

Planning a New World Climate Order: 'Seal the Deal' or 'Seattle the Deal'?

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The Copenhagen Accord that US President Barack Obama persuaded leaders of the BASIC countries – Brazil, South Africa, India and China - to sign at literally the climate summit's last minute on December 18 is a telling reflection of the limits to top-down 'global governance', and suggests the potential instead for bottom-up transformation. The deal followed extremely harsh police repression against nonviolent protesters outside the Bella Centre, and inside, a 'Green Room' process in which Denmark's conservative ruling party leaders cherry-picked 26 countries to represent the world. When even that small group deadlocked, allegedly due to Chinese intransigence and the overall weak parameters set by the US, the five leaders – Obama, Lula da Silva, Jacob Zuma Manmohan Singh and Wen Jiabao - attempted a face-saving last gasp at planetary hygiene.

Not only did the Accord fail on its own terms, missing even its first January 31 deadline for signing on and declaring cuts. The UN climate chief, Yvo de Boer, then conceded no binding deal was likely even at the Mexican meetings in November 2010. Moreover, Obama's strategy meant the World Trade Organisation's divide-and-conquer political style would become the norm for UN climate negotiations - if indeed the UN remains a site of negotiation, instead of the more likely G20, starting with the expected G8 decommissioning near Toronto in June 2010 - to the obvious detriment of climate victims, especially in Africa and small islands.

Instead of 350 parts per million (ppm) of carbon in the atmosphere as 'required by science' (as the popular advocacy phrase goes), the Copenhagen Accord signatories' promised 15% emissions cuts from 1990 levels to 2020

could in reality translate into a 10% increase once carbon trading and offset loopholes are factored in. The result would be 770 ppm by century's end, which will cook the planet, say scientists. Nine of ten African peasants will not be able to produce if the two degrees centigrade mark is breached, according to UN experts. Hence the repeated accusation that Obama and Zuma 'sold out' their rural Luo and Zulu relatives on behalf of their economies' fossil fuel industries.

Process aside, the Accord's content was nearly universally condemned, for four reasons:

- inadequate emissions cuts which imply a catastrophic 3.5 degree centigrade increase by the end of the century, with options for vague 'pledge and review' commitments and, even worse, offsets so that Northern polluters can outsource the cuts;
- no clear sources of financing and explicit commitments to pay the North's 'climate debt' to the South, estimated at \$400 billion/year by 2020, owed for taking too much environmental space and doing massive climate damage (such as the current 300 000 premature deaths annually, escalating much more quickly as climate chaos worsens);
- the departure from Kyoto Protocol and Bali Action Plan principles which set out much more ambitious targets for richer versus poorer countries; and
- no legally binding components or compliance mechanisms.

Most important was Obama's refusal to lead the North to make 45% emissions cuts and offer payment of the Climate Debt, and instead

his leadership of a process so flawed that, according to 350.org leader Bill McKibben: 'he blew up the United Nations.' Economist Jeffrey Sachs also charged Obama with abandoning 'the UN framework, because it was proving nettlesome to US power and domestic politics. Obama's decision to declare a phony negotiating victory undermines the UN process by signaling that rich countries will do what they want and must no longer listen to the "pesky" concerns of many smaller and poorer countries.' The idea that the UN is too unwieldy for climate talks surfaced repeatedly in subsequent weeks. The Accord is 'insincere, inconsistent, and unconvincing', Sachs continued, 'unlikely to accomplish anything real. It is non-binding and will probably strengthen the forces of opposition to emissions reductions.' Moreover, US secretary of state Hillary Clinton's 'announcements about money a decade from now are mostly empty words. They do not bind the rich countries at all.' As Naomi Klein summed up, the Accord is 'nothing more than a grubby pact between the world's biggest emitters: I'll pretend that you are doing something about climate change if you pretend that I am too. Deal? Deal.' George Monbiot compared the deal to the 1884-85 Berlin negotiations known as the 'Scramble for Africa', which divided-and-conquered the continent.

