

POSTSCRIPT TO THE PARIS CLIMATE AGREEMENT

Arnold De Graaff

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General reactions

Here are some reactions to the Paris Climate Agreement: “This is a major leap for mankind” (Francois Hollande); “We did it! – a turning point in human history” (Avaaz); “a global turn from fossil fuels” (Reuter); “a transformative moment” (Environmental Defense); “a magnificent failure” (Globe and Mail); “By comparison to what it could have been, it’s a miracle; by comparison to what it should have been, it’s a disaster” (George Monbiot, The Guardian); “No action, just promises” (Degrowth); “Paris deal: epic fail on a planetary scale” (New Internationalist); “Trading carbon: how Paris set us up for failure” (Counterpunch); “Seven wrinkles in the Paris climate deal” (Foreign Policy in Focus). “weaker than Copenhagen”, (Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research); “a failure for humanity”, (Climate Justice Alliance); “exploitative, deceitful and hollow, favoring the rights and voices of corporations over people”, (Rising Tide North America); “Claim no easy victories. Paris was a failure, but a climate justice movement is rising” (Guardian); “Only people power can bridge the gap between ambition and action in Paris Agreement” (Friends of the Earth).

These are just a few of the reactions to the Paris Climate Agreement. They range from euphoric to disastrous. After the first relief that at least something had been accomplished passed, the negative reactions multiplied. The general consensus from many different sources is that the Paris agreement is a failure for humanity and a disaster for the global environment. These negative reactions are well-founded.

The core issue

For 195 national leaders to commit themselves to any climate agreement at all is indeed a miracle, especially given past failures from Kyoto to the present. Some say that ‘politically’ it was probably the best that could be achieved. However, the best in this case means the triumph of the ‘free market’ and ‘market-based’ solutions to climate change and mitigation measures. By means of political pressure, manipulation, bullying and threats particularly by the US negotiators, opposing voices were silenced, including those from the global South. Even in the face of massive public protests and the efforts of countless civil organizations ‘*business-as-usual*’ triumphed. The global leaders were able to stall the process of more immediate climate action and a more rapid reduction of CO₂ emissions. They gave themselves ample time to put (lucrative) ‘market-based’ solutions in place that will maintain the use of fossil fuel energy for decades to come. It reflects their deep commitment to global corporate capitalism with its unlimited growth, ‘free market’ policies and unequal ‘rewards’ while externalizing environmental and social justice costs.

Unfortunately, *climate change does not respond to global economic practices nor to political pressure and manipulation*. The rise in CO₂ and other gasses, leading to global warming, is a matter of *scientific*

observation and requires *solutions that are in keeping with current science and not market-based*. Or, on a more down-to-earth level, climate change is a matter of global experience by millions of people and requires down-to-earth solutions and people-power. In this respect most of the world leaders are 'climate change deniers' that do not really take the evidence of science into account in developing their policies. They are committed to an ideology that makes them blind to the reality and urgency of global warming. For example, it is estimated, *based on present usage* especially by industrial agriculture that over 1½ billion people will suffer *absolute water scarcity* by 2025 and that billions more will experience *severe water shortage*. That is only 10 years from now. In ten years Canada will have barely begun to make significant reductions in its carbon emissions. It is just one example.

There are many other major concerns that are the direct result of global warming, None of these issues were addressed in Paris, like the increasing acidification of the oceans and slow decline in phytoplankton which supplies about half of the earth's oxygen; the melting of Arctic glaciers and rising sea levels threatening the inundation of many coastal areas, cities and islands; the global decrease in topsoil and biodiversity with its implications for food security; the increase in pollution and rise in GHG from industrial agriculture; the on-going deforestation and displacement of indigenous people and many other pressing issues. Stopping and reversing global warming and climate change is not just a matter of reducing burning fossil fuels or capturing carbon at the stack or exhaust pipe. It involves all the interrelated aspects of our environment that are affected by our economic practices and climate change. These interconnected ecological givens, from the changes in the atmosphere to the oceans, weather, water, lands, forests, biodiversity, chemical pollution, etc. and many distressing global social justice issues should be sufficient for all world leaders to see what is really happening in many regions of the globe and to the lives of millions of adults and children. The political leaders have failed humanity in Paris; the corporate leaders have 'succeeded'.

