

Climate Diplomacy Failed Again. Only Movements From Below Can Save The Planet



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The outcome at COP26 doesn't bode well for the future of the planet, but then again, no one remotely aware of the history of international climate talks should have expected anything but a failure at Glasgow.

As a matter of fact, given what we already know about the science of climate change (fossil fuels are the primary culprits behind global warming), and, in light of our experience with the catastrophic effects of global warming (heat waves, wildfires, floods, droughts, melting glaciers, rising sea levels, habitat loss and species extinction), COP26 must be regarded as a "[monumental failure](#)."

Indeed, it is quite shocking to see [reports](#) and [commentaries](#) from certain quarters trying to convince the public that COP26 represents a step forward in the fight against the climate crisis.

Why? Because for the first time in nearly three decades the world "coal" was used in a COP climate agreement? Or because of the pledge to end deforestation by 2030? Or could it be because world leaders agreed to end "inefficient" subsidies for fossil fuels?

Hypocrisy reigned supreme at COP26 in Glasgow. Leaving aside the presence of the fossil fuel industry with a bigger delegation than any country, most world leaders were there to defend their national economic interests rather than the sustainability of the planet.

Let's start with President Joe Biden. He argued that "there is no more time to hang back or sit on the fence," and then sought to convince everyone present that the U.S. will "lead by example" in the fight against global warming. How? By

[leasing over 80 million acres of public waters](#) in the Gulf of Mexico to fossil fuel companies for oil and gas extraction immediately after his rhetorical posture at COP26.

And let's not forget [his urgent plea to OPEC](#) just a few months ago to increase oil production.

Perfect samples of leading by example!

How about Australia, whose current government [vows to keep using and selling coal](#) for decades to come?

Countries such as China, Russia, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, to name just a few, worked hard during the negotiations to weaken as much as possible the final COP26 pact.

Of course, wealthy nations, which are primarily responsible for the climate crisis, bear the vast majority of the blame for climate impasse.

Their failure to honor a pledge of \$100 billion in climate financing a year to poor nations, which are hit hardest by the consequences of global warming, speaks volumes of their commitment to the transformation of a sustainable and just future. So does their position on the issue of financing for "losses and damages" at COP26, which was deliberately couched in very vague terms and was left to be addressed in future climate talks.

But that's what international climate diplomacy amounts to in the end: governments fighting for a climate agenda that won't harm the specific interests and needs of their own ruling classes. This is exactly the reason why world leaders have been kicking the can down the road for nearly three decades now when it comes to taking drastic measures to combat global warming.

The truth of the matter is that whatever progress has been made so far in our fight against the climate crisis has been greatly due to activism on the part of individuals and a wide array of organizations such as community groups, labor unions, non-governmental organizations, and Indigenous groups. Youth voices on the climate crisis have been, of course, most instrumental in raising public consciousness and building momentum for the formation of a global climate movement, which is our only hope left towards securing the goal of sustainability for all life on Earth.

The irony is that actually no sober and rational thinking human being could possibly have any illusions about the challenge humanity faces in the 21st century. It requires an indubitably high level of ignorance, in conjunction with a heavy dose of misanthropy, to pass over the fact that the world is faced with a titanic struggle over how to save the planet.

Moreover, there is no mystery about how humanity can avoid a possible collapse of civilized order as we have known it. A global Green New Deal is our only hope to save the planet from the disastrous effects of global warming caused by the burning of fossil fuels. Decarbonization in conjunction with natural climate solutions such as reforestation are key to making sure that humanity doesn't get trapped in a conundrum the "the gates of hell are locked on the inside."

There is no other choice at the present juncture. It is still not clear to what degree technology can be part of the solution at some point in the future, and we surely have no luxury in waiting to find out whether emerging technologies can solve the climate crisis.

Also, let's have no illusions about the global Green New Deal project. This is not some sort of a utopian dream, as its opponents seem to suggest. The research, for instance, conducted by economists at the renowned Political Economy Research Institute (PERI) of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst shows with unquestionable clarity that the implementation of the Green New Deal project will not only spare us from the worsening effects of global warming, but will also ensure sustainable development and a just transition.

But, perhaps more important, there are already scores of organizations in places all over the world working hard to turn the Green New Deal vision into reality. For example, ReImagine Appalachia, a collection of individuals and organizations seeking to "built a sustainable 21st century Appalachia," is restoring damaged lands and water, refashioning the electric grid, building a sustainable transportation system, reforesting the region, while at the same time promoting union rights and ensuring that workers in extractive industries remain vital elements of the workforce in the post-fossil fuel economy.

Mass organizing is central, of course, to the attainment of the goals set forth by ReImagine Appalachia. Amanda Woodrum, Senior Researcher, Policy Matters Ohio, and Co-Director, Project to ReImagine Appalachia, says ReImagine

Appalachia “reaches out and engages a wide variety of stakeholders – labor, faith, enviro, racial justice, criminal justice reform advocates, local electeds and others.”

Indeed, participation from below is the key to ensuring a societal transformation towards sustainability. As Amanda Woodrum so eloquently expressed to *Truthout*, this is the only way that “Appalachia stays on the climate table, otherwise it will be on the menu.”

In addition, ReImagine Appalachia appears to have developed a very effective local elected outreach strategy, which, according to Amanda Woodrum, “has secured a number of endorsements from local electeds and passed community resolutions in several communities.” Equally important, the organization has launched BLAC, the Black Appalachian Coalition, an initiative led by Black women, as [Black Appalachians have been hit hardest](#) by the downward mobility of the neoliberal project since the 1980s.

The outcomes of international climate summits are very discouraging, but the work done at the grassroots level by researchers and activists alike in the fight against humanity’s greatest existential crisis is quite inspiring.

So, yes, the struggle ahead promises to be hard and brutal, but the “[general will](#)” can always prevail in the end even under the most gruesome of circumstances if people are willing to fight for the right cause. And no cause can be more sacred than saving planet Earth.

Source:

<https://truthout.org/articles/climate-diplomacy-failed-again-only-movements-from-below-can-save-the-planet/>

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