The African Union was twisted and U-turned to support Zuma's capitulation by the man appointed its climate leader, Meles Zenawi. In September, the Ethiopian dictator claimed, 'If need be we are prepared to walk out of any negotiations that threatens to be another rape of our continent.' But he didn't walk out, he walked off his plane in Paris on the way to Copenhagen, into the arms of Nicolas Sarkozy. The fateful side deal, according to Mithika Mwenda of the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance, is 'undermining the bold positions of our negotiators and ministers represented here, and threatening the very future of Africa.' Not only did Zuma and Zenawi surrender on emissions cuts, but also on demanding full payment of the North's climate debt to the

South. 'Meles wants to sell out the lives and hopes of Africans for a pittance,' said Mwenda. 'Every other African country has committed to policy based on the science.' Climate damage to Africa will include much more rapid desertification, more floods and droughts, worse water shortages, increased starvation, floods of climate refugees jamming shanty-packed megalopolises, and the spread of malarial and other diseases. Ironically, Obama's and Zuma's own Luo and Zulu relatives in rural Kenya and KwaZulu-Natal will be amongst the first victims of the Accord.

The BASIC climate 'compradors' did, however, begin to face opposition from within. For example in India, Centre for Science and Environment director Sunita Narain argues that her government's negotiators

are the same people who would stymie any real action on environmental improvement in the country. They will oppose fuel efficiency standards, tax on big cars, or tough penalties for polluters. But they will still talk glibly about low-carbon economies. They will of course, dismiss out of hand, any discussion on the need for 'radical' and out of the box solutions for equity and sustainability. These, they will tell you are mere evangelical thoughts of some fringe activists. The men think and act differently. These are the promoters of the Accord in India. And I believe they do so, because for them, firstly, the Accord provides the perfect solution – talk big about change, but do little at home. The US has provided a perfect formula – it promises us the right to pollute, because it wants to legitimize its own pollution. Secondly, it promises that we can get a place on the high table of polluters. And as powerful conspirators this will mean that we need to do little ourselves, but instead push the price of change on the less favoured – the poor of India or the poor anywhere else in the world. It's an open

offer to protect, not our right to development as we have been demanding – the rich countries pay for our transition to low-carbon economies. But a simpler proposition: we give you the right to pollute (at least for now). The other proposition is equally seductive. To the countries, which are not yet polluters (from Ethiopia to Maldives), the Copenhagen Accord says we will give money to keep you pliant and agreeable. This is why the Accord promises some fictional money to poor vulnerable countries. It's a perfect formula, designed to please all. There is only one hitch: we will all have to forget the climate change crisis and the hazards and impacts that will grow.

Judged not only by Copenhagen's crash but by the rise of the G20 (economics) and BASIC (climate) groupings, the global-scale climate governance ship appears to be sinking. So too is the climate's supposed private sector lifeboat, carbon trading. Consider each in turn, especially within the crucial United States debates, before turning to a logical political backlash by grassroots environmentalists.

Legislative gridlock and the sinking carbon trading ship

Recall Obama's January 2008 promise:

We would put a cap and trade system in place that is as aggressive, if not more aggressive, than anybody else's out there... So if somebody wants to build a coal-powered plant, they can; it's just that it will bankrupt them because they're going to be charged a huge sum for all that greenhouse gas that's being emitted. That will also generate billions of dollars that we can invest in solar, wind, biodiesel and other alternative energy approaches.

Nothing of the sort was attempted. The main legislation pushed by Congressmen Henry

Waxman and Edward Markey and by Senators John Kerry, Barbara Boxer, Joe Lieberman and Lindsay Graham during 2009 did not auction but instead gifted the right to pollute to those firms with historically high emissions records, foregoing the billions Obama pledged would flow to alternatives. As Virginia Congressman Rich Boucher explained, new subsidies to the coal industry plus massive offsets which reduce pressure to cut emissions at source together meant that Waxman-Markey's House of Representatives bill (passed in June 2009) 'strengthens the case for utilities to continue to use coal.' Remarkably, the bill also strips the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of its authority to regulate greenhouse gases. As a result, the US' emergent Climate Justice (CJ) movement opposed the legislation and only the major environmental groups put resources into pressuring the Senate to adopt similar legislation.

