At Copenhagen climate talks

US takes hard line against poor nations, China

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11 December 2009

Tensions between the major imperialist powers and the poorest and most oppressed countries erupted Thursday at the UN climate talks in Copenhagen, after the leaking of draft documents that would effectively ratify the privileged position of the United States and Europe in the world economy.

The so-called Danish text, a secret agreement nominally drafted by the host country but dictated by the United States and Great Britain, would set emission standards permitting the wealthy countries to release twice as much carbon per capita as poor countries for the next 40 years. It was leaked to the British press, which published excerpts.

The draft agreement would release the wealthy countries from provisions of the Kyoto Protocol, adopted in 1998 but never ratified by the US, which imposed binding commitments on the industrialized countries but not on those less developed, including China and India.

A diplomat from one of the poorer countries told the *Guardian* that the Danish text was "a very dangerous document for developing countries. It is a fundamental reworking of the UN balance of obligations. It is to be superimposed without discussion on the talks."

The head of the G77 group of less-developed countries, Lumumba Di-Aping of Sudan, compared the US-backed document to the 1944 agreement among the major powers on establishing the post-World War II financial system based on the US dollar, calling it an attempt at a "Bretton Woods takeover" of the climate talks.

Di-Aping directly criticized US President Barack Obama for the pathetically small US offer of assistance to the most impoverished and endangered countries: "We have to ask him, when he provided trillions of dollars to save Wall Street, are the children of the world not deserving help to save their lives?"

The document would allow wealthy countries to emit 2.67 tons of carbon per person by 2050, while setting the limit for poor countries at 1.44 tons—effectively barring any of the less developed countries from achieving industrial or economic parity with the West for more than a generation.

The document would shift decisions over climate policy from the United Nations, the sponsor of the Copenhagen forum and the 2007 meeting in Bali, to the World Bank, where voting power is based on financial contributions, ensuring control by the wealthiest countries.

There were charges that the purpose of the draft document was to prepare a fait accompli to be imposed by Obama and other heads of government who are scheduled to arrive for the closing days of the climate summit next week.

The document is backed up by virtual extortion on the part of the wealthy countries, which are to make financial aid to the poor countries dependent on their accepting and meeting mandatory emission standards by 2020.

The behind-the-scenes machinations were matched by public arrogance on the part of the top US climate negotiator, Todd D. Stern, who flatly rejected arguments by representatives of the poor countries that the US and other industrialized countries should make "reparations" for the damage wrought by uncontrolled industrial pollution over the last century and more.

He told a news conference Wednesday, "I actually completely reject the notion of a debt or reparations or

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anything of the like. For most of the 200 years since the Industrial Revolution, people were blissfully ignorant of the fact that emissions caused a greenhouse effect. It's a relatively recent phenomenon."

Stern also rejected suggestions that the US should provide financial aid to rapidly developing countries like China and India to help them convert their heavy industries to less pollution-intensive methods. "China has $2 trillion in reserves," he said. "We don't think China would be the first candidate for public funding."

Instead, he called on China to reduce its carbon emissions and include a pledge to that effect in the agreement being drafted in Copenhagen. China's chief negotiator, Yu Qingtai, rejected this suggestion and criticized the US for failing to provide financial aid to those countries harmed by environmental degradation, particularly the island countries now facing inundation by rising sea levels.

Stern essentially thumbed his nose at the poorer countries. "Emissions are emissions," he said. "You've just got to do the math." He cited estimates that 97 percent of future emissions growth will come from the developing world.

One of the smallest and most endangered countries at the talks, the Pacific island state of Tuvalu, appealed Wednesday for a new, legally binding protocol to cut greenhouse gas emissions, applying to both the industrialized countries and the emerging Asian powers, with the aim of limiting the global rise in temperature to 1.5C, below the 2C target supported by the US and Europe.

Although more than half the 192 countries represented in Copenhagen gave their support to the Tuvalu plan, it was torpedoed by opposition from China, India and Saudi Arabia, which is opposed to any limitation on fossil fuel consumption.

The *Washington Post* described the salvos back and forth in the following terms: "Two top Obama administration officials arrived Wednesday at the U.N.-sponsored climate talks that opened this week offering both diplomacy and a tough line: The United States is willing to be a full partner in fighting climate change, but the real problem is with China and the developing world."

The *New York Times* admitted that the economic tensions within world capitalism were paramount, writing, "it was the gulf between rich and poor nations, not the science of global warming, that dominated talks here…"

The open conflict in Copenhagen underscores the fundamental reality of the climate crisis: despite the mounting and irrefutable evidence that the unplanned and anarchic methods of the capitalist economy are destroying the planet and making it uninhabitable, the capitalist powers cannot take a single serious step to remedy the situation.

The division of the world into rival nation-states, each seeking its own economic and financial advantage, makes any type of systematic, coordinated action impossible. Nor will any of the countries take steps that impinge on the profit interests of their own capitalist ruling elites. The only way forward to address the climate crisis is on the basis of the struggle to abolish capitalism and the nation-state system, and established a planned socialist economy on a world scale, which can combine scientific management of natural resources and democratic control of the productive forces.

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