerity is incompatible with life on Earth....

We are accelerating the rollout of a society that is based on protecting life, on climate justice, on energy democracy....

As we go forward, we also have to acknowledge the grief, grief that we will not deny nor will we suppress, grief at what we have already lost, for whom we have already lost.

And we acknowledge that there is also rage at those who could have acted long ago but chose not to, and at those who make that same disastrous decision still.

But mostly, mostly there is joy. Mostly there is joy and resolve as we witness the next world taking shape before our eyes. We used to think that it was our job to save the world. Then we realized that we are really saving ourselves. We used to say that we were here to protect nature, and now we say that we *are* nature, protecting herself.

COP21: An Opportunity For Climate Justice, If We Mobilize



Above photo from Global 2000 by Liebenritt on flickrand cc

By Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers, www.popularresistance.org

December 13th, 2015

<https://www.popularresistance.org/newsletter-opportunity-for-climate-justice-if-we-mobilize/>

The COP21 resulted in an agreement that was 25 years in the making, beginning with the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. Until now the world had been unable to reach an agreement on combating climate change. Because the document required unanimous consensus it is the lowest common denominator. Countries that depend on oil as the basis of their economy, like Saudi Arabia and Venezuela, as well as those with strong climate denialism, like Australia and the United States, which combines denialism with corporate domination of government, all had to agree.



From CommonDreams.

The lowest common denominator is not good enough. [Friends of the Earth International](#) described the agreement as “a sham.” The [New Internationalist](#), measuring the deal against the [People’s Climate Test](#) developed before COP21, described it as “an epic fail on a planetary scale.” Climate scientist [James Hansen](#) said it was a “fraud . . . fake . . . bullshit.”

Low Expectations for COP21

We had low expectations going into COP21 recognizing the involvement of polluters and corporate underwriting and the reality that developed countries put corporate profits ahead of people and planet. The fact that they achieved a framework based on some science-based goals was better than expected. Now it is up to the people to push for policies at all levels of government to make the Paris Accord effective. We have the potential to use this deal to create a turning point in humanity's struggle for climate justice and end the fossil fuel era, but only if the people mobilize to make it so.

Countries came to Paris with reduction targets, and renegotiating those targets was not part of COP21. While COP21 ended with an agreement to not raise the Earth's temperature by more than 2° Celsius (3.6° Fahrenheit) and to attempt to keep it at 1.5° Celsius (2.7° Fahrenheit) [the targets of the nations, when combined, go](#) beyond those levels. So nations must lower their targets and put in place policies to achieve greater reductions.



Activists call for a 1.5C warming limit (Photo by IISD/ENB)

At [the halfway point of COP21](#) there were concerns about the agreement being insufficient, whether nations were representing corporate interests rather than the needs of the planet and whether negotiations would end in disaster. As negotiations continued, [civil society pushed negotiators to improve their positions](#) to protect vulnerable communities and speed up the transition to renewable energy. As the end neared, the [High Ambition Coalition](#), representing more than 100 countries, formed in secrecy six months ago, went public to push for a legally binding global agreement.

When the agreement was concluded there was mixed reaction – on one hand it was finally a framework that was universally agreed on, but on the other it provided inadequate funds for developing nations most impacted by the climate crisis, had no enforceable provisions and left it to individual nations to reduce climate emissions. There were no specific policies like a carbon tax or specific reductions in the use of carbon energy, just a framework. On the final day, [tens of thousands of people gathered throughout Paris drawing red lines in protest](#) urging climate justice, stopping the construction of carbon infrastructure, moving investment from carbon to clean energy and urging that carbon be left in the ground.



“Sorry for the disturbance. We are trying to save the world.” By Thom Mitchell of New Matilda.

Creative Protest throughout COP21, Protests Bend to the Paris Emergency

The largest climate protests in history were planned for COP21 but the terror-attack in Paris resulted in a state of emergency that prevented large-scale protests. This brought out an ongoing tension between movements and non-profit organizations, between front-line groups and big greens. The big greens cancelled the mass multi-hundred thousand person march that had been scheduled. Thousands of [people went ahead with the march](#) and predictably French security forces used pepper spray, tear gas, batons and arrests to stop them.

In [ROAR Magazine](#) they make the points that “Both experience and research in civil resistance tell us that our best bet against fear, intimidation and repression is to [increase](#) (not decrease!) [participation](#)” and that “It is well established that social movements win by [polarizing the public](#) and [exercising non-cooperation](#) to weaken and undermine power structures.”



Shoe protest in Place de la République. By The Straits Times.

Would mass protests have changed the political environment for COP21, resulted in larger amounts of money being agreed to for nations hardest hit, a binding agreement, enforceable goals? Because the COP21 was only a limited success civil society will continue to have to pressure the power structure, so these questions need to be debated, discussed and resolved within the climate movement.

On the same day that [police tear gas and arrested 200 protesters](#), there was the empty shoe protest using shoes to show the thousands of people who would have marched – estimates were as high as 500,000 planning to march – and there was a human chain across Paris, with people holding hands to show solidarity for climate justice.

Building on the experience of climate protesters in other European cities, the [Climate Games were getting organized for a series of protests](#) months before the COP21 meeting. Not only were they working on the big mass march, but also on smaller autonomous protests that would occur throughout the meetings. When the mass march fell apart the other protests continued. Climate Games organizers say that their purpose was not to shut down COP21 but build momentum for a spring offense for climate protests, knowing the results of COP21 would require escalation.



A flotilla of indigenous peoples demonstrate to be heard. (Photo: Joe Soloman, Flickr CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

There were a series of a wide variety of [protests](#) that did go forward. [Indigenous peoples used kayactivism](#) to urge keeping fossil fuels in the ground, [Paris was plastered with wanted posters for 'Climate Criminals'](#), [US fracking opponents disrupted Paris talks](#), [a massive sun was painted around the Arc de Triomphe demanding renewable energy](#), [the Indigenous Environmental Network denounced false corporate 'solutions'](#), [a bank was taken over by song and dance protesting coal investment](#) and ['brandalists' took over advertising posters throughout Paris highlighting the corporate takeover of the COP21](#). The Louvre was the site of protests, inside [an oil spill denounced polluting carbon energy corporations](#) sponsorship of the museum and [outside the museum](#), performers dressed in black held up umbrellas with letters spelling out the phrase "Fossil Free Culture."

By the end, with a call for mass action, activists said they would [move forward on a mass protest despite Hollande's ban](#) and [defy the ban](#). They [decried the deal saying it had failed humanity and the planet](#) and promised to draw [redlines throughout the city](#). They [drew lines in banners, cloth, red roses and umbrellas](#) calling for keeping fossil fuels in the ground and declaring no peace without climate justice. Police were out in force but they just watched.



Westchester Woman Stands in Way of Crews Working on Gas Pipeline Near Nuclear Power Plant | NBC New York

Paris is not the end but just another stage in the growing climate justice movement which has seen important victories in the United States this year like [stopping the KXL pipeline](#), [stopping Arctic drilling](#) and decentralized [protests that delay and make carbon infrastructure more expensive](#). During the COP21, the threat of protests resulted in the [Obama administration delaying a fuel auction](#) of federal lands. And, [Australian protesters shut down the three largest coal ports](#).

Activists are already planning an active spring, with coordinated [protests being planned for May](#) to shut down the most carbon polluting projects on the planet. And protests against carbon-fuel infrastructure are continuing. Next [Wednesday we are helping to organize protests against Bank of America for its funding of carbon pollution projects](#), our focus is on demanding BoA stop funding the fracked gas export terminal at Cove Point and other fracking-related projects.



The Beginning of the End of the Fossil Fuel Era

The reality is that the slowness of the transition to a fossil free, nuclear free energy economy is not only inconsistent with climate science but also inconsistent with the renewable energy technology that already exists. At a COP21 side event, a group showed that [technology solutions for a 100% renewable energy are in place](#), finance options are available and scalable, and resource availability is plentiful. [National Geographic](#) published an interactive map of the world that showed the mix of renewable energy for each country and how much money would be saved

per person in each country. A report this week showed 2015 will be the [United States solar market's best year in history](#) with a record-breaking fourth quarter. If world leaders listened to the science COP21 would have set a goal of complete transfer to clean energy within a generation, the goal should be a just transition by 2030.

