

Why Copenhagen Failed

By [Shamus Cooke](#)

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To anybody interested in the future of the earth's climate, the conclusion of the Copenhagen conference represents either colossal disappointment or profound rage. The financial pledges— if honored— that rich nations made to poor nations will do nothing to combat global warming. The few climate related agreements that were made were of zero substance, especially when compared to what the situation demanded.

The sorrowful outcome, however, could have been predicted in the conference's first week, based on two seemingly unrelated events: The conference showcased the largest police action in Denmark's history (including mass arrests of "troublemakers"); while also producing the largest ever boom in limousine rentals. Both happenings helped reveal the true nature of the conference, spelling doom for climate progress.

Contrary to the hopes of billions of people, the talks were a purely elite affair. Many of the thousands of delegates sent to the conference were not looking to save the planet, as advertised, but were looking out for the national interest of their native governments. Most of these countries are dominated by the "special interests" of giant corporations.

Big business in the rich nations used the conference as a cynical maneuver to maintain their economic dominance over the "emerging business" in the developing countries. This fact was at first obscured by technical language, until the now-famous "Danish Text" was leaked to the press in the first week of the conference.

This document was a conference proposal written by the U.S. and England, though submitted by Denmark. The Danish Text proposes that developed nations — the U.S., Europe, Japan, etc. — be allowed to pollute twice the amount of developing countries — China, India, Russia, Brazil, etc. — for the next fifty years.

If enacted, the corporations of the developing nations would be forced to function under an incredible economic handicap. Their governments would have, of course, rejected such nonsense, giving the U.S. delegates the needed excuse to blame China for the failed talks (the U.S. media has done this with absolute disregard for facts).

The Danish Text also proposed to move future climate talks out of the realm of the too-democratic UN into the U.S./Europe dominated World Bank. Obama has thus surpassed his predecessor in the realm of global arrogance.

However, the U.S. torpedoed the talks long before they ever began, forcing the international media to campaign in favor of "lower expectations." The New York Times explains:

"... when Mr. Obama and other world leaders met last month, they were forced to abandon the goal of reaching a binding accord at Copenhagen because the American political system

is not ready to agree to a treaty that would force the United States, over time, to accept profound changes in its energy, transport and manufacturing [corporate] sectors.” (December 13, 2009).

Instead of building upon the foundation of the already-insufficient Kyoto Protocol, the Obama administration demanded a whole new structure, something that would take years to achieve. The Kyoto framework was abandoned because it included legally binding agreements, and was based on multi-lateral, agreed-upon reductions of greenhouse gasses (however insufficient). Instead, Obama proposed that “...each country set its own rules and to decide unilaterally how to meet its target.” (The Guardian, September 15, 2009).

This way, there is zero accountability, zero oversight, and therefore, zero climate progress. Any country may make any number of symbolic “pledges” to combat global warming, while actually doing very little to follow through — much like billions of dollars rich countries pledged to Africa that have yet to leave western bank accounts.

Obama’s maneuvering to ruin Copenhagen was correctly assessed by Canadian writer Naomi Klein, who said that Obama, like Bush, is “using multi-lateralism to destroy multi-lateralism.” This means that Obama is participating in international organizations like the UN Copenhagen conference, with no intention of reaching agreements. Once the U.S. blames its overseas rivals for the failure to “cooperate,” a more independent path can be struck.

This is reminiscent of Bush’s path to invading Iraq: he used the UN Security Council to pass resolutions against Iraq, which helped him weaken Iraq while strengthening U.S. public opinion. But when the Security Council wouldn’t agree to an invasion, Bush assembled a pathetic “coalition of the willing” to attack, completely abandoning the UN (Obama appears to be following an identical approach with Iran). U.S. corporations wanted to dominate Iraq’s huge oil reserves and other treasures, to the detriment of the corporations within Europe, Russia, and China.

Another example of Obama’s fake multi-lateralism is the World Trade Organization (WTO). The U.S. is again being blamed for blocking a multi-lateral agreement in this corporate-controlled organization — some U.S. corporations want market protection from rival corporations of other countries.

The international WTO continues to be unofficially abandoned in favor of regional (unilateral) trade blocs like NAFTA, CAFTA, the EU, etc., increasing international tensions, which, if one looks below the surface, are conflicts between giant corporations based in rival nations, battling for control of international markets, raw materials, and cheap labor.

The failure of the WTO, the UN, and now Copenhagen are all examples of an increasingly conflict-ridden world, based on the emerging economies challenging the rule of the old powers. This dynamic clearly resembles the situation prior to WWI, when the big powers — England and the U.S. — felt threatened by the rise of Germany and Japan, and used a strategy of “containment” to stunt their growth. The end result was war.

This time, however, China, India, Brazil, and Russia are the emerging threats, and the issue of climate change is being used as yet another tactic to “contain” their growth.

With such a dynamic unfolding, there can be no future multi-lateral agreements expected,

minus the “symbolic” type that Copenhagen produced. The unbridgeable national conflicts are not the result of bad policy from naïve leaders, but an inherent future of a market economy [capitalism].

Giant corporations in different countries are constantly growing and competing with each other for a very limited global marketplace, always attempting to monopolize markets, raw-materials, and labor by any means necessary. This vicious competition pushes all other social issues into the background — human needs are subordinate to blindly chasing profits.

Such an irrationally competitive system cannot be smoothed over with good intentions and on-paper cooperation. Deeper, conflicting corporate interests between nations are the motor force pushing countries further apart the more cooperation is needed.

But soon the fake cooperation Obama stresses will be too much for the U.S. corporate-elite to bear. Many of them are bored with the international community, especially when the U.S. is the sole military super-power in the world. Soon Obama’s “failed attempts” to cooperate internationally will evolve into a more independent, Bush-like approach.

The largely ignored UN is likely to be further pushed aside so that brute force can continue to dictate US international policy, an agenda already begun by the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan, Iraq, Obama’s expanding war in Pakistan, and the “looming threat” that supposedly Iran is.

As long as governmental policy is dictated by the corporations — represented in the U.S. by the two party system — multi-lateralism and cooperation are doomed. Thus, the battle to save the environment and end war must include a fight against these corporations, who wield a political/economic vise grip over society. Only by publicly controlling these billionaire-owned mega-enterprises can the peaceful and cooperative impulses of the earth’s people find their full expression.

Shamus Cooke is a social service worker, trade unionist, and writer for Workers Action (www.workerscompass.org). He can be reached at shamuscook@yahoo.com

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