

Two C or Not Two C? Little Mermaid; Little Progress in Copenhagen:
An examination of the climate talks

“Ever get the feeling you’ve been cheated” – John Lydon to the audience at final Sex Pistols gig.
(He later said that this comment was aimed at the world in general)



The Co₂untdown to Co₂penhagen - Ban Ki-moon, the secretary general of the UN, said that “the future of humanity depends upon these talks”. This was echoed by Hilary Benn, UK Environment Secretary: “Without any doubt at all, the most important meeting in human history”. Lord Stern: “The most important gathering since the Second World War” and Ed Miliband, UK Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change: “Bretton Woods plus Yalta multiplied by Reykjavik”. So quite important then! Remember this was supposed to be the summit that replaced the (pitiful) Kyoto Protocol that was adopted in 1997 and came into force a long seven years later. One week into the Copenhagen talks and a block of developing countries accused the chair of trying to ‘kill’ the Kyoto Protocol.

John Prescott told Jon Snow that we need fairness and equity in Copenhagen and talked about carbon rationing. He all but names this framework - Contraction and Convergence: <http://www.gci.org.uk/>. Channel 4 also brings up ‘emailgate/climategate’ as a reason to suggest that there is now doubt about the science of global warming. Presumably in the name of ‘balance’, other media outlets invite back the usual suspects of climate deniers who have collectively helped delay meaningful action on climate change for nearly two decades. Saudi Arabia use the hacked, cherry-picked and admittedly injudicious emails from the University of East Anglia as proof that global warming is a myth and certainly not man-made in the first days of Copenhagen. These were the emails that had been hacked into from Russia (another country without a great appetite for tackling climate change) last spring and were made public in the build-up to Copenhagen ... Hmm.

The week before the summit one Guardian headline was ‘Copenhagen must fail – top scientist’. The top scientist is Jim Hansen, chief scientist for NASA, who has been warning of the dangers of man-made greenhouse gas emissions since the 80s. Due to political compromise he suggests that any agreement would be so unambitious that it would commit people and the planet to a place we don’t want to go - I am paraphrasing. He is also fundamentally opposed to carbon markets, that are at the

heart of climate negotiations, which he compares to Papal indulgences that the Catholic Church sold to sinners for redemption in the Middle Ages. Colleagues of mine who attended Copenhagen said that the event resembles one big trade fair, where deniers and fossil-fuel lobbyists are invited to attend. In this way western countries can continue with business as usual by paying developing nations not to pollute and there is no net reduction in emissions. Hansen has called upon the world to limit global warming to 1°C above pre-industrial temperature to prevent Greenland raising sea-levels by 7 metres. We are already at 0.7°C.

Weeks before Copenhagen it became clear that the best that could be expected from the summit was a political agreement because the US Senate could not commit themselves to the issue of climate change and emission reduction targets until 2010.

On the eve of the talks it is suspected that following pressure from the EU and US, Bernarditas de Castro Muller, the G77 plus China Groups chief negotiator is asked to step down. She is immediately signed up by the Sudanese delegation to negotiate on behalf of the G77 (130 countries or two thirds of the planet's poorest people). She has said of the West: "They just do not accept they have historic responsibility. It's like I burn down your house and you become rich but now you say you can pay for it yourself. Well you might be rich, but your brothers and sisters also lost their houses. Are you free from responsibility because one member of your family becomes rich?"

COP 15 – The 15th Conference of the Parties of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Twelve days to avert catastrophic runaway climate change. Did they do it? We'll find out I am afraid. For some time perceived wisdom has been that holding global warming to 2°C above pre-industrial temperatures will avert 'dangerous' or runaway global climate change. This is the temperature the UK and EU have signed up to. Bolivian President Evo Morales called on the world leaders to raise their ambitions to hold temperature increase to 1°C, saying: "Our objective is to save humanity and not just half of humanity. We are here to save mother earth. Our objective is to reduce climate change to under 1°C. Above this many islands will disappear and Africa will suffer a holocaust."