Instead polluting corporations who profit from selling energy that is causing the crisis of climate change had a [display of false solutions](#) at the COP21. Some of the biggest polluters were pushing false solutions like clean coal and fracked gas; nuclear power and [agribusiness](#) were pushing their wares, along with [bioenergy](#) and REDD. The latter is not forest protection but cover for an offset scheme that undermines Indigenous rights while allowing for mass tree plantations. Bill Gates was in Paris to push a [new initiative](#) that was exposed as a front for new nuclear plants. [Activists organized "toxic tours"](#) of the false solutions exhibit and were immediately arrested by undercover police. Even media covering the event were removed.



In the final week of COP21 negotiations, a [leaked document showed](#) that there cannot be climate justice if the triad of trade agreements being negotiated becomes law. These agreements, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Trade In Services Agreement (TiSA), [create a polluter's paradise of legal protections](#), have no enforceable environmental standards and encourage extreme extraction and export of carbon energy. The leak showed that EU negotiators were told not to agree to anything that would restrict trade – putting corporate profits ahead of the needs of the planet. People concerned with climate change [must mobilize to stop these corporate trade agreements](#) or all other work for climate justice will fail. [Click here to take the action pledge.](#)

The link between stopping corporate power and climate change is one that links critically important issues. We must fight corporate power to achieve climate justice. [The illegitimate rise of corporate power](#) parallels the rise of climate gasses in the atmosphere. In “[Apocalyptic Capitalism](#)” Chris Hedges forces us to face the reality of what we are up against:

“The global elites have no intention of interfering with the profits, or ending government subsidies, for the fossil fuel industry and the extraction industries. They will not curtail extraction or impose hefty carbon taxes to keep fossil fuels in the ground. They will not limit the overconsumption that is the engine of global capitalism. They act as if the greatest contributor of greenhouse gases—the animal agriculture industry—does not exist. They siphon off trillions of dollars and employ scientific and technical expertise—expertise that should be directed toward

preparing for environmental catastrophe and investing in renewable energy—to wage endless wars in the Middle East. . . And as the elites mouth platitudes about saving the climate they are shoving still another trade agreement, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), down our throats. The TPP permits corporations to ignore nonbinding climate accords made at conferences such as the one in Paris, and it allows them, in secret trade tribunals, to defy environmental regulations imposed by individual states.”

This is the harsh reality we must face if we are to act strategically to save the planet. Not only does the campaign for climate justice require all of us to act, it requires us to change everything – how government’s operate on behalf of corporations and how the economy is disfigured for transnational corporate profits rather than the betterment of humans and the planet.



Where We Go From COP21

Once we stop listening to the lullabies of elected and unelected leaders and face reality, our course becomes clearer. At the foundation of our strategy must be the recognition that [the lives of those in developed countries are not worth more than those in the undeveloped world](#). The billions who live on less than \$2 per day are as valuable as those who spend \$100 for lunch. Recognizing this reality creates the global solidarity to move forward.

Also at the foundation of our next steps must be [human rights](#). Climate change will violate the human rights of billions as rights to life, water, food, health, housing and security among others are all undone by climate injustice. Already, 157.8 million people were forced from their homes in the past seven years as a result of extreme weather. These numbers will multiply rapidly. Tens of thousands of people are dying from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea and heat stress; between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250 000 additional deaths per year. We cannot pick whose human rights will be protected, all must be protected.



To move forward strategically it is also important to see something that was highlighted at COP21 but many did not see: the [relationship between war, terrorism and climate](#). The neo-colonialism of western powers, led by the United States, going to war for the oil and resources needed for big agriculture, transit and the computer era is at the root of terrorism and closely connected to climate change. Not only does the war machine produce climate gases at immense levels but it leads to protecting the current fossil fuel- based economy.

Steve Breyman, discussing next steps after COP21, highlights that “the angry and energized climate justice movement is primed to pressure the big polluters like never before.” We have had some victories, have grown our strength and see the connections between issues. We know elected officials and dirty energy corporations “must be hounded and harangued to do what’s needed.” We must demand our country treat the voluntary goals as mandatory and make them stricter, move up the timetables and rapidly transition to a clean energy economy.

Breyman points out there is impressive “climate justice work being done at city, county and state levels” and with a dysfunctional federal government that work is important. Successful campaigns to build on include fossil fuel divestment, pipeline and infrastructure resistance, opposition to fracking and extreme extraction, protests of the fake energy regulator FERC, zero waste campaigns and more. He sees the “prospects for climate justice advocates to more firmly join forces with other movements, especially labor, peace, women’s, and indigenous rights are better than ever.”



The evidence is increasingly on our side so as we stop the carbon-nuclear energy industries we must also be building the alternative. That begins by changing our lifestyles, but also getting government at all levels to make transitions to clean energy. We should highlight the

“numerous [convincing studies](#) of the economic, ecosystem, and human health benefits of a full transition to a fully clean energy economy” and how it is “far cheaper to take action now than later, that the longer we wait the greater the costs of all sorts.”

This is the path forward not only to saving the Earth and putting in place climate justice but also to building solidarity with people throughout the world and undermining the corruption of corporate power and militarism that currently dominates it. In short, the fight for climate justice is about building a better world for all.

Paris Agreement represents progress on cutting emissions, but not so much on climate justice

By Ben Adler on 21 Dec 2015 5 comments

http://grist.org/climate-energy/paris-agreement-represents-progress-on-cutting-emissions-but-not-so-much-on-climate-justice/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=daily-horizon

Last week, a radio host considering whether to have me on to discuss the recent [Paris climate agreement](#) asked me, “What is your basic take on COP21? Failure or success?” It’s a partial success, I said, the full extent of which won’t be known for years. Perhaps that unsatisfying answer is why she decided not to have me on.

I didn’t even give her the complete answer, which is that it also depends on what you were looking for the agreement to achieve. I took it as a given that she was asking, as Americans always are, whether it succeeded or failed in making progress to substantially slow climate change.

But, especially to people in the developing world, the negotiations in Paris weren’t just about limiting greenhouse gas emissions and the warming they cause. They were also about something that was largely ignored in the ultimate deal: climate justice. While the Paris Agreement is a partial or potential success on limiting warming, it represents only marginal progress on climate justice. The reason is simple: The rich countries largely got their way in Paris.

Let’s break it down.

What is climate justice?

Like environmental justice in general, climate justice means prioritizing the least fortunate and most vulnerable rather than the richest and most powerful. Climate justice, like all forms of economic and social justice, is redistributive: It would stop the [carbon budget](#) from being gobbled up by the richest countries and move some of their fossil fuel–derived wealth into helping the poorer, more vulnerable people who suffer the most in a climate-changed world.

How would we put climate justice into practice?

- **Rich countries would make dramatically larger emission cuts than they’ve promised thus far.** It has become conventional wisdom that all nations, not just developed nations, must contribute to the effort to stop climate change. That’s right. At this point, we’ve already polluted so much that there just isn’t room left for developing countries to go through a decades-long process of fossil fuel–driven growth before they get clean. We’ve already warmed 1 degree Celsius, and have another 0.5 C baked in thanks to what we’ve already emitted. That means we need to bend the emissions curve down sharply right away to stay below 2 C and avert total catastrophe.

But though everyone needs to contribute, countries' contributions have to reflect their cumulative emissions and their per capita emissions.

The U.S., Europe, Japan, Canada, Australia, and Russia have been spewing significant amounts of carbon pollution for a century or more. Carbon dioxide lingers in the atmosphere for centuries, so those historical emissions are driving much of the climate change we're seeing today. [As of 2011](#), the U.S. was responsible for 27 percent of the world's cumulative greenhouse gas emissions — the largest share of any country — and the European Union collectively accounted for 25 percent. India, in comparison, was responsible for just 3 percent. In short: Rich countries made most of the mess and they should be responsible for cleaning most of it up.

