

Doha climate summit concludes without agreement on emission reductions

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Another international climate change summit, this time in the Qatari city of Doha, has concluded without a binding agreement reached on reducing global greenhouse gas emissions.

The failure of the 18th Conference of the Parties (COP18) was anticipated beforehand by everyone involved, and met with widespread indifference on the part of the international media. Since the debacle at the Copenhagen summit in December 2009—which broke up without agreement on a post-Kyoto climate treaty amid bitter conflicts between the major powers—annual UN-sponsored climate summits have been restricted to negotiating various secondary issues, unrelated to the question of binding emissions targets. Heads of government have not gathered to discuss the issue in the past three years, leaving junior ministers and diplomats to head negotiating teams at the subsequent summits at Cancún, Durban, and Doha.

The inability of world leaders to even meet to discuss the climate change crisis represents a devastating indictment of the capitalist system.

Overwhelming scientific evidence points to the serious threat posed to the world's population by excessive emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. The forecasts made in the first UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, in 1990, have proven accurate. "We've sat back and watched the two decades unfold and warming has progressed at a rate consistent with those projections," Matt England, of the University of New South Wales' Climate Change Research Centre, told Australia's ABC Radio. "The analysis is very clear that the IPCC projections are coming true. And at the moment we are tracking at the high end in terms of our emissions, and so all of the projections that we look to at the moment are those high end forecasts."

Average temperatures on the planet have already increased

by 0.8 degrees Celsius—triggering serious weather events, the melting of much of the Arctic ice, and creating other serious environmental problems—but temperatures remain on track to increase as forecast by the IPCC by more than 4 degrees by the end of the century. This would likely lead to deadly heat waves, droughts, and a sea-level rise affecting hundreds of millions of people and inundating low lying areas, including many coastal cities.

These projections remain unaltered after the Doha summit. The final communiqué, adopted after two weeks of discussions, committed to finalising a post-Kyoto treaty governing greenhouse gas emissions by a conference to be held in Paris in 2015, with the new treaty to take effect in 2020.

A United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) report demanding urgent action was ignored. "The scientists are telling us that if we are to stay on the path to limit warming to 2 degrees Celsius we need global emissions to peak before 2020," UNEP chief scientist Professor Joseph Alcamo warned before the summit. "By 2030 we need to be 25 percent below current global emissions, and in 2050 we need to cut more than half of the current global emissions level. We cannot wait till 2020 to begin these stringent emissions reductions."

There is no reason to expect that the 2015 Paris summit will end any differently than Copenhagen did in 2009. Every advanced capitalist country is seeking to promote its own corporate and financial institutions, and gain a geo-strategic advantage, by imposing stringent emissions reduction targets on its rivals while avoiding such targets for itself.

Underlying all the discussions on a post-Kyoto treaty is the increasingly acrimonious rivalry between the US and China. This enmity has only intensified in the past three years, due to the Obama administration's aggressive military and

diplomatic “pivot” to Asia and the Pacific, which seeks to reinforce American hegemony by strategically encircling China.

Washington is determined to block any climate treaty that upholds the Kyoto Protocol’s classification of China, together with India and other states, as a “low income” country. Under Kyoto, such countries are not subject to binding emissions targets. The Obama administration has insisted not only that China must accept targets, but has objected to any reference in climate negotiations to “common but differential responsibility.”

Washington maintains that advanced and developing economies ought to have an equal responsibility to reduce carbon emissions. The US, however, is responsible for the bulk of the greenhouse gases currently in the atmosphere, having emitted three times more than any other country between 1850 and 2007. Moreover, per capita emissions in China remain many times lower than in America.

Unable to make any progress toward a post-Kyoto agreement, delegates in Doha trumpeted the extension of the Kyoto Protocol for another eight years, until 2020. However, the treaty is now a very limited agreement, with the US remaining apart and other countries, including Japan, Russia, and Canada, withdrawing. Only the European Union, several non-EU European states, Australia and three former Soviet republics signed on, covering countries responsible for an estimated 15 percent of global emissions.

Extending the Kyoto Protocol will not reduce carbon pollution by any significant degree.

The real aim of the extension is to prop up the European Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS). Carbon trading has been advanced as the “free market” solution to climate change—creating a new commodity, carbon pollution, in which the corporations and banks can trade and speculate. This has proven a spectacular failure in actually reducing emissions, but the ETS has generated large profits for sections of European finance capital. London is home to an estimated 80 percent of the global carbon trading market, which was recently estimated by the *businessGreen* website to be worth £90 billion annually.

In recent years, however, the carbon trading industry has been hit by the European economic crisis, which has led to a plunge in industrial activity, in turn lessening the need for businesses to purchase carbon credits. The surplus of credits in the system has seen their value plummet from around \$20

per tonne of carbon before the 2008-09 financial crash to as low as \$3.

Without Kyoto, the carbon market would be in danger of collapsing entirely, as the protocol provides its legal underpinnings. The Australian government signed up for the extended agreement only because its carbon tax is scheduled to transition to an emissions trading scheme, plugged into the European ETS. “International carbon markets will cover billions of consumers this decade,” Prime Minister Julia Gillard told a meeting of business CEOs recently. “Ask the bankers at your table whether they want Australia to clip that ticket. We’re going to help them get their share.”

Carbon traders were active participants in the Doha discussions. One climate change campaigner, Sustainable Energy and Economy Network co-director Janet Redman, noted: “You’ll also find in the halls of the annual climate summits the faces of private interests—industry reps, investors and carbon traders. They’re a regular fixture, but this year the private sector has taken centre stage in debates over climate finance. At COP18 there are seven times as many side events about getting private finance and carbon markets engaged in climate action as events highlighting the role of public funds.”

The latest climate summit only underscores the reality that under the profit system, corporate interests and inter-imperialist rivalries sabotage any possibility of reorganising the global economy to avoid an environmental disaster. Utilising the available technology and carrying out the necessary restructuring of energy generation, industrial and agricultural production, and transport infrastructure to adequately lower carbon emissions, while also raising living standards internationally, will only take place within a rationally planned world socialist society.



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