The illusion of making significant carbon reductions by 2020, 2030, and 2050

The commitment to "holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2° C above pre-industrial levels" certainly cannot be met by 2030 or 2050 *given present economic practices and planning*. In view of the commitments by 176 nations, the promise "to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5° C" is an empty gesture. It would mean that by 2030 – that is in 15 years-world-wide we would have to stop burning fossil fuels; radically change our agricultural practices; change our ways of transportation and building; stop development of new dams; and many other environmentally destructive practices. Instead, given the total number of committed reductions, *we are presently headed for an increase of over 3° C*, which will make life in many regions of the world impossible. The agreement acknowledges that "*much greater emissions reduction efforts will be required to meet even the 2-degree target*". However, the new agreement does not go into effect until 2020 and then it will be years before there is any significant reduction in CO₂ emissions. By that time the chance to hold global warming to 1.5° C will be gone unless global corporations and the world's largest economies radically change direction. Such a dramatic change would mean a turn away from corporate capitalism to a 'third alternative' of an 'economy of enough' or a 'no-growth economy' as many have recommended.

Several reduction commitments take 2005 as their base line and not 1990 or the pre-industrial level. This means, for example, that the US's commitment of a 28 percent reduction in GHG emissions by 2030 only amounts to a very low 14 percent reduction compared to other nations that take 1990 as their base line. What is needed is a reduction of 30 to 50 percent by 2030 to slow down and stop the increase in CO₂. Both the US and the EU have refused to agree to additional cuts and will fall far short of their fair share of international efforts to limit global warming.

There are no legally binding targets. All we have are voluntary pledges and there are no penalties for breaking their commitments. The Paris Agreement only commits countries to come back after 2020 (and every 5 years after that) to re-assess their commitments and progress in cutting GHG. If they have not met their targets or have not made sufficient progress five or ten year later, all they have to do is promise to do better during the following five years. By that time we are a decade or two further down the road to a 3 degree increase in global warming. There is no commitment to do anything before 2020. According to the best scientific predictions we have a narrow window of around 2 decades to turn things around and that is not taking into account any re-enforcing climate changes or tipping points.

Other specific issues

The commitment in Copenhagen to establish a climate fund of \$100 billion a year by 2020 for developing countries to adapt to climate change has not materialized. So far only \$2 billion a year or at most \$20 billion has been put in dedicated climate funds by the developed countries that have created the bulk of pollution. No new funds have been made available. *Climate Fairshares* estimates that at least \$400 billion a year is needed to mitigate and adapt to climate change, especially for vulnerable communities and eco systems. Developed countries that have exploited the global South are backing away from taking any responsibility for the ecological damages they have left behind and are still creating. They have refused to accept any liability for these damages and any demands for reparations, either now or in the future.

Climate scientists have repeatedly warned that we need to leave over 80% of the remaining fossil fuels in the ground if we are to avoid increasing levels of CO₂ with its impact on global warming. The Paris Agreement has avoided and eliminated any references to this recommendation. There is no commitment to decarbonize the global economy within the next two decades. Instead the suggested alternatives are *Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS)*, a 'new' *carbon trading or offsetting system* to replace the present failed system and massive *removals of carbon by sink*, which could include 'reforestation' by means of mono culture tree plantations. All these measures are market-based, technical solutions. They are either expensive, unproven on any large scale, or will require huge acreage and volumes of water. They have been called 'false solutions' since they will not lead to significant reductions in CO₂. Instead they will further entrench present global economic policies. See below what these 'solutions' mean for Canada. In view of the need for a total decarbonisation, there is no strong endorsement of renewable energy nor a commitment to phase out subsidies to the fossil fuel industry (more than \$500 billion a year globally; \$34 billion a year for Canada) and re-direct these funds to renewable energy, organic farming, re-building infra-structures and rapid public transit, etc.

International flights and shipping is excluded from the agreement even though they account for more than 5% of the global pollution and are estimated to triple (flights) and quadruple (shipping) by 2050. More serious than all the other omissions, there is no specific mention of the intense impact of industrial agriculture and food processing industry on global warming, second only to the extraction and burning of fossil fuels. Neither is there any mention of the effect on climate change of the increasing conversion of forests and grass lands to mono cultures and the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. Nor is there any mention of the impact of large dams for generating hydro power on global warming and its destruction of the environment and displacement of millions of people. Thousands more dams are being built or planned, including in the Amazon, with the support of the World Bank. And while the Paris negotiations were going on, several international trade agreements like TTIP, TTP and many other bi-lateral agreements were quietly pushed forward along with its secret alternative international corporate legal system. These trade agreements alone will lock the global economy into a business-as-usual approach for many decades to come. These agreements might all be de-railed by catastrophic economic and climate events, like another speculative financial collapse, massive crop failures, food riots, extreme weather events, increasing water shortages, large groups of climate refugees overwhelming other nations, etc.