And the wealthy countries are still polluting far more per person than almost all developing countries. The average American is responsible for [17 metric tons](#) of CO₂ emissions each year — 10 times as much as the average Indian, who pumps out just 1.7 tons. If India's emissions per capita held steady between now and 2030, and the U.S. fulfilled its commitment to cut emissions 26 to 28 percent from 2005 levels by 2030, the U.S. would still emit about nine times as much per capita as India.

The moral imperative then is for the U.S. and other wealthy countries to cut far more than they have pledged to. That would be the No. 1 way to fight climate change and to simultaneously advance toward climate justice.

- **Rich countries would steer huge amounts of money to poor ones.** Financial assistance is needed to help developing countries build renewable energy capacity, adapt so they can better cope with coming climate shifts, and be compensated for [loss and damage](#) from climate-related disasters.

As developing nations and anti-poverty activists are increasingly describing it, loss-and-damage funding would be compensation for developed countries having dumped climate pollution on the world, just like the damages a government, corporation, or individual is assessed in court after harming someone's property. But rich countries are having none of that. They rejected all proposed language for the Paris Agreement that even hinted at liability or compensation for climate change-related damage. There is a section addressing loss and damage, but it specifically says that this doesn't imply any liability.

In terms of funding for developing clean energy sources and adapting to climate change, a few countries — the U.S., Canada, China, Japan, much of northern and Western Europe — [came up with pledges](#) of a few billion dollars each. The U.S. doubled its contribution to dedicated adaptation funding between now and 2020 from \$400 million to \$800 million. Other rich countries that are more selfish and stubborn about both emissions and finance, such as Russia and Saudi Arabia, offered little or nothing. In total, developed countries still aren't close to raising \$100 billion per year in climate finance for poorer nations, the official goal that's to be met annually starting in 2020, even though they are allowed to count private finance towards that.

Many developing nations made it clear they would do more to rein in their emissions if they got more financing to help them, but it wasn't forthcoming.

• **Indigenous rights, women's rights, and human rights would get high priority.** Activists called for such rights to be incorporated into the operational text of the Paris Agreement, but instead they merely got mentioned in the preamble. That's the difference between being having actual power and being offered a symbolic nod. If indigenous rights, for example, were protected in the substance of the agreement, then indigenous communities might have more power to block fossil fuel development on or near their land.

The agreement reflects who was at the table negotiating it. [Women](#) and other marginalized groups were underrepresented among delegates at the talks. Indigenous communities are often [disempowered](#) within the nations negotiating the agreement. And poor countries have neither the economic nor military power to force rich countries to treat them fairly. Their only leverage in Paris was the threat of refusing to sign on to the ultimate agreement, which under U.N. rules had to be adopted unanimously. They were able to use that threat to get a little bit of what they wanted — that modest increase in adaption funding from the U.S., mention of “loss and damage” in the text — but not much. Since poor countries suffer most from climate change, they had the most to lose if no deal at all were reached in Paris.

Rich countries are being shortsighted by not making climate justice a bigger priority. Aside from being the moral thing to do, it would be in their own interest. If wealthy nations make big emissions cuts themselves and provide money to help poorer countries curb emissions, they will reduce their own suffering and economic losses from catastrophic climate change, and they'll limit the number of climate refugees and regional conflicts in the developing world, which always wind up on Europe's and America's shores.

“Ultimately it is enlightened self-interest for rich countries to pay for the climate adaptation of poor countries,” said Oxfam International Executive Director Winnie Byanyima in an interview with Grist. “People today in the most vulnerable countries, island states in the Pacific, Bangladesh, and other low-lying areas are so threatened that we are going to see huge populations of refugees: people fleeing places where they can no longer farm, being hit with hurricanes and floods. This kind of migration will be completely unstoppable. For the sake of stability, peace, and prosperity of everyone, it will be important that everyone contribute.”

The good news for climate justice is that everyone agreed in Paris for the first time that they all must contribute. The bad news is that none of the richest countries has yet come even close to contributing enough.

On the other side of the sky

Francesco Martone

December 26, 2015

<http://sinistracosmopolita.blogspot.com/2015/12/on-other-side-of-sky.html>

It would be extremely helpful and absolutely necessary to try and read the outcome of the UN Conference on Climate Change that took place in Paris, using a pair of bifocal lenses, to allow us not to stop to a more superficial look, to the outer peel of a negotiating process that went on and on for years, mushrooming into other threads and processes. A pair of bifocals would help us de-codify what happened in Paris and what future will offer us. These lenses are made of other materials, you will never find them in scientific essays, studies of climatology, in the myriad of elaborations on the Earth or intact forests' carbon storage capacity, you will not find them in the drawers of government leaders, or businesspeople, entrepreneurial or non-governmental experts. These lenses are makeshift, bound together by duct tape and a rubber band, and allow us to see things under a completely different perspective. The time has come now to make an effort and put ourselves on the other side, on the side of air and sky. On the side of the Earth and its inhabitants, not necessarily as an impulse driven by mysticism or ecocentrism. Indeed such shift is partly justified by the urgency of admitting that we humans, as small as we are, generate dramatic upheavals, and are such a small thing when compared to the complexity of ecological balances and life, and that therefore it would be a good thing for us to lower our ecological footprint and carry a lighter rucksack. Putting ourselves on the side of the sky, on the other side of that sky nowadays darkened by a thick suffocating cloud of smog, upset by anomalous events, heavy rainfall, heat and cold, altered migratory cycles, clouds that indigenous knowledge cannot read anymore, means assuming another perspective, a decolonized and feminine one, of a Mother that is rapidly being depleted by productivist fury and growth obsession.

A very thoughtful and challenging study comes to mind to that regard, titled "Antarctica as a cultural critique: the gendered politics of scientific exploration and climate change" by CUNY professor Elena Glasberg. Glasberg studied the "official" history of the conquest of Antarctica, written and made mostly by males, men driven by the desire to conquer even that last segment of unknown land, and proposed another viewpoint, based on post-colonial and queer thought, notably putting ourselves on the side of ice, and re-read that myth under a gender lens. Maybe it is not casual that the Earth is Mother, and as a Mother she is inextricably bound to our existence to each of our primeval cells. Paris was a much awaited event, a point of arrival full of expectations and realistic disillusionment. Maybe as never before has the French capital become stage of an evident chasm between the "mainstream" narrative of climate change and that which took shape outside, in the streets, in marginal neighborhoods, in the participation of people from all walks of life, and from everywhere, that not only took to the streets to defy a ban, but contributed to build another perspective of ecological and social justice. The papers adopted in Paris have to be studied carefully. They tell us that in fact governments of all parts of the world believe that climate change is not a matter of human rights, that thousands of people, women and men whose very survival is at stake should not be considered as right-holders. These people live

in lands that always inspired our dreams of untouched paradise, painted by Paul Gauguin or portrayed in glossy brochures of all-inclusive travel agencies, be them the Maldives, or a myriad of other islands, splinters of rock, sand, coral and land in the Pacific Ocean. Thousands of people that are forced to migrate, without water, land, food, shelter are considered only as items of accounting for private charity or development and humanitarian aid agencies. Those papers testify the sovereign interest of nations in securing a blank check and inventing new tricks to continue to postpone their doomsday date, when they will have to stop pumping oil and gas from the Earth.

At the negotiating table, this game was played on a computer keyboard, cutting and pasting words, adding or removing brackets. Outside of this editing feat, reality is made of suffering and pain and nothing new or unexpected came out in Paris. A “self fulfilling prophecy”, one could say. As a matter of fact, the absolute majority of countries had already tossed their chips on the table, written in black and white whatever they intended to do to contribute to limit temperature increase.

