

Climate Change: The Tragic Farce At Doha

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As the Doha COP18 climate talks draw to a close, they have unfortunately confirmed The Economist's description of the event as a "theater of the absurd." Even as the World Bank has released a report describing a rise in average global temperatures by a catastrophic 4 degrees Celsius over the course of this century, no greater sense of urgency emerged at the talks, largely due to the obvious futility of trying to formulate global policy without a serious commitment by Washington to reduce its own gargantuan carbon footprint. Meanwhile, the effects of climate change have accelerated with the ferocious global warming-fueled superstorm Sandy and the enormous Typhoon Bopha that has ravaged the southern Philippines, to mention only the most recent and dramatic that have ravaged communities as a result.

The irony of the current round of UN climate talks taking place in Doha, Qatar, the world's highest per capita emitter and a principal member of the Gulf Cooperation Council alliance of fossil-fuel based states was not lost on anyone, save some of the delegates. It was a foregone conclusion that the talks had reached an impasse over critical issues. As the Kyoto treaty was set to expire, no industrialized country met the target for reducing emissions. Both the United States and the European Union repeatedly cited "tough economic times" as their excuse. For them, capitalist profitability triumphs effective action to save the ecosystems. The intransigence of Washington as the "most obdurate bully in the room" murdered the hope of expanding the Kyoto treaty to incorporate the world's principal culprits—clearly the United States and China—and detailing how a climate funding program to assist the world's "developing nations" would be set up as long ago as Copenhagen.

What did come out of this session from 36 straight hours of negotiations was an agreement by the Kyoto signatories—who collectively represent just 15% of the world's emissions—to extend the Kyoto framework to 2020. While this may sound like a "modest but essential" step in the right direction as described by Connie Hedegaard, the European climate commissioner, it is so full of loopholes that it will have negligible impact on carbon emissions. Greenpeace Executive Director Kumi Naidoo lamented, "The talks in Doha were always going to be a modest affair, but they even failed to live up to even the historically low expectations."

Although the countries of the global south are already bearing the brunt of the damage caused by the industrialized countries, neither US or EU delegates came up with concrete plans on how to raise the climate fund goal of \$100 billion a year by 2020. This crisis of political will is particularly damning given how much has already been allocated to bailing out criminal financial institutions and subsidizing fossil fuels, not to mention Washington's enormously bloated defense expenditures.

Once again, the only spark of hope came from the speeches of those who held no power at the level of policy-making, but are the voices of the growing global environmentalist movements.

In a passionate speech to the delegates, Syrian-American student Munira Sibai declared that none of the official representatives of the world's governments were worth addressing and so she addressed the climate justice movement directly, "Your governments are failing you," in a moment of clarity and truth unsurpassed throughout the entire event [1]. Further, her two-minute address pointed out

that this entire process suffered not only from “a complete absence of vision” but from “an active effort by some to move backwards.” Further, she noted that those who have caused this crisis—the wealthiest countries on Earth—already agreed to take responsibility two decades ago with the Kyoto Protocol, but have utterly failed to live up to their own commitments. She ended with the prediction, “You are well on your way to leaving a legacy of global devastation.”

Another powerful voice was that of the Filipino negotiator, Nadarev Sano, whose nation was ravaged during the talks by the most southerly typhoon ever reported, Typhoon Bopha. Sano’s emotional address queried the assembly: “I ask all of us here, if not us, then who? If not now, then when? If not here, then where?”

The real answer to the question of “*if not us here, then who?*” is quite clear from the past 18 years of inaction on climate change by the world’s most powerful countries. Patrick Bond, director of the Center for Civil Society at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, pointed out, “The elites continue to discredit themselves at every opportunity. The only solution is to turn away from these destructive conferences and avoid giving the elites any legitimacy, and instead, to analyze and build the world climate justice movement and its alternatives.” [2]

Promising signs that the movement for climate justice is coalescing into a serious global force continue to emerge. Two international events to note are the massive day of global protest staged by Bill McKibben’s 350.org project in 2009 and the 2010 World People’s Conference on Climate Change in Bolivia. The crisis is too urgent to be left to the policy tinkering of foot-dragging governments that bear the greatest responsibility for the crisis. Now that high-level elites from the World Bank to Bloomberg Business Weekly (with its “It’s Global Warming, Stupid” headline after Hurricane Sandy) have awoken to the seriousness of the crisis, the space for demanding action to save the planet has widened—but whatever modest steps “green capitalism” has taken, they are unable to confront the logic of profitability.

As ecosocialists, we call for a dramatic reduction in fossil fuel production and consumption in industrialized countries, and reparations to the former colonial countries so they can develop in a sustainable manner. This involves restructuring every aspect of how we live and work through a revolutionary process of social change, moving from an economy dominated by profit to one based on ecology and human needs. To accomplish this will require honestly confronting the severity of the crisis and democratically discussing and deciding how to move forward against the intransigence of the global elite. The voices of this growing climate justice movement will be central to this process.

The Solidarity Ecosocialist Commission, December 11, 2012

P.S.

* <http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/3759>

* The Ecosocialist Commission is a group of Solidarity members whose goal is to show why the struggles for socialism and for ecological justice are inseparable. It is a place for education, discussion, and coordinating activism around the intersections between the socialist and ecological movements. For more information, contact the current convener at ndvnprt (at) gmail (dot) com.

Footnotes

[1] http://www.democracynow.org/2012/12/7/your_governments_have_failed_you_syrian

[2] See on ESSF (article 27245), [Climate Change : Q&A : COP18, Another 'Conference of Polluters'](#).