Having thus spent his first year in office moving around some deckchairs with Congress' assistance, the captain of this Titanic, Obama, began 2010 by heading directly towards the closest iceberg: the USS Senate. The shock election of Scott Brown to fill Edward Kennedy's Massachusetts seat in late January – in the process ending the filibuster-proof Democratic majority - was telling and perhaps decisive, because the climate debacle was center stage. Brown campaigned partly on the basis that he will reject cap and trade legislation currently pending in the Senate. His election confirms the most likely outcome from Capitol Hill: gridlock. Given Congressional power relations and the destructive nature of legislation on the table, this outcome is, frankly, welcomed by many US grassroots environmentalists. Ecosocialists and other radical environmentalists can easily contrast the ineffectual, pork-laden legislation with the EPA's ever-stronger regulatory potential, opportunities to intervene against climate-destroying projects via utility regulatory boards and local planning commissions. In December, the EPA issued an 'endangerment' finding against carbon dioxide and other

greenhouse gas pollutants using the Clean Air Act.

The major bills are being pushed by Kerry, the senior Massachusetts senator who failed in a 2004 presidential campaign bid against George W. Bush. Kerry felt the need to ally with the conservative Independent (but pro-Republican) Lieberman (his 2004 running mate) and the very conservative Republican Graham. To lure deserters from the Senate's substantial climate-denialist or climate do-nothing camps, the bill they are pushing in 2010 is full of subsidies to the coal, oil/gas and nuclear industries and remains based upon a carbon trading strategy in which polluters are rewarded for historic emissions, and in which an inadequate domestic emissions cap can be 'offset' with purchases from other countries. This was partly the source of US promises in Copenhagen of \$100 billion – and hence was rejected by many in the South since it is part of a market process, not genuine Climate Debt payments.

The entire carbon trading apparatus – worth nearly \$140 billion in volume last year and, had Copenhagen succeeded, projected to grow to \$3 trillion in annual trades by 2020 - is now in question. The main pilot project, the European Union's Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), failed to cut emissions but did send vast profits from consumers to utilities, fossil fuel firms and financial intermediaries. Due to overallocation of permits, the ETS will face further declines in price in 2010 (according to the main market forecasts). The failure of the Copenhagen Accord to confirm financing was a major blow to the market, which crashed by 10% from December 17-21 as it appeared there would be no legitimacy granted to a global carbon trading regime. By early 2010 a tonne of carbon traded at a 60% discount from mid-2008 highs. The ETS was itself delegitimised in September 2009 when the UN's main verification contractor was disqualified for repeated procedural violations, and in December when Europol discovered that up to 90% of trades in some EU countries were

flagrant tax scams.

Yet in spite of its proven failure, carbon trading was still central to Copenhagen's aspirational implementation and promised 'adaptation finance' (as the US refused to acknowledge 'Climate Debt'). If the current Kyoto Protocol Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) ratio (about 6%) of the market stayed the same in 2020, then the anticipated \$3 trillion market would yield \$180 billion in 'financing' from North to South in any case, far in excess of Clinton's promised \$100 billion. So critique of 'market mechanisms' to finance adaptation became one of the major projects of not only activists but the more enlightened negotiators from vulnerable states: the Association of Small Island States and Africa and Latin America's Bolivarian leaders. Only the latter prevailed with tough politics, in the end, as financial blackmail compelled many others to agree on December 19 to 'note' the US-BASIC Accord (although only 20 countries had formally signed on as partners by mid-January 2010). Surprisingly, the Mauritian and Ethiopian heads of state who were once so tough in their rhetoric ultimately folded and joined Obama's side. Where, then, does that leave oppositional grassroots politics?

Radical environmental politics

One theory, offered in *Counterpunch* ezine by anarchist activists Tim Simons and Ali Tonak, is that Copenhagen is a site of defeat for radical climate politics, because, they claim, 'the attempted resurrection of this movement, known by some as the Global Justice Movement, under the banner of Climate Justice' failed the tests of critical analysis and militant practice. The roots of the two processes are important for any current and future fusion of red and green internationalism. Zapatismo in 1994 may be the first sifting of the solidarity that came to characterize the Global Justice movement's inspiration and horizontal capacities. Likewise Climate Justice (CJ) might date its origins to Accion Ecologica's pathbreaking work in

Ecuador at roughly the same time. Partly because the World Social Forum itself has helped activists find transnational linkages and understand each others' constraints, these two political projects were conjoined in Bali, Indonesia when Climate Justice Now! (CJN!) emerged outside another failed UN Conference of Parties to the Kyoto Protocol. That crucial moment stitched together global justice and radical environmental activists, and since then, the growth of CJ politics has been not merely the rebranding of existing radical networks but instead has witnessed a new red-green movement across borders that by most accounts will necessarily be anti-capitalist if it addresses the problem with the seriousness required.

