

Climate conference ends with UN admission of failure

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During the final press conference of the 19th Conference of Parties (COP19), the latest international climate change summit, which ended on November 23 in Warsaw, a top UN official admitted that current efforts were not adequate to halt the pace of global warming.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Executive Secretary Christiania Figueres said that the summit “does not put us on track for a two-degree world.”

“Two-degree world” has become the catch-phrase for containing and reducing greenhouse gas emissions globally so that average world temperatures in 2100 do not increase by more than 2° C above what they were at the beginning of the 20th century. This has been taken as the benchmark by the UNFCCC to stop catastrophic results caused by climate change from occurring. These primarily include mass droughts, more powerful hurricanes, large floods and rising ocean levels.

Figueres then posed as mutually exclusive the “two realities” of “the urgency of the science and the boundaries that science imposes on us with respect to greenhouse gas emissions with an international policy evolution process that is necessarily a gradual and progressive process.”

She was referring to the divisions between the major powers that exist over any agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in a timely manner. While every country, including the US and major imperialist powers, states that global warming should be brought under control, all are determined to do it on their own terms. Major corporate interests must be appeased, including the national fossil fuel industries of both developed and developing nations.

There is an overwhelming body of scientific evidence of the ever-growing threat to the world's population

caused by continued emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. During COP19, a group of scientists from the Climate Action Tracker released a report saying that if current trends continue, the likely warming will not be 2° C, but 3.7° C and possible as high as 4.6° C. That world governments cannot agree on how to resolve the climate change crisis underscores the basic inability of capitalism—based on private property and rival nation-states—to defend the natural environment necessary for life.

COP19 is the most recent in a series of international summits—Copenhagen, Cancún, Durban, and Doha, to name a few—that were called in the attempt to create a post-Kyoto Protocol climate treaty. At each instance, there has not been an agreed-upon structure for all participating countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The most that these conferences have achieved is a commitment to a new treaty by 2015 that will go into force in 2020.

As with previous summits, the divisions have occurred largely across the lines of the industrialized versus the developing countries. During the first international climate talks in 1992 and then again in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, it was established that “developed” nations would have obligations to cut greenhouse gas emissions while “developing” nations would not. Since the Copenhagen summit in December 2009, the US and the European Union have staunchly refused to accept this framework, insisting that emerging economies, particularly India, China and others such as Brazil, should also be beholden to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

These tensions flared when China and India sharply rejected the phrasing of “commitments” by all parties towards greenhouse gas emissions in the penultimate draft. “Only developed countries should have

commitments,” stated Chinese lead negotiator Su Wei. It was only when “commitments” was changed to “contributions” that both countries backed down.

Tensions became so overt that Poland was forced to remove Marcin Korolec, the host of the conference, from his position as environment minister. It did not help matters when Japan—the country of origin of the Kyoto Protocol—revealed that it would not be meeting its 2020 emission reduction deadline.

The second sticking point was over financial allocations to developing countries over losses and damages caused by global warming. They demanded that a new institution be formed called a “loss-and-damage mechanism” to deal with the financial impacts of weather events exacerbated by climate change. Furthermore, the developing nations wanted this body to be independent of a previously existing UN body that deals with similar issues, which was agreed upon.

While these are being hailed as victories, both proposals are largely face-saving measures. They do nothing to concretely reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

This theme was taken up by a variety of environmentalist groups including Greenpeace International, the World Wildlife Fund, Oxfam International, ActionAid International, Friends of the Earth Europe and the International Trade Union Confederation. In a coordinated action, the groups walked out of the conference, accusing the participating governments of giving in to the interests of the “dirty energy lobby” and not working towards solving the “climate crisis.” They vowed to “return with the voice of the people” to put “pressure” on world governments.

The idea of putting “pressure” on governments has been taken up by environmentalist activists in the past. Their perspective is that with enough letters written and enough protests held, world leaders will finally take initiative and solve global warming.

To call this politically bankrupt and impotent is an understatement. As shown through this conference and countless others, there is a fundamental inability, in the face of inter-imperialist rivalries and the predatory exploitation of the poorer countries by the richer ones, to come to any agreement on reorganizing the world economy to head off an environmental disaster.

There are powerful financial interests at stake. According to one report issued for the Warsaw conference, just 90 corporations worldwide are

responsible for two-thirds of the greenhouse gas buildup over the past 200 years that is driving global warming. These corporations—mainly giant oil and gas monopolies and coal mining companies—cling to their profit interests in the face of threats to the survival of the human race.

If the available technology that exists today is to be utilized to carry out the urgent restructuring of energy generation, transportation, industry and agriculture to halt carbon emissions, while simultaneously raising worldwide living standards, it must be done under a rationally planned world socialist society.



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