2 degrees, 1.5 degrees, 3 degrees. These figures make the difference in a gambling game that skilled negotiators have sorted out with language that holds almost everything together, an “aspirational” goal (we will have to get used to new lingo here, between “aspirational” and “transformational”, rather than binding a clear targets) towards the containment of temperature increase of 1.5 C as to preindustrial levels. No strings attached, no commitments. Again, it will be up to the invisible hand of market and its thaumaturgical capacity to provide a solution. An invisible hand that becomes pretty damn visible when it sticks new prospecting and drilling derricks in the ice, in the seas, in forests, or when it fells these to plant agrofuels, or evicts communities whose only crime is that of managing ecosystems from time immemorial, under the pretext of keeping them intact, and ensuring that they can absorb those toxic gases - even pumping them underground - that the new and old “Norths” of the world will continue to produce. This is what “net negative emissions” are all about, another trick to show that – apart from minor corrections – the route remains the same, and is chartered by the ideology of extractive capitalism.

Putting ourselves on the side of the sky today means taking a stance and the decision to unveil the trick, overcoming old rhetorics of a geographical North that exploits a colonized South. That North and that South do not exist anywhere but in handbooks of geopolitics of political correctness or opportunism. What we have today are communities in the North and in the South that suffer climate change, that are violated in the quest for new fuel, that resist and practice alternatives. It is not surprising that Parties in Paris did not agree to acknowledge that the only possible way out is that of inducing an oil shock, not a traditional shock of oil markets, but a shock therapy – to paraphrase Naomi Klein – that would envisage the end of fossil fuel prospecting and a progressive but rapid reduction of fossil fuel extraction and use. Figures speak for themselves: 800 billion USD are spent every year by fossil fuel companies to look for new gas and oil, as against less than the expected 100 billion allocated every year to support developing countries in their ecological transition. Much of this money is under the form of loans or private funds from companies or financial institutions and will reignite the spiral of debt, a double debt, ecological and financial.

If we put ourselves on the side of the sky, if we want to stop being relentlessly smothered, we will have to keep 80% of the gas and oil underground. This is what science tells us, but politics makes a selective use of science, so no decision has been taken on the matter in Paris, nor was anything agreed on the moral obligation to compensate those that have suffered loss and damage caused by climate change.

Nevertheless, the official “narrative”, that of the United Nations, of governments, and some big NGO (possibly affected by some sort of Stockholm syndrome) tells us that Paris represent an initial success. It invites us to look at the glass “half-full” when the glass is now full of cracks, and does not seem to be willing to wear new glasses. Hence, our bifocals help us to de-codify and unveil, and at the same time focus on the other side of the sky. And this is where a work in progress comes into form, women, peasants, workers, citizens, activists, pacifists, ecologists, communists and post-communists, indigenous peoples, small entrepreneurs that practice another economy, philosophers and artists, human chains and red lines. This “commune” has a powerful toolbox at hand, made of reclaiming ecological debt and struggling for climate justice, stopping CO2lonialism, recognition of the rights of nature and communities, ecocide, nonviolent resistance.

This other side of the sky has declared a state of climate emergency in Paris, and built its agenda, the agenda of peoples and of the Earth, by intertwining the critique to the development model to that of the current phase of extractive capitalism, to patriarchal power structures, where often “human” is synonymous of “man”, to the construction of authentically decolonized language and practices. So, our bifocals help us in looking beyond. And the beyond is made of us reclaiming our future, from bottom up, continuing to weave networks and relations, exchanging knowledge and practices, spinning a texture of resistance, and not only limiting ourselves to resilience, putting our minds and bodies between the sky and the Earth, between bulldozers and oil drilling machines.

Why big NGOs won't lead the fight on climate change

Belinda Rodriguez and Ben Case

December 6, 2015

<https://roarmag.org/essays/paris-ngo-cop21-climate-march/>

The cowardly response of prominent climate organizations like 350.org and Avaaz to the protest ban during COP21 demands accountability.

In the wake of ISIS' attacks on Paris, French authorities jumped on the opportunity to revoke permits for the Global Climate March, a well-planned series of demonstrations scheduled to coincide with international climate talks. After [speculation](#) around the fate of the demonstrations, several prominent groups including 350.org and Avaaz gave in and announced that the march was canceled, while key grassroots groups announced they would take to the streets despite the ban.

These differing responses expose a [long-standing](#) divide between mainstream NGOs and grassroots groups in the climate justice movement and highlight conflicts about how the movement negotiates with power and demonstrates solidarity in the face of crisis. With time running out to secure a livable planet and many more [high-stakes decisions](#) to be made going forward, we cannot afford to let these conflicts continue to go unresolved. It is clear now that the movement requires nothing short of an internal revolution.

Historically, high-level international meetings like the Paris Climate Conference ([COP21](#)) have resulted in abstract proclamations and shiny photo-ops, while dirty energy policies continue to accelerate levels of carbon [past the threshold](#) that will raise global temperatures to a dangerous and likely irreversible degree.

Despite hosting delegates from nearly every country and claiming to seek a binding cap on emissions, the UN Framework on Climate Change has no teeth. Deals that will impact literally everyone on earth — involving policies that are a matter of life and death for hundreds of millions of people on the “front lines” of climate disasters — are being cut by the same corporations and governments that have caused and profited from climate change.

The high-profile meetings represent the best governments can do to remedy climate change while leaving global power structures intact. As such they serve as opportunities for the movement to highlight the huge disconnect between the causes and severity of the climate crisis and the solutions proposed by a capitalist world system. Accordingly, movements called for unprecedented action at COP21 to force our voices into the conversation and remind the delegations where power ultimately lies.

Despite the supposed cancelation, many grassroots groups announced that the French government's ban on protest — which had [nothing to do with fighting terrorism](#) — would not

deter them. On November 29, activists took to the streets for climate justice, and the same government that is hosting the Climate Conference responded by [attacking](#), [tear gassing](#), and [arresting](#) hundreds of protesters.

How not to do civil resistance

If the goal of mainstream groups in canceling the march was to ensure the safety of the public, they failed. Both experience and research in civil resistance tell us that our best bet against fear, intimidation and repression is to [increase](#) (not decrease!) [participation](#). It is difficult to imagine the French government successfully arresting and detaining [400,000 people](#), the number originally expected to participate in the Paris march. Instead, hundreds of the [10,000](#) or so who demonstrated on November 29 became easy targets for arrest and [violent repression](#) by the French police.

It is well established that social movements win by [polarizing the public](#) and [exercising non-cooperation](#) to weaken and undermine power structures. Canceling the march did the opposite of these things. It demobilized would-be participants, shrank away from an opportunity to generate outrage over the French government's cynical efforts to subdue the movement after the Paris attack, and sent a message that the movement is willing to back down in high-stakes scenarios as soon as it meets opposition.



“We’re blocking Green Capitalism”, photo by Duc, via [Flickr](#).

Beyond failing to apply these core strategic principles, the groups that called off the march forfeited a unique opportunity to connect imperialism and neocolonialism with climate change, and escalate as an interconnected movement against war, racism, and fossil fuels.

Attempting to cancel the march was not only a strategic mistake, it was a betrayal. It validated the French government's attacks on protesters and it left the activists who boldly carried on with planned actions without much-needed organizational support. In the wake of events like the Paris attacks, we have a moral obligation to make meaning of the violence we see and its root causes. We should not allow the interests that are profiting from war to frame the response and set the political agenda.

This example is a case study in the ways power imbalances in NGOs reinforce systemic hierarchies and hurt movements. Beyond that, it provides a window into civil resistance in a climate-changed world. Resource wars, violence and social instability are [expected to increase](#) as the planet warms. This will not be the last time the movement needs to make a tough strategic decision with terrorism and xenophobia looming in the background.

The decision to cancel the Paris climate march sets a bad precedent, and with the stakes as high as they are we can't afford to let the issues that caused it go unaddressed.

Nonprofits versus social movements

The tension between corporatized nonprofits and grassroots groups is not new, but the consequences are getting more serious. The mounting realities of climate change create a new sense of urgency for the climate movement.