Climate change, global warming, and environmental degradation is the result of many interrelated systems and interacting factors. The extraction and burning of fossil fuels is only one crucial factor of climate change. Even a near total change to renewable energy within the next two decades would not stop the increase in global warming and changes in climate. Much more would be needed to stop and reverse present trends. None of these complex and interrelated causes were addressed in Paris and any issues of social justice, reparations, indigenous peoples, gender equity, poverty, slavery, child labour, etc. were carefully avoided. The 'free market' triumphed and the environment and social justice lost out. When the market is the only morality that is acknowledged, world leaders become morally bankrupt. The common human values of freedom, equality, justice, the rule of law, participatory democracy, care, respect, mutual responsibility, community, and so on, have been relegated to the fringes or left to individual initiatives, especially in the global North. Greed, power and profit, and personal enrichment by the few at the expense of the majority and the earth, are the order of the day. What is needed is a new commitment to the *multi-dimensional unity of life* in which each dimension of life can come to its own. Such a vision is the opposite of a one-dimensional view of life which gives priority to the economic aspect at the expense of everything else.

Canada as an example

Meanwhile, globally the extraction of oil, gas and coal continues unabated, as well as the expansion of industrial agriculture and food processing, land and water grabbing, overfishing, deforestation and illegal logging, increase in shipping and air travel, development of new dams, unsustainable building practices and rapid urban expansion. These on-going investments and developments commit the global economy to a 20 to 40 year increase in global warming. We can take Canada as an example of what needs to change and what challenges citizens' organizations face. After the first euphoria about joint action and disillusionments about the outcome of the Paris negotiations subsided, citizens' groups and

First Nations are taking up the struggle again where they left off in early December. This time they are doing so with even more determination than ever, knowing that it is up to civil society to bring about climate change. They know more clearly that we can't depend on political and corporate leaders to stabilize and reduce global warming.

Although coal prices have gone down, some coal mines in BC and Alberta have been shut down, new projects have been moth-balled, and the major coal exporting ports in BC are working below capacity, there is still hope within the coal industry that the slowdown will be temporary. The expectation is that the export of steel-making metallurgical coal (coking coal) to Asia and even thermal coal will continue or survive the slump. Globally there is still a (slowed-down) increase in developing coal fired plants for generating electricity. Alberta depends for 55% of its electricity production on thermal coal-fired plants. These plants are slated for decommissioning in 15 years, assuming there are no loopholes, postponements, equivalency substitutes, or downright political lobbying and pressure. It calls for a lot of vigilance, pressure and action on the part of citizens' groups to hold BC's and Alberta's governments to their commitments. It will be especially challenging to make sure that adequate job transition training is provided for the approximately 42,000 people that are employed in the coal industry either directly or indirectly. Hopefully better training possibilities will be made available than those of the Cape Breton coal miners in the late 1990's who had to transition to work in call centers, of all things.

In contrast, Saskatchewan is investing billions of dollars in carbon capture and storage (CCS). It is a post-combustion, commercial scale CCS for coal-fired power plants. SaskPower, a crown corporation, has encountered many technical problems and increasing costs. In spite of these set-backs they hope that they can make a commercially and environmental viable case for the continued use of 'clean' coal and 'green' oil. By combining capturing emissions from three units of the power plant (one a very high percentage and two very low) they hope to meet the minimum allowable emission targets. Saskatchewan has been selling its carbon to an Alberta oil company to pump carbon into exhausted oil wells to extract even more oil. It is called 'Enhanced Oil Recovery' techniques. The subsidized CCS plant (\$2 billion in public money so far) turns out to be a way of subsidizing oil producers. Along with Alberta, the province is one of Canada's big polluters.

To reduce their carbon emissions, Ontario and Quebec have committed themselves to a dubious cap-and-trade or offsetting scheme, which allows the buying and selling of carbon credits to achieve an overall reduction of emissions. In the past these carbon markets have collapsed, been subverted and resulted in unscrupulous dealings. In the cap-and-trade scenario, the government 'caps' the total amount of carbon pollution that an industry is allowed and issues permits that companies can purchase. Companies can sell any excess credits if they are under their allowance or buy extra credits from less polluting industries if they have exceeded their limits. No carbon pricing system has been worked out yet, which in itself can become very complex and vary for each industry. The price for the carbon permits has not been worked out either. If the price and the yearly increases are set too low there will be little incentive to invest in carbon reduction devices and measures and carbon credits will soon lose their value as they have in the past. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture is already figuring out how farmers can make some extra money by selling credits earned from sequestration of carbon in the soil.

From the first reports it is clear that establishing and obtaining those carbon credits will be a very complicated and long process. Meanwhile, evidence is appearing that storing carbon in the soil may not be as stable as was thought before and much more limited as a result of the increase in CO₂ in the atmosphere..

Support for a New Market Mechanism broke down in Paris, which would have replaced project-by-project schemes with a new system focusing on whole industries at a time. There are no common accounting rules for international carbon markets. There is some push now to develop national, domestic carbon markets, in this case, provincial markets in Ontario and between Ontario and Quebec (along with California to create a larger carbon credit market). Will Ontario and Quebec be able to avoid the pitfalls, failures and corruption of past and present cap-and-trade schemes in Europe, Russia, Ukraine and other countries? The first indications make this seem doubtful. Already the Ontario government is talking about exemptions for some industries and free permits for others (as Quebec has done), which has opened the door to fierce lobbying even before more details of the scheme are made public.