The Alliance of Small Island States (43 countries) say any deal that allows temperatures to rise by more than 1.5°C is 'not negotiable'. Their call was backed by a further 48 countries. The following day the UN conference chief Yvo de Boer implied that the proposal had little chance of being adopted saying: "It is theoretically possible that the conference will agree to hold temperatures to 1.5°C but most industrialised countries have pinned their hopes on 2°C." The 2°C figure was included in the leaked draft negotiating text prepared by the summit's host Denmark. On the ninth day of the conference the G77 succumbed to this 'hope' and accepted the 2°C rise. Archbishop Desmond Tutu said: "We are facing impending disaster on a monstrous scale ... a global goal of about 2°C is to condemn Africa to incineration and no modern development ... it is better to have no deal than to have a bad deal". And Augustine Njamshi of the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance stated: "You cannot say you are proposing a 'solution' to climate change if your solution will see millions of Africans die and if the poor not the polluters keep paying for climate change."

Rajendra Pachauri, the head of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), said referring to a 1.5°C rise: "Some of the most vulnerable regions in the world will be worst affected. These will be the largest countries in the developing world. They have little infrastructure that might protect them from climate change. The tragedy of the situation is that those countries that have not at all contributed to the problem of climate change will be the ones most affected ... some parts of

the world, which even with a 1.5°C rise, will suffer great hardship and lose their ability to lead a decent and stable form of existence."

'24 hours' is a dramatic device used in the movies and so it was in Copenhagen: 24 hours before the conference was due to close a leaked report from the UN stated: 'The emissions cuts offered so far at the Copenhagen summit would still lead to global temperatures rising by an average of 3°C'. The newspaper article adds: 'A rise of 3°C would mean up to 170 million more people suffering severe coastal floods and 550 million more at risk of hunger, according to the Stern economic review of climate change for the UK government – as well as leaving up to 50% of species facing extinction ... could lead to the collapse of the Amazon rainforest, crippling water shortages across South America and Australia and the near-extinction of tropical coral reefs'. The IPCC has previously said that global greenhouse gas emissions must peak by 2015 (or 83 months away). Existing reduction pledges from the summit would not halt emissions growth until 2040 ...

Perhaps the most surreal moments from Hans Christian Anderson's homeland came when the International Advertising Association representing the global advertising industry asked the planet to 'Turn Copenhagen into Hopenhagen. Sign the petition and become a citizen', as if clicking on a mouse transformed us from consumers. But just in case you were as confounded as I, normal service was resumed with the thumbnail, 'Act Locally, Take to the street with a Hopenhagen T-shirt', the cotton of which may well have come from the banks of the Indus and represent 2,500 litres of imported water from a water-stressed part of the world; see Aman Iman: <http://www.vision21.org.uk/index.asp?page=waterislife>. The next surprising story was the Nobel Peace price recipient and climate change super hero, Al Gore, observing; "Civil disobedience has an honourable history, and when the urgency and moral clarity cross a certain threshold, then I think that civil disobedience is quite understandable and it has a role to play. And I expect that it will increase, no question about it.'

Thousands of activists were arrested for peaceful demonstrations despite assurances that this would not happen. Civil society groups that represent the voiceless, the landless, and the powerless who had been on the 'guest list' were barred from the Bella Centre where the summit was taking place. On another day, civil society from the majority world protested against 'business as usual' and false solutions to climate change such as the inequity of global and carbon markets and were joined by delegates from the developing nations from the Bella Centre. The civil society groups stand for climate justice and living in harmony with the planet, rather than profiting from its resources.

These groups held an alternative summit with alternative solutions to those that they see as false solutions to climate change. It attracted 15,000 more than the 35,000 allowed into the Bella Centre. Here George Monbiot reported: The barrister Polly Higgins described 'a declaration of planetary rights that invests ecosystems with similar legal safeguards to those won by humans after the second world war. It changes the legal relationship between humans, the atmosphere and the biosphere from ownership to stewardship. It creates a global framework for negotiation which gives nation states less discretion to dispose of ecosystems and the people who depend on them'.