The US provides a good example. Throughout the history of its environmental movement, most of the organizing priorities have been set by "big green" environmental groups like the Sierra Club and the National Resources Defense Council. Overwhelmingly led by wealthy white men ([historically](#) and [to this day](#)), these groups have lacked the perspective and will to draw connections between environmental degradation, racism, sexism, inequality and other social injustices. They are also known for having ill-conceived ideas about challenging institutional power.

Author Naomi Klein [has argued](#) that many big green environmental groups pose an even greater threat to the planet than climate deniers because of their willingness to cooperate with corporate polluters and even [invest in fossil fuels](#).

Groups like 350.org suffer from the same lack of perspective as older big greens, with leadership that poorly reflects the diverse communities most impacted by climate change. While they are not in bed with the fossil fuel industry, they demonstrate a hauntingly familiar weakness in power analysis and lack coherent long-term strategies.



Police during the banned Climate March in Paris. Photo by Duuc, via [Flickr](#).

Big nonprofits like 350.org and Avaaz also command tremendous resources and communications infrastructure. These things are not inherently bad, but they must be leveraged as tools to uplift and amplify grassroots work, rather than drown out grassroots voices.

Curiously, some of the [decision-making groups](#) composing the Mobilization Support Team of the [People's Climate Movement](#) (one of the platforms used to announce that the Paris march was cancelled) released statements disregarding the French government's ban on protest.

Several of these Environmental Justice groups and others under the banner of the [It Takes Roots delegation](#) released an inspiring [statement](#) that they would continue to protest in Paris despite the ban. Additional groups openly defied the ban, including [Rising Tide North America](#) and the [Climate Games](#) (a Paris-based civil disobedience platform).

Naomi Klein, as an influential voice on climate change and global justice, [called out](#) the French government's crackdown on protest while demonstrating alongside other activists. The widely conflicting actions and public statements of several key groups and leaders raise big questions about how the decision to cancel the march was made in the first place.

We need a climate movement that can (actually) win

Civil resistance is contentious by nature. It can include activities that vary widely in tone, from righteous anger to [outright silliness](#), but the key to effective action is confronting oppressive power structures in one way or another.

The emergency security powers the US legislature granted the government after 9/11 under the Patriot Act are now [widely understood](#) to have been, at least in large part, a cynical power grab

by security forces. This lesson appears to have been lost on the leadership of organizations like 350.org and Avaaz.

Predictably, French authorities used [sweeping emergency powers](#) to crack down on climate demonstrators, preemptively placing [dozens of organizers under house arrest](#) leading up to the conference. Groups like 350.org, Avaaz, and others that sheepishly accepted the French government's ban on protest were complicit in an effort to quell dissent and reinforce state power when they could have challenged or undermined it.



Protestors sitting in front of the police line during the banned Climate March in Paris. Photo by Duc, via [Flickr](#).

How would the French authorities have responded on November 29 if groups like 350.org and Avaaz had instead announced that the march would not be cancelled; if there were hundreds of thousands of people in the streets instead of thousands? We can only speculate on how this could have influenced the political weather in Paris and worldwide, how it could have increased public awareness around the negotiations, or put pressure on decision makers to act in the interest of the people.

The important thing now is to move forward as a movement in a way that will allow us to fight for the change we need. We cannot allow opaque, top-down decision making to shape the future of our planet.

People's lives depend on what movements are doing. Literally everyone's lives depend on climate action, and for frontline communities this is the case in a very immediate sense. Yet big green nonprofits attempt to play nice with the corporations poisoning the atmosphere and the governments who actively impede the kind of progress that is urgently required.

Fossil fuel companies are not taking a break from their business in respect for the Parisian casualties. The French government did not attempt to cancel or move COP21 due to security concerns. Conservatives are not taking time off from pushing their hateful narratives against refugees.

If we take a metaphoric moment of silence in our opposition to climate change every time there is a crisis (and there is always a crisis somewhere) while the agents of climate change march forward undeterred, we become their allies in shaping the future of the planet.

Without popular movements aggressively leveraging people power, the result of these international talks will always be insufficient. After endless arguing and negotiating, governments and corporations will agree on non-binding or unenforceable resolutions that will leave power and profits in the hands of those who are destroying the planet. Absent our pressure, no amount of high-profile meetings will result in the outcomes we need.

This is a moment of reckoning. Without significant changes, we can only expect to witness more bad decisions with increasingly serious consequences. If the leadership of major nonprofits associated with the climate movement is unable or unwilling to lead the type of radical action our moment requires, if it makes decisions for the movement behind closed doors and absent strategic or moral grounding, if it is unaccountable to frontline communities and organizations, then we need new leadership altogether.

COP21: Achievements and challenges to the climate justice movement

Dec 29, 2015 by [David Schwartzman](#)

www.cnsjournal.org/cop21-achievements-and-challenges-to-the-climate-justice-movement/

The 21st meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (COP21) concluded its meeting on December 12 in Paris. COP21 followed the process that began in 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit, taking up as its central challenge the urgent need for global reductions in greenhouse gases that drive climate change.

Today, roughly 60 percent of greenhouse gas emissions hail from fossil-fuel use, with coal, natural gas' methane leakage into the atmosphere, and tar sands oil leaving the highest carbon footprint. Conventional liquid oil boasts the lowest footprint (about three-fourths that of coal), arguably making oil the real bridge energy source in a full transition to a [global wind/solar infrastructure](#).

Other greenhouse gases derived from human activity include nitrous oxide (the breakdown product of nitrate fertilizer), carbon dioxide, and methane—also byproducts of industrial agriculture, particularly cattle. That industrial food production also contributes to global warming makes a transition to ecologically-based agriculture imperative.

On the outcomes of the COP21 Paris Agreement, climate justice activists, including leading climate scientists such as Jim Hansen, generally have very sober assessments.

First, let us begin with the Paris Agreement's positives (with significant caveats). This COP meeting was the first in which virtually all countries agreed to at least submit their national plans on climate change, subject to periodic review. From the introduction to the [Paris Agreement](#):

“Recognizing that climate change represents an urgent and potentially irreversible threat to human societies and the planet and thus requires the widest possible cooperation by all countries, and their participation in an effective and appropriate international response, with a view to accelerating the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions, Also recognizing that deep reductions in global emissions will be required in order to achieve the ultimate objective of the Convention and emphasizing the need for urgency in addressing climate change, Acknowledging that climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and inter-generational equity.”

But does the actual Agreement live up to these strong, even inspiring words? It agreed to a goal of keeping global temperature increase “well below” 2 °C and to pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5 °C warming above pre-industrial temperatures by 2100. 176 nations including the biggest greenhouse gas polluters, China, U.S. and EU, made specific commitments via the Intended

National Determined Contributions (INDCs) to eventually curb their greenhouse gas emissions, as well as to peak them as soon as possible. No penalties, however, were provided for failing to achieve INDCs that curbed emissions over a projected time period. The sum of INDC commitments gives a projected warming of [2.7 to 3.5 °C warming above](#) the pre-industrial temperatures by 2100, translating into climate catastrophe.

In the Introduction to the Agreement itself, we find that the challenge is acknowledged:

“Emphasizing with serious concern the urgent need to address the significant gap between the aggregate effect of Parties’ mitigation pledges in terms of global annual emissions of greenhouse gases by 2020 and aggregate emission pathways consistent with holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre- industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C.”

Many leading climate scientists now think that the 2 °C limit is too high. For example, NASA climate scientist Jim Hansen said this goal was a “prescription for disaster” because of projected impacts such as sea level rise and acidification of the ocean. His assessment is reinforced by [a newly published study in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#). This evidence strongly backs up the long-term demand of many poor countries for a 1.5 °C limit, recognizing that the severe weaknesses in the Paris Agreement make this goal a huge challenge.

Nevertheless, some participants in COP 21 take even the acknowledgement of the 1.5 °C target as a major achievement:

“The fact that the accord prominently mentions the 1.5 °C target is a huge victory for vulnerable countries,” [says Saleemul Huq](#), director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development in Dhaka, Bangladesh and adviser to a coalition of least-developed nations. “Coming into Paris, we had all of the rich countries and all of the big developing countries not on our side... In the 14 days that we were here, we managed to get all of them on our side.”

