

# Obama offers environmental fig leaf in climate policy

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Obama's "Climate Action Plan" released last week had nothing to do with defending the planet against the polluting excesses of capitalism, or address the very real threat of global warming. Rather, it was an appeal for the support of an upper-middle-class environmentalist milieu by an increasingly isolated administration.

This is the first time in four years that the Obama administration has put forward even a fig leaf addressing climate change. In 2009, a bill passed the House of Representatives, then under Democratic control, that had weak greenhouse gas reduction targets and huge concessions to big business. Even so, the big oil companies, working through both Democrats and Republicans, blocked the bill in the Senate.

Obama's current plan is by its very nature weaker, since it is limited to executive action within the framework of the Clean Air Act, legislation passed in 1970, long before there was any concern over the danger of global warming. Even this limited action is likely to be tied up in the courts indefinitely as the energy monopolies use their vast resources to defend their right to poison the world's population.

Despite the token character of the effort, the plan is being presented as a great advance by the various environmentalist affiliates of the Democratic Party. Greenpeace's Phil Radford declared Obama's speech announcing the plan "bold, monumental," and "the best by not only this president, but any president to date on the climate crisis."

When Obama stated during the speech that he would only support the Keystone XL pipeline as long as it "does not significantly exacerbate the problem of carbon pollution," Jamie Henn of 350.org tweeted, "Next thing you know, @ **BarackObama** is going to announce he's getting arrested at a # **NoKXL** sit-in."

This fulsome praise of the "environmental president" ignores his actual record of protecting protected BP during the worst ecological disaster in US history and scaling back environmental regulations on big corporations. Moreover, the administration's energy plan relies heavily on nuclear power, with longterm environmental consequences, as well as the dangers revealed in such disasters as Chernobyl and Fukushima.

Even if one takes Obama's rhetoric at face value, the actual contents of the plan—in which the word "Keystone" does not appear—are a collection of proposals that are wholly insignificant to the problem they purport to solve. In 2012, Obama ordered the Department of the Interior to issue permits for the creation of "utility-scale" solar facilities, wind farms and geothermal plants to produce 10 gigawatts of power. This number means next to nothing. The power requirements of the United States are more than 3 *tera* watts.

The plans put forward to address the current consequences of climate change, such as more severe droughts, floods and hurricanes, are of a similar character. After a year that saw more than \$110 billion in hurricane damage, a total of merely \$350 million will be given to fortify coastal ecosystems. Only \$200 million will be allocated for coastal communities to upgrade infrastructure to resist storms. No new funds from the Department of Transportation are going to be given to the New York and New Jersey transit systems to repair and upgrade their systems after the impact of Hurricane Sandy.

These proposals are so minimal they do not even deserve the description "drop in the bucket." The Democrats employ pro-environmental rhetoric, like their posturing in support of gay rights or abortion

rights, to present themselves as slightly more “progressive” than the Republicans, even while the Democratic president orders assassinations, mass wiretapping and intensified CIA and military subversion of targeted regimes overseas.

This lip service to environmental concerns appeases a layer of the upper-middle class, whose concern over global warming in no way challenges the profit system, and whose personal economic interests dovetail with the Obama administration’s policy of enriching the most privileged layers in American society.

The Obama plan takes as its point of departure the failure of the Copenhagen climate summit of 2009, and all previous and subsequent UN climate summits. The Copenhagen summit was presented as the forum for every member state of the UN to come together to forge an agreement that would limit carbon emissions, thus global warming, on a worldwide scale. It was seen as where the Kyoto Protocol, which expired in 2009, would be replaced.

However, even before the conference began, a legally binding greenhouse gas treaty was ruled out. At one point during the conference, 77 delegates of smaller nations staged a walkout against the demands of the wealthier nations to lock in their economic advantages. All subsequent proposals fell far short of what was recommended by scientists at the time. And all the while, police were battling and arresting protestors outside the conference.

Highlighted there was not simply the conflict between the old and the new powers, though that did play a part, particularly between the US and China. More fundamentally it pointed to the inability of the capitalist nation-state system to address, let alone solve, a global problem. No single country, even if it wanted to, could resolve global warming.

The only solution is the marshaling of the world’s resources in a planned and rational manner. The full force of human technology and ingenuity must be brought to bear to avoid an environmental disaster. There must be a restructuring of energy generation, industrial and agricultural production, and transport infrastructure to lower carbon emissions. This can only take place when the international working class, the vast majority of humanity, takes control of the levers of society to run it for social need, rather than private profit. In a word, the precondition for attacking global

warming is socialism.



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