Simons and Tonak dispute that the CJ movement can address the climate crisis at its roots, because, they argue, it promotes 'the financialization of nature and the indirect reliance on markets and monetary solutions as catalysts for structural change', thanks to demands for Climate Debt payments. Yet CJN! and the main Copenhagen activist network, Climate Justice Action (and before them the Durban Group for Climate Justice starting in October 2004), are explicitly against commodification of the atmosphere, carbon trading and offsets.

Do demands made by CJ activists lack the militancy required by the times? On Climate Debt, the best of the older Jubilee South debt/reparations language merged with Accion Ecologica's 'Ecological Debt' demands, culminating in the insistence upon \$400 billion/annum by 2020 (a figure that has been rising dramatically as we learn more about the damage ahead). If articulated fully, Climate Debt should cover not only the damages done by climate change but also finance for the South's transcendence of extreme uneven development associated with the world economy's export-oriented operation. Payment of Climate Debt damages and of 'adaptation' financing – if done properly - would ideally permit (and compel) the Global South to delink

from all manner of relations with the world economy that damage both the exporting economy and the climate: fossil fuel extraction, agricultural plantations and associated deforestation, export-processing zones, vast shipping operations and foreign debt that forces further attempts to raise hard currency. Climate Debt is not, therefore, a 'simple claim', as Simons and Tonak allege, it's potentially a complex challenge to capitalism's internal logic of commodification and neoliberal policy expansion.

Simons and Tonak charge that CJ 'demands for reparations justified by the notion of climate debt open a dangerous door to increased green capitalist investment in the Global South'. Yet the door has been wide open since 1997, when mainstream greens adopted the Kyoto Protocol's CDM strategy as a North-South financing vehicle. Climate Debt analysis does the exact opposite: delink reparations obligations from market mechanisms. In short, to promote Climate Debt does not require the CJ movement to promote CDMs or other existing financing strategies that tie the South more deeply into Northern-controlled circuits of capital. On the contrary, the Climate Debt demand is why CJ activists legitimately argue the South should halt export-oriented agriculture, extraction of minerals and petroleum, cheap manufacturing platforms and metals smelting, mass-produced consumer imports, further debt, further migrant labor supplies, further Foreign Direct Investment, further aid dependency, etc.

Moreover, Climate Debt is about reparations to people who are suffering damages by the actions of Northern overconsumption of environmental space - damages that can be proven even in courts (the way the Alien Tort Claims Act has proven useful in the US for some of the Niger Delta plaintiffs against Shell recently and for apartheid victims). This does not mean, as Simons and Tonak further claim, that "'Climate Debt" perpetuates a system that assigns economic and financial value to the biosphere, ecosystems and in this case a

molecule of CO₂', and that 'Everyone from Vestas to the Sudanese government to large NGOs agree on this fundamental principle: that the destruction of nature and its consequences for humans can be remedied through financial markets and trade deals and that monetary value can be assigned to ecosystems.'

Even if Simons and Tonak's political conclusion is wrong, their resistance to quantification of nature is understandable and commendable. Yet it is also passé, particularly given the CJ movement's hostility to – and track record fighting – carbon markets. Under capitalism, after all, everything gets commodified, and the optimal Climate Debt narrative involves recognizing this problem, to insist on explicitly compensation for damages done by climate chaos to the South (especially islands, Africa, Bangladesh and other vulnerable sites), and then to make a rough estimate of this damage. The point is both financing compensation (for 'adaptation' - i.e. survival) and disincentivizing further climate damage by penalizing the polluters.