But [Oscar Reyes from the Institute for Policy Studies](#) is far more sober. “According to the IPCC holding warming to 2 °C will probably require emissions to be cut by 40–70% by 2050 compared with 2010 levels, achieving the 1.5 °C target would require substantially larger emissions cuts — of the order of 70–95% by 2050,” Reyes says. “The new agreement doesn’t [fully] take effect until 2020, the chance to achieve the 1.5-degree goal will have already gone, unless all of the world’s largest economies dramatically change course.”

“It’s a fraud really, a fake,” [says Hansen](#). “It’s just bullshit for them to say: ‘[We’ll have a 2 °C warming target](#) and then try to do a little better every five years.’ It’s just worthless words. There is no action, just promises. As long as fossil fuels appear to be the cheapest fuels out there, they will be continued to be burned.”

[Patrick Bond, climate justice leader from South Africa has also added](#), “Since 2009, US State Department chief negotiator Todd Stern successfully drove the negotiations away from four essential principles: ensuring emissions-cut commitments would be sufficient to halt runaway climate change; making the cuts legally binding with accountability mechanisms; distributing the

burden of cuts fairly based on responsibility for causing the crisis; and making financial transfers to repair weather-related loss and damage following directly from that historic liability.

Washington elites always prefer ‘market mechanisms’ like carbon trading instead of paying their climate debt even though the US national carbon market fatally crashed in 2010.”

Nevertheless, rather than immobilizing the climate justice movement with the recognition of the huge challenges unaddressed in the COP21 agreement, indications so far point to a re-energizing process as a result, building on its recent victories such as the rejection of the X-L Keystone pipeline by President Obama with continuing struggles around extreme energy projects and the actions of cities around the world to take more aggressive steps to curb their greenhouse gas emissions and transition to renewable energy supplies.

I suggest the following issues be taken more seriously by the global climate justice movement:

1. The huge subsidies going to fossil fuels (IMF study: \$5 trillion/year), with indirect costs including health impacts from air pollution (3-7 million die every year), with a goal to nationalize the energy industry and decentralize with community management and ownership clean energy supplies in a full transition to wind/solar power (e.g., see [Unions for Energy Democracy](#)).
2. The Military Industrial [Fossil Fuel Nuclear State Terror and Surveillance] Complex (MIC) as a block to achieving global cooperation for rapid curb on global greenhouse gas emissions and a full transition to wind/solar power. The Pentagon/NATO is the instrumental arm of the Imperial foreign policy of the MIC, so while the Pentagon is going “green” with respect to energy conservation and use of renewables it is simply “greenwashing” its Imperial role. The Pentagon’s recognition of the growing security threat from climate change reinforces the Imperial Agenda and military spending.

This is the critical obstacle posed by the MIC, not the sizable, but widely exaggerated greenhouse gas emissions of the Pentagon itself. ^[1] Yes, of course there are critical contradictions within capital regarding energy policy, and the Green New Deal strategy must capture the “solar” faction of capital into a multi-class alliance to force demilitarization and termination of the perpetual war dynamic to have any hope of implementing a C3 prevention program in time. Does any socialist believe that this prevention program can be realized as long as the State Terror apparatus is locked in the vicious cycle of violence with its useful enemy, its terrorist antagonist? To sum up, this strategy remains very relevant: [build a transnational movement for a Global Green New Deal](#). This is not a strategy relying on the capitalist market driving “green” capitalist investment, rather one opening up the path for a concrete C3 prevention program and a more favorite terrain for global ecosocialist class struggle.

Footnotes

[1] On the issue of the Pentagon Greenhouse Emissions, [Neslen in his recent Guardian article says](#), “According to Department of Defence figures, the US army emitted more than 70m tonnes of CO2 equivalent per year in 2014. But the figure omits facilities including hundreds of military bases overseas, as well as equipment and vehicles.” I contacted the DOE with the response that the total CO2 equivalent emissions does include overseas bases. (The [excel sheet](#) available in the

Neslen's article includes emissions labeled "Mobile Emissions [Vehicles, Aircraft, Ships and Equipment], plus Military Operations.") The total CO₂ equivalent emissions equal to 70 million metric tons from the DOD is less than 0.2% of the global emissions for 2014. Neslen also cites the 2008 Oil Change International estimate for the Iraq War. The total carbon dioxide equivalent emissions for the Iraq War corresponds to less than 0.1% of the total global carbon dioxide emissions from burning fossil fuels for the same five-year period ([I published this comparison in 2009](#)). Yes, the DOD emissions are larger than that from many small countries, but simply focusing on the direct emissions from the military is misleading.

The Paris Agreement: Paper Heroes Widen the Climate Justice Gap

John Foran

December 13, 2015

<http://www.resilience.org/stories/2015-12-14/the-paris-agreement-paper-heroes-widen-the-climate-justice-gap>

“By comparison to what it could have been, it’s a miracle. By comparison to what it should have been, it’s a disaster.... The talks in Paris are the best there have ever been. And that is a terrible indictment.” George Monbiot, [*The Guardian*](#), December 12, 2015



Banner saying “COP 21 +3 Degrees Celsius” on fire at climate protest in Paris, December 12, 2015. Photo by John Foran

The day after can be a source of regret, or a new beginning. It all depends on how much we can perceive the importance of events in time, in history, in life itself.

On Saturday, December 12, in Paris, the negotiators at the COP 21 UN climate summit came to a final decision on the text they have been negotiating for four years, or six, or twenty-one by signaling their assent to a thirty-two page document, titled simply “[The Paris Agreement](#).” Not quite a treaty, since it is not really legally binding in a strict sense, it gives the world its second global climate accord, superseding the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, and replacing it with a global map for our climate future agreed by all 196 parties to it, the nations of the world.

It’s just not a map to any kind of future we should want.

Saving the World: The Master Narrative

Scenes of relief and jubilation broke out on the floor of the closing plenary when Laurent Fabius, the President of COP 21, gavelled the session to a close amidst thunderous applause late on Saturday afternoon. It was a huge diplomatic accomplishment to get the nations to agree to anything, as anyone who has ever followed a COP can attest. And in this sense, it *was* a miracle, since going into Paris the parties were far apart on all the tough negotiating issues that had stymied progress over the years: who should be responsible for emissions reductions, how massive adaptation funds should be raised and allocated to the Global South, and who would help climate-impacted countries recover from the loss and damage of catastrophic weather events.

Of the agreement, Laurent Fabius [said](#): “It is my deep conviction that we have come up with an ambitious and balanced agreement. Today it is a moment of truth.” Not shy about taking credit, Barack Obama [said](#) “We’ve transformed the United States into the global leader in fighting climate change,” and [tweeted](#): “This is huge: Almost every country in the world just signed on to the #Paris Agreement on climate change – thanks to American leadership.” Al Gore was “visibly moved” and John Kerry [announced](#) “It’s a victory for all of the planet and future generations.” French President François Hollande [observed](#) that “12 December 2015 will be a date to go down in history as a major leap for mankind. It is rare in any lifetime to have a chance to change the world.”

Some international experts agreed. Lord Stern, author of *Why Are We Waiting? The Logic, Urgency, and Promise of Tackling Climate Change*, [proclaimed](#): “This is a historic moment, not just for us and our world today, but for our children, our grandchildren and future generations. The Paris Agreement is a turning point in the world’s fight against unmanaged climate change, which threatens prosperity and wellbeing among both rich and poor countries.”

Professor Hans Joachim (John) Schellnhuber, Director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research [effused](#): “The spirits of Paris have defeated the ghosts of Copenhagen! Reason and moral combined at the COP21 to deliver a historical climate agreement that finally transcends national egotisms.” *In the view* of Eva Filzmoser, director at Carbon Market Watch, “*The French Presidency achieved a miracle in presenting a detailed treaty acceptable to all Parties. At first reading, the new global climate treaty is surprisingly positive. We are still looking for the loopholes.*”

Most of the world press will by now have followed suit. The message that goes out to the world will be the saving the planet one, tempered to some degree by any closer look at the

details, and failing to credit the success of the climate justice movement in raising awareness about the issues, or noting its own, more nuanced and critical assessments, in the narratives that are being written at a furious pace.