Ontario is aiming for a 15% reduction of 1990 levels by 2020, which it seems may only amount to a 10% reduction. How Ontario will achieve its stated target of an 80% reduction by 2050 remains a mystery. In 35 years it would have to lower its emissions from 150 Megatonnes to 35 Mt of CO₂. Instead, given present policies and initiatives overall emissions are expected to rise to 190 Mt by 2030.

Carbon markets, carbon pricing, carbon offsetting and carbon trading basically function as a delaying tactic. It creates the possibility of further delays for decades to come. There has been no attempt in Paris to deal with the *supply-side* of fossil fuel energy and putting a moratorium on any further extraction of oil, gas and coal, instead of just capturing emissions at the smoke stack or tail pipe. There has been little incentive to develop low-carbon modifications *at source*. No doubt, small improvements in many industries and sectors have been and will be made in every province in the coming decades. David Suzuki summarized what has been accomplished in each province and what needs to happen to further cut carbon emissions. Present achievements will not be sufficient to bring down the overall carbon emissions in Canada in the foreseeable future. For such reductions to happen, much more drastic action will be needed. Most important of all, these various carbon capturing schemes are market-based solutions that do not tackle the core of the problem. These market-based solutions are subject to the up-and-downs of the carbon credit market, speculation, corruption, technical complications and bureaucracy. For many years a carbon tax has been widely advocated as the best possible way to limit carbon emissions. Depending how the tax is implemented it is the fairest way to pay for a reduction in carbon emissions. To be effective a lot depends on whether the tax is high enough with yearly increases to stimulate the adoption of carbon reduction measures. Generally there has been strong opposition by industry to any attempts to implement such a tax on a global level.

The peoples' response to Paris

As Alberto Saldamando (human rights expert and attorney) concluded after the Paris Climate Agreement, “The Paris accord is a trade agreement, nothing more” which is as good a summary as any. During and right after the Paris agreement it was business-as-usual as is clear from the flood of news items and articles since Paris from many organizations, like *Mining Watch Canada, SumOfUs, Ecojustice, Beyond Pesticides, Avaaz, CCPA, EcoWatch, Transnational Agrarian Movements (TAM), Via Campesina International, International Labour Movement, Indigenous World Association, Cultural Survival, Waterkeeper Alliance, Worldwatch Institute, Food First, Grist, Organic Consumers Association, David Suzuki Foundation, Global Justice Now, FERN, GMWatch, National Farmers Union* and many other alternative and watchdog organizations. Business will continue as usual, except for the setbacks of low oil prices and the low Canadian dollar. *It is as if Paris has never happened.* Since Paris it has become clearer than ever that we will not be able to depend on our provincial or national government, nor on Canadian industries to reduce green house gas emissions within the next few decades to prevent a 3^o C rise in global warming.

It is clear that the Canadian government and industry will not take strong action to leave 80% of carbon in the ground and instead expedite the development of renewable energy and a host of other measures. Nor will they initiate a broad public debate about the changes that need to be made if Canada is to live up to its commitments. New mining explorations are continuing as usual, as well as the expansion of industrial agriculture for export, including factory beef and hog production. New dams and hydro projects are being developed and the forest industry will carry on as usual, especially in the Canadian north. During the coming decades, subsidies for all these developments will not readily be transferred to renewable energy projects, small-scale forestry and coastal fishing cooperatives, funds for transitioning to organic farming, increasing the recycling of metals, upgrading buildings, developing sustainable ways of making cement, investments in rapid public transport, containing urban sprawl, supporting adaptation measures for low-lying coastal areas like the east coast, or reforming the prison system. It will be an uphill battle to stop the use of dangerous chemicals, restore climate change research, provide public information, free the media and public education from corporate control, restore democracy and proportional representation, invest in preventative health care, and a host of other urgent issues. There will be no radical change in direction. No doubt some significant environmental improvements will be made, as well as some good legislative initiatives, some adjustments in the way business operates, and so on, but there will be no fundamental change in government and corporate policies. A radical change would require a commitment to an integrated view of life in which each area of society gets its due.

However, after Paris, citizens’ groups are going forward with new inspiration and purpose as the many news briefs and articles indicate. They are taking up the challenge from where they left off before last December. Already protest and action groups in B.C. are challenging the government and industry to halt further pipeline developments and the extension of port facilities for the export of liquid gas and coal. The citizens’ of Kamloops, B.C. are organizing themselves to protest the development of a new copper and gold mine close to their town. MiningWatch Canada has taