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The new Scottish climate bill shows how far we've come - but it's not enough

Friday 6 December 2019, by [WILKINSON Ruth](#) (Date first published: 26 September 2019).

Yesterday, on Wednesday 25 September, Holyrood passed the new Climate Bill for Scotland. It's much more ambitious than it was when it was first proposed - but it doesn't do enough to address the climate emergency.

The Scottish people won't tolerate inaction

There's a lot for activists to feel proud about in this moment. Two years of campaigning, protesting and calling on politicians to take the climate emergency seriously forced the Scottish government to increase the strength and ambition of the bill hugely. The first draft proposed a woefully inadequate 90% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, and a 66% reduction by 2030. The bill that passed yesterday commits Scotland to net zero emissions by 2045, and 75% reductions by 2030. When we look at what the science tells us is needed, and consider what a fair contribution from a rich country like Scotland should be to reducing its emissions, then we see that it still falls short. But it's a huge improvement on where we were only a year ago.

Without the tens of thousands of people who mobilized across Scotland over the course of this bill; without the thousands of activists reaching out to their MSPs through letters, mass lobbying, surgery visits and meetings; without the massive, constant pressure put on the Scottish parliament by huge numbers of their constituents, we would not have seen this change.

In fact, the 75% target only got enough support to pass at the very last minute - right after Scotland saw its largest ever climate demonstrations last Friday, when the Scottish school strikers brought over 35,000 people of all ages and backgrounds onto the streets across Scotland.

It's no use being the fastest snail

Although the Scottish Climate Bill that passed yesterday is far stronger than the one that was introduced in May 2018, it still isn't enough. According to the science, if we're to stand even a 50% chance of keeping global temperature rise under 1.5°, we need to reduce emissions by at least 80% by 2030. That's the bare minimum. If we take into account the disproportionate amount of global emissions coming from rich countries like Scotland (now and in the past), then a fairer number would be something like 86% by 2030.

The Scottish government proclaims that Scotland is a climate leader, doing more than anybody else to address the climate crisis. But if that's true, it's more of a condemnation than anything else. As school striker Dylan Hamilton said, "It's no use being the fastest snail."

Capitalism + colonialism = climate crisis

Why, when we know what needs to be done, do politicians keep undershooting?

Because to make the changes we need, they have to let go of the idea that the world exists to serve

the global north. Scotland, like most countries founded on colonialism, has long operated on the assumption that all we want can be extracted at the expense of the global south, and that the consequences that happen elsewhere aren't our problem.

Yesterday, these assumptions were thrown into sharp relief. Several amendments to the bill were put forwards that called on the government to commit to working in ways that didn't negatively impact countries in the global south. All of them were voted down. Both the Conservatives and the SNP openly argued that they shouldn't have to care what happened to people in other countries, because it might limit Scotland's economic growth.

This is the mindset that we have to move past if we want to minimize the damage we're doing to the planet and *all* of its inhabitants. What the Scottish government told us yesterday is that they don't think that the lives of people in the global south should matter as much as economic growth here in Scotland.

We can't keep growing forever at the expense of the rest of the world. We already owe a massive debt to the global south; this is a crisis that the global north is massively, disproportionately responsible for, and which the global south is already bearing the brunt of.

Being realistic

Throughout the development of the bill, we kept hearing the same excuse – “We have to be realistic.” To the Scottish government, “realistic” meant continuing to exploit oil and gas; it meant overlooking emissions produced overseas to make the things that we consume here; it meant business as usual, politically achievable targets, and just enough action to keep selling Scotland as a climate leader.

When the government said “realistic,” what it meant was “as little as it could get away with.”

The targets the new climate bill set out aren't ambitious enough to make the change we need. It's deeply disappointing to see the Scottish Government unwilling to commit to anything more than the bare minimum.

But we can draw hope from this Climate Bill as well. In under two years, Holyrood went from hotly opposing any targets more ambitious than continuing their current course to yesterday's final bill, which not only has markedly improved targets but also forces the Scottish Government to address the role of oil and gas in the climate crisis, requires policy to be developed in the next year to make sure we meet those targets, and holds Scotland more responsible for measuring and addressing the overseas emissions caused by our consumption.

The campaigning that activists kept up throughout the Bill's passage through parliament, the mass mobilisations, and the refusal to accept empty rhetoric without action backing it up, managed to move Holyrood's idea of what's “realistic” a long way.

This afternoon, I went back to Holyrood again because the Climate Bill is not the end. The Scottish Youth Climate Strikers were gathered outside, presenting their demands for climate justice. Climate activists, in Scotland and beyond, will keep campaigning for the change we need until we've pushed our governments into not only meeting the bare minimum, but addressing the debt we owe to the global south. Ambitious policy is not just necessary – it's the only realistic option.

Ruth Wilkinson

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