Closer to home – whilst our elected leaders were carving up the global commons, or as one commentator put it, dividing the atmosphere like the colonial powers did in Africa, The Daily Express led with '100 Reasons why Global warming is natural' and 'Climate Change 'lies' by Britian - Now Russia accuses Met Office'. The Guardian led with 'Brown attacks "flat-earth climate change sceptics' whilst the Met Office published figures showing that the last ten years were the hottest in recorded history. Following snowfall in Britian, the Daily Star's frontpage was 'Global Warming what a load of snowballs!' (their exclamation mark). There was the full page advert in The Guardian for RT News: 'Is

Climate Change More Science Fiction Than Fact?' Meanwhile in London, Campaign Against Climate Change organised the Climate Emergency Rally calling for: 'Declaration of a Climate Emergency, 10% cuts by end 2010, a million green jobs by end 2010, ban domestic flights, 55 mph speed limit – scrap the roads program and an end of Agrofuel use'. On the same day, Stop Climate Chaos (90 organisations including the WI and RSPB with millions of members!) galvanised 50,000 to attend the biggest gathering of people in the UK against climate change. At one point the march was one street way from Oxford Street, which was also closed to traffic and was busier than the march with £200 million going through the tills that day.

What did Copenhagen achieve? After eight draft texts a political agreement was brokered by China, South Africa, India, Brazil and the US, much to the surprise of the G77 (130 countries) who had not seen the text, but learnt about it by watching Obama on a TV screen informing the world about the deal. The Copenhagen Accord (the entire document is on our website) is a political statement not a legally binding treaty and within its pages: On temperature: 'The increase in global temperature should be below two degrees.' On peaking emissions: 'We should co-operate in achieving the peaking of global and national emissions as soon as possible.' On emission cuts: 'Parties commit to implement individually or jointly the quantified economy-wide emissions targets for 2020 as listed in appendix 1 before 1st February 2010' – for the EU this is a still to be determined level between 20-30% on 1990 levels, when some years ago the science was saying 90% by 2030. The 80% reduction by 2050 dropped out of the text on the final day, as did all long term targets. Forests are going to become part of the carbon markets, which is an unmitigated disaster for our carbon sinks, destruction of which is the quickest way to bring about runaway climate change. Plantations of, for example, palm oil for biofuels will be classed as a carbon sink which is so absurd as to beggar belief, given that peatland plantations have a carbon debt of 840 years. On money for developing countries to adapt to the climate change that we have caused – Tuvalu, the island nation that is currently being submerged by rising sea levels likened the financing offered to the '30 pieces of silver' that Judas Iscariot received to betray Jesus. Little of the money is new aid money and all too often the money that is promised is reduced by the donor countries.

On a deadline for a treaty: 'as soon as possible ...' Gordon Brown said: "This is the first step we are taking towards a green and low carbon future for the world, steps we are taking together." John Sauven, executive director of Greenpeace UK, had a slightly different view: "The city of Copenhagen is a crime scene tonight, with the guilty men and women fleeing to the airport. Ed Miliband is among the very few that come out of this summit with any credit. It is now evident that beating global warming will require a radically different model of politics than the one on display here in Copenhagen."

Lydia Baker of Save the Children said world leaders had "effectively signed a death warrant for many of the world's poorest children. Up to 250,000 children from poor communities could die before the next major meeting in Mexico at the end of next year."

Who was to blame for this shameful unforgivable collective failure? Well there appears to be plenty of candidates – the main ones being America and China followed by the EU, who have more sway than the likes of Saudi Arabia. What is clear is that the world's leaders have had since 1992 since they met at the Rio Earth Summit and agreed to "stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that does not cause dangerous interference with the climate system". They may already have failed. Certainly relatives of the 300,000 people who die annually from climate change may feel the 'interference is dangerous.' It should also be evident that these negotiations are deeply flawed, where 'might' appears still to be 'right'. As with the abolition of slavery, the civil rights movement, universal suffrage, Gandhi and the velvet revolution, it is again time for our global

citizenship to demonstrate that 'business as usual' is no longer acceptable and a legally binding treaty must do what has to be done to truly prevent runaway climate change and protect as many people and species as is possible. We started with John Lydon, so it seems fitting to finish with a recent quote when he reformed Public Image Ltd (PIL): 'life's grim, but we'll make it better'.

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