Burning the World: The Climate Movement Judges the Paris Outcome

First [reactions](#) from the climate movements, NGOs, and activists were decidedly mixed, and where one stood on the Agreement could be a political litmus test of where the climate movement's fault lines and political sensibilities lie.

Truly celebratory praise came instantly from the more than forty-two million-member on-line movement Avaaz, in the form of an e-mail from Emma Ruby-Sachs titled: "We did it! – A turning point in human history":

World leaders at the UN climate talks have just set a landmark goal that can save everything we love! This is what we marched for, what we signed, called, donated, messaged, and hoped for: a brilliant and massive turning point in human history.

It's called net-zero human emissions – a balancing of what we release into the air and what is taken out – and when the dust settles and the Paris Agreement is in the hands of lawmakers, clean energy will be the best, cheapest, and most effective way to keep their promise. This gives us the platform we need to realize the dream of a safe future for generations!

Out of great crises, humanity has borne beautiful visions. World War II gave rise to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an enduring standard for our spirit and capacity as one people. The fall of Apartheid led South Africa to the single most bold and progressive constitution in the world.

Ambitious visions like these rely on movements to carry them into the mainstream, and on movements to make them reality in our everyday lives. Today is no exception.

Some of the trouble with this formulation is indicated by other large climate NGOs. There were many shades of criticism, beginning with the cautious optimism of Greenpeace International Director Kumi Naidoo, who drew the balance sheet [this way](#):

The wheel of climate action turns slowly, but in Paris it has turned. This deal puts the fossil fuel industry on the wrong side of history.

There's much in the text that has been diluted and polluted by the people who despoil our planet, but it contains a new imperative to limit temperature rises to 1.5 degrees. That single number, and the new goal of net zero emissions by the second half of this century, will cause consternation in the boardrooms of coal companies and the palaces of oil-exporting states....

There's not enough in this deal for the nations and people on the frontlines of climate change. It contains an inherent, ingrained injustice. The nations which caused this problem have promised too little help to the people who are already losing their lives and livelihoods.

The global movement 350.org, far more radical in its views than it used to be, went further. In the [words](#) of Bill McKibben, "Every government seems now to recognize that the fossil fuel era must end and soon. But the power of the fossil fuel industry is reflected in the text, which drags out the transition so far that endless climate damage will be done. Since pace is the crucial question now, activists must redouble our efforts to weaken that industry. This didn't save the planet but it may have saved the chance of saving the planet." May Boeve, 350's Executive Director, believes the Agreement can be used in the fight against the fossil fuel corporations and countries: "This marks the end of the era of fossil fuels. There is no way to meet the targets laid out in this agreement without keeping coal, oil and gas in the ground. The text should send a clear signal to fossil fuel investors: divest now."

The climate justice and radical spectrum was more unequivocal in its condemnation. In a spirited defiance of police orders not to assemble (the government gave in at the last minute), an estimated 15,000 or more determined climate activists gathered to protest the agreement's crossing of "red lines" for the planet and to honor those whose lives have been lost to climate injustice.



Some of the thousands of people who brought their "red lines for the climate that must not be crossed" to the Arc de Triomphe on December 12, 2015. Photo: John Foran

And at a gathering of thousands of activists who held hands in front of the Eiffel Tower on Saturday, Naomi Klein [said what had to be said](#).

Our leaders have shown themselves willing to set our world on fire and we will not let that happen. Our mood today is not one of despair but rather a clarifying sense of commitment and purpose. We knew that these were not the real leaders. We knew that the leaders were in the streets, that the leaders were in the fields, that this city is filled with climate heroes.

Despite their beautiful words, our leaders remain trapped in a broken system and a crashing worldview based on dominance of people and the planet and that worldview simply does not allow them to align their words, their goals, with their actions.

And so the gap is increased between the rhetoric and the goal of safety and the reality of the epic danger they are allowing to unfold. And the gap is increased between the expressions of solidarity with the most vulnerable and the reality of those leaders consistently putting the interests of the rich and powerful before the interests of the vulnerable, and indeed the interests of all humanity.

Our leaders have none of the courage that it takes to stand up to the corporate interests that are responsible for this crisis. They can't even say the words "fossil fuels" in this text. So it is up to us to do what they so clearly refuse to do, which is to stand up to the polluters and make them pay.

And we will do this everywhere, using every tool that we can. We will do it in the streets with protests like this one, and we will do it in the face of every single polluting project that they decide to try to roll out.

We are doing this already, and we're winning.... This is a global movement. Some of us call it Blockadia. So we will take them on in the streets, the forests, and in the water. In our schools, in our places of worship, and in our cities. And we're going after them with our art, with our culture, because as we know, the logic of austerity is incompatible with life on Earth....

We are accelerating the rollout of a society that is based on protecting life, on climate justice, on energy democracy....

As we go forward, we also have to acknowledge the grief, grief that we will not deny nor will we suppress, grief at what we have already lost, for those whom we have already lost.

And we acknowledge that there is also rage at those who could have acted long ago but chose not to, and at those who make that same disastrous decision still.

But mostly, mostly there is joy. Mostly there is joy and resolve as we witness the next world taking shape before our eyes. We used to think that it was

our job to save the world. Then we realized that we are really saving ourselves. We used to say that were here to protect nature, and now we say that we *are* nature, protecting herself.

Under the title, “Too weak, too late, say climate justice campaigners” can be found an extensive [compendium](#) of radical opinion that emerged within hours of the outcome (the following indented quotes come from this very useful piece).

“This deal offers a frayed life-line to the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people.” – Helen Szoke, executive director, Oxfam

“The US is a cruel hypocrite. Obama spoke about embracing the US’s role of creating the problem and the need to take responsibility. This is all talk and no action. They created a clause that excludes compensation and liability for the losses and damages brought on by climate chaos. This is a deliberate plan to make the rich richer and the poor poorer.” – Lidy Nacpil, Asian People’s Movement on Debt and Development

“We, Indigenous Peoples, are the redline. We have drawn that line with our bodies against the privatisation of nature, to dirty fossil fuels and to climate change. We are the defenders of the world’s most biologically and culturally diverse regions. We will protect our sacred lands. Our knowledge has much of the solutions to climate change that humanity seeks. It’s only when they listen to our message that ecosystems of the world will be renewed.” – Tom Goldtooth, Executive Director, Indigenous Environmental Network

“The Paris Agreement will be known as the Polluters’ Great Escape since it weakens rules on the rich countries and puts the world on a pathway to 3C warming.” – Victor Menotti, International Forum on Globalization

“The price tag for climate damages this century will be in the trillions, with much of that damage in poor and vulnerable countries. The US is responsible for much of that toll, but they don’t care and they won’t pay. With arm twisting of developing countries, they have language now protecting the richest and heaping devastating costs onto the poorest.” – Doreen Stabinsky, Professor of Global Environmental Politics, College of the Atlantic, Maine, US

“Close to 100% reductions are needed by developed countries already by 2030 for a reasonable chance of 2°, let alone 1.5° world. Paris had the opportunity to deliver radical pre-2020 action and did none of this. Developed countries’ refusal to commit to either cuts or necessary finance means we are sleepwalking into climate chaos.” – Niclas Hällström, What Next Forum

“The Paris negotiators are caught up in a frenzy of self-congratulation about 1.5 degrees being included in the agreement, but the reality is that the reductions on the table are still locking us into 3 degrees of global warming.... The bullying and arm twisting of rich countries, combined with the pressure to

agree to a deal at all costs, has ensured that the agreement will prevent poor countries from seeking redress for the devastating impacts of a crisis that has been thrust upon them.” – Nick Dearden the director of Global Justice Now

“The deal fails to deliver the rules and tools to ensure that climate change doesn’t spiral out of control. Many in Paris seem to have forgotten the very people that this climate agreement was supposed to protect.... In spite of this result in Paris, people all over the world must push their governments to go beyond what they have agreed here.” – Teresa Anderson, Policy Officer, ActionAid International

The key organizers of climate justice actions by civil society during COP 21 were unanimous in their condemnation of the outcome. “Rich countries have moved the goal posts so far that we are left with a sham of a deal in Paris. Through piecemeal pledges and bullying tactics, rich countries have pushed through a very bad deal,” [said](#) Sara Shaw, Friends of the Earth International climate justice and energy coordinator. Asad Rehman of the same organization, who knows as much about justice issues at the COP as anyone, put it this way: “The iceberg has struck, the ship is going down and the band is still playing to warm applause.”

Attac France, one of the key climate justice organizations on the ground in Paris, active in every aspect of the mobilization of civil society, was equally critical. Activist and spokesperson on climate issues Maxime Combes [said](#): “The mandate given to COP 21, François Hollande and Laurent Fabius was not to get an accord at any price. To use the terms ‘ambitious,’ ‘just,’ and ‘legally binding’ in presenting the Agreement is an intellectual fraud. And to add a vague reference to ‘climate justice’ is contemptuous of all who have mobilized under its name for years.” Attac spokesperson Thomas Coutrot added: “The emptiness of this agreement reflects the powerlessness of governments to attack the true causes of climate disruption. This comes as no surprise: the greed of the multinationals, the fossil fuel energy, and the obsession with growth are considered untouchable.”

Danny Chivers and Jess Worth, who have been providing excellent coverage of COP 21 for *The New Internationalist*, evaluate the outcome in terms of the four criteria of [The People’s Test](#) developed by movement organizations from the global South. These are:

1. *Catalyze immediate, urgent and drastic emission reductions;*
2. *Provide adequate support for transformation;*
3. *Deliver justice for impacted people;*
4. *Focus on genuine, effective action rather than false solutions.*

The title of their [piece](#) gives the answer: “Paris deal: Epic fail on a planetary scale.”

Where is the Justice?

The central failures of what has happened in Paris have been underlined by the trenchant criticisms above. Based on a year-long study of the process, actually stretching back to my first time inside the COP in Durban four years ago, and shaped by these roller-coaster two weeks in

Paris, I offer here my first reflections on what is, by any measure, a historic moment in the sense that it will shape all our futures.

There are two huge gaps between the lines of the Agreement: one of greenhouse gas emissions and one of elementary climate justice.

The INDCs that constitute the core of the Agreement's stance on the greenhouse gases that are driving global warming faster and faster toward the cliff of extreme danger, give us a world of something over three degrees Celsius – in other words, Paris has been a completely unacceptable failure to take the kind of action that climate science is screaming for and the world's people must have.

If anything, mentioning 1.5 degrees in the text only heightens this glaring hole at the center of the plan to save the planet, highlighting how far away our governments are from being able to rise to the greatest challenge that humanity has ever faced.

Of the 180 pledges received, only two have been judged “sufficient” by [Climate Action Tracker](#), those of Gambia and Bhutan, whose share in global emissions is vanishingly small, and whose courageous actions are therefore symbolic, in both the sense of “only symbolic” and “visionary and humane.”

Kevin Anderson, Deputy Director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, [noted](#) that “The Copenhagen text included aviation and shipping emissions, that together are as large as the emissions of Britain and Germany combined, but they are not mentioned in the Paris text.’ Overall, he finds the agreement “weaker than Copenhagen” and “not consistent with the latest science.” This is [put](#) more colorfully but just as strongly by the United States’ most well-known climate scientist, James Hansen: “It’s a fraud really, a fake,” he says, rubbing his head. “It’s just bullshit for them to say: ‘We’ll have a 2C warming target and then try to do a little better every five years.’ It’s just worthless words. There is no action, just promises. As long as fossil fuels appear to be the cheapest fuels out there, they will be continued to be burned.”

So, emissions remain essentially out of control, *pace* the optimists who make observations along the lines of “We have cut a degree or more of the business-as-usual scenario already, and we will do more and more as time goes on and the provisions for adjusting national pledges become increasingly ambitious.” It is very hard for me to see this happening (and I’m an optimist too most days).

The words “climate justice” and “just transition” actually each appear once in the Agreement’s preamble, but they are passed over as foreign notions held by unnamed others: “Noting the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including oceans, and the protection of biodiversity, recognized by some cultures as Mother Earth, and noting the importance for some of the concept of ‘climate justice’, when taking action to address climate change.”

In reality, instead of justice, the most vulnerable nations in the world have been betrayed by the global North and the big emitters like China and India.

Loss and damage remain words on paper, with no permanent standing, no mechanism for finding the funds, and a clear statement that no one is “liable” to pay or assist countries hard hit already by climate catastrophe like the Philippines and many others to come. The decision text on this makes clear “that Article 8 of the Agreement does not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation.”

“The idea of even discussing loss and damage now or in the future was off limits. The Americans told us it would kill the COP,” [said](#) Leisha Beardmore, the chief negotiator for the Seychelles. “They have always been telling us: ‘Don’t even say that’.”

Instead of this, developing countries are offered “Comprehensive risk assessment and management, risk insurance facilities, climate risk pooling and other insurance solutions.”

There is no firm commitment from any country to actually make a contribution to the Green Climate Fund’s promised \$100 billion annually by 2020. These funds are for making the front-line communities of the global South more resilient to the inevitable disasters that even 1.5 degrees will serve up with increasing frequency. Instead, developed countries are “strongly urged” to find “a concrete roadmap” to locate this missing money!

There is nothing binding in the Paris Agreement that will force any government to act with compassion, responsibility, and more than words to bend the arc of climate change in the direction of justice.

And why should we expect otherwise? The real problem with the COP process is that it can only produce a document forged by and for the world’s political and economic elites. The most rapacious corporations in the world can carry on wrecking the planet, especially if they say the right things and make some gestures of awareness of the climate crisis. The main mechanisms for bringing down emissions remain in marketized form, subject to every abuse that follows when we measure human needs and nature herself in the cold, hard terms of cash money.

Salvaging Something for the Future We Want

Enshrining the words “1.5 degrees Celsius” in a global climate accord opens a door to a house on fire, and will be turned into one of the most powerful memes of the global climate justice movement now. We will finally turn the page on the COP process and get down to the business of transforming a world that has been broken by greed, callous disregard for life, and the slow violence that capitalism visits on the majority world, each day a little more cruelly than the last.

The climate justice movement has gained demonstrable strength in the course of 2014 and 2015, and here in Paris too. The connections made here, the insights gained, the empowerment of activists of all ages, will be taken home to make deeper connections with the movements, organizations, front-line communities, and people who are already doing so much. They will be used to try to stop the climate madness of the world’s political and economic elites, and the systems that have created it: capitalism, patriarchy, racism, militarism, colonialism – all

the operations of power in our warming world. My guess is that at the end of the day, the network of networks that comprise the movement will be stronger than ever, going into the battles of 2016.



“Climate Justice Peace” spelled by thousands of activists across Paris, December 12, 2015

“When we came into these Paris talks we had very low expectations. These expectations have been exceeded in how low they are. It’s what happens on Monday that’s the most important thing. Do we return to our capitals, do we build a movement, do we make sure our countries are doing their fair share? Do we stop the dirty energy industry, do we invest in new climate jobs, do we invest in community-owned decentralized energy? And most importantly, do we stand in solidarity with the millions of people across the world who are struggling for climate justice?” – Asad Rehman, [quoted](#) by Danny Chivers

It’s up to the movements, networks, activists, thinkers, bloggers, organizers, and countless “ordinary people” to step up in 2016.

We will create the worlds we dream of together, no matter what it takes, and we will fight to keep them alive in our hearts and our communities, helping Mother Earth defend herself, and in the process, rising to the great challenges of our time, step by step, win or lose, come what may.