Climate Debt analyst Joan Martinez-Alier responds to this kind of critique by acknowledging, 'although it is not possible to make an exact accounting, it is necessary to establish the principal categories and certain orders of magnitude in order to stimulate discussion.' Once discussion is generated about the damages done to South climate victims (including their inability to use the environmental space that is occupied by the North), next comes the logical demand for reparations. To refuse on principle to make any kind of quantification, as do Simons and Tonak, is to refuse to acknowledge that damage is being done - and then to refuse to halt it. That is Washington's viewpoint, as was stated repeatedly by Obama Administration officials in Copenhagen, although the president's Kenyan Luo relatives are amongst the first serious victims.

Simons and Tonak also claim the movement

'obfuscates internal class antagonisms within states of the Global South in favor of simplistic North-South dichotomies.' This is a danger, of course, and always has been in internationalist politics. But against that danger, dynamic CJ movements are emerging to challenge national elites (and the transnational corporations they front for) in Brazil, India and South Africa, and most other major Global South sites. Simons and Tonak worry about 'the pacification of militant action resulting from an alliance forged with transnational NGOs and reformist environmental groups who have been given minimal access to the halls of power in exchange for their successful policing of the movement'. But against the danger of demobilization, CJN! arose specifically because the existing Climate Action Network on environmental NGOs was inadequate, compromised and ideologically confused. Moreover, in Copenhagen, some of the most militant South-based transnational movements - e.g. Via Campesina and Oilwatch affiliates - showed they are able to negotiate the inside-outside space with power and grace. So too did the CJ's movement's major formal NGO network which worked to undermine elite legitimacy within the Bella Centre, Friends of the Earth (as a result, they were evicted). Simons and Tonak allege that the CJ movement's 'solidarity with the Global South' was conflated with 'a handful of NGO bureaucrats and allied government leaders'. There are certainly some in the CJ movement who would put the North-South contradiction ahead of internal class conflict as a priority for struggle, a tension that is openly recognized and has been the source of frank debating as this broad global movement is organized quickly, without secretariats and enforced norms/values/processes.

This is, after all, a movement in its early stages, and if the long tradition of protests for democracy and social justice in Mexico are any guide, and if Cancun in 2003 and the 2006 Mexico City march of 10,000 against the World Water Forum (just as illegitimate a body as those deciding the climate future) are

precedents for internationalism, then it will be worthwhile to again descend on another climate summit, in Cancun in November 2010 (and again at a follow-up in South Africa a year later) to battle so that CJ issues will be raised forcefully - including big emissions cuts, big Climate Debt repayment and the decommissioning of carbon markets. And when the governing elites refuse the demands of science, environment and most of all radical Southern social movements, which will be there in much greater numbers than in Copenhagen, then the momentum will have decisively shifted away from the centrist NGOs and mainstream environmentalists who do, certainly, aim to band-aid not transform the system.

Simons and Tonak would have preferred CJ activists to confront 'the hyper-green capitalism of Hopenhagen, the massive effort of companies such as Siemens, Coca-Cola, Toyota and Vattenfall to greenwash their image and the other representations of this market ideology within the city center.' But the world's CJ movements are indeed targeting both the corporates directly (especially at oil/coalface in the Niger Delta, Ecuador, Australia, Europe, Alberta, West Virginia and San Francisco), and the national and multilateral executive committees of the bourgeoisie who go to COPS. There are, of course, major environmental organizations – WorldWide Fund for Nature, Environmental Defense Fund, National Resource Defense Council, and even the Sierra Club and Greenpeace – which have strong corporate connections. These were most pernicious in the case of the TckTckTck marketing campaign, which asked Copenhagen leaders to 'seal the deal'. The CJ movement, in contrast, aimed to 'seattle the deal', and generated the political principles, analysis, strategies, tactics and alliances to do so.

CJ seattling, to plan a *new* climate order

Hence it is indeed logical for CJ activists to declare victory at Copenhagen, and make plans

for future scale politics that move progressively closer to the home base, whether in the North or South:

- at global scale, continue to make genuine demands - unwinnable now to be sure - for 1) huge emissions cuts, 2) Climate Debt repayments and 3) no carbon markets - and then to seattle Cancun and other bad climate deals when these demands are rejected;
- at national scale, make genuine demands - unwinnable now - for the same cuts, debt demands and carbon market decommissioning (plus state investments in transformed energy and infrastructure) but expect more unacceptable legislation and/or gridlock;
- at national scale, begin forcing national environmental regulatory agencies to their job in restricting greenhouse gas emissions, for example in the US through lawsuits (as the Sierra Club shows is possible) and direct action protests at the EPA (as West Virginia coal activists do);
- at state and municipal scales, start working hard on public utility commissions and planning boards to block climate-destructive practices and projects; and
- at local scales, find sites of major greenhouse gas emissions or power consumption and raise consciousness and the cost of business-as-usual through direct activism.

Organising and consciousness-raising are critical, perpetual steps, just as hotly contested as the right to protest in Copenhagen. To illustrate, an intense struggle over interpreting carbon trading in the US played out partly through a nine-minute popular educational film, 'The Story of Cap and Trade', launched a week before the summit. In its first two weeks on YouTube and Vimeo, the film recorded 400,000 hits, in the process attracting strong opposition from mainstream environmentalists wedded to promotion of cap and trade.

Finally, to confirm that activism would be the main antidote to polluters and carbon traders, the most effective response to the post-Copenhagen hangover came from radicals stretching from Australia to Africa to the Andes to the Amazon to Appalachia to Alberta.

- on December 20, on a bridge leading to the world's largest coal port, in Newcastle, Australia's Rising Tide activists blocked a train for 7.5 hours, with 23 arrests;

- in South Africa, groundWork, Earthlife and the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance demanded that the state electricity utility, Eskom, 'keep the coal in the hole', by protesting at Durban and Johannesburg tariff hearings in January;

- up the Atlantic Coast, the Niger Delta oil was kept in the soil by the Port Harcourt-based NGO Environmental Rights Action, which explicitly links local destruction to global climate chaos, and through sabotage of oil extraction by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, which ended a two month ceasefire by attacking a Shell and Chevron pipeline six hours after the Copenhagen Accord was signed;

- in the Andes, Bolivian President Evo Morales announced he will host a major strategy conference of the world's eco-social CJ movements from 20-22 April;

- in the Amazon, Quito-based Accion Ecologica's work with indigenous people to protect the Yasuni national park required renewed solidarity in January when Ecuador's President Rafael Correa threatened to authorise drilling in June (Correa also tried to put Yasuni into the carbon markets), while environmental and indigenous people have instead demanded that more countries join Germany (\$50 million/year) in paying their Climate Debt so that Ecuador's leaders can justify leaving the oil in the soil;

- in Appalachia, the Climate Ground Zero activists of West Virginia have, according to a December 19 report by Vicki Smith, 'chained themselves to giant dump trucks, scaled 80-foot trees to stop blasting and paddled boots online into a 9 million-gallon sludge pond. They've blocked roads, hung banners and staged sit-ins. Virginia-based Massey Energy claims a single 3 1/2-hour occupation cost the company \$300,000'; and

- in Canada on December 20, anti-tarsands environmentalist Ingmar Lee climbed a flagpole at the British Columbia parliament to protest carbon crimes by prime minister Stephen Harper, provincial premier Gordon Campbell and their ally Tzeporah Berman from the corrupted NGO ForestEthics, following an action in London at the Canadian High Commission, where Camp for Climate Action activists offered solidarity to Alberta's indigenous Canadian tarsands victims by cutting down the maple-leaf flag, drowning it in crude oil, and then locking down on an upstairs balcony.

Opportunities abounded for activism following Copenhagen, as CJ forces in San Francisco carried out various protests – at Senator Boxer's office, Chevron headquarters, City Hall and the Danish consulate – as well as teach-ins in December-January. In New York on January 13, a carbon traders conference was subject to a protest by scores of Climate Camp activists.

So if only two useful things were accomplished in Copenhagen, they were the unveiling of Pretoria, Delhi, Beijing and Brasilia as willing criminal accomplices to the Washington-Brussels-Tokyo-Melbourne-Ottawa axis, and the rise of Climate Justice Action, Climate Justice Now!, 350.org and parallel movements whose hundreds of thousands of protesters swarmed streets of the world's cities. The next question is whether in 2010, before the next fiasco in Mexico, the latter can cancel the former. We all depend upon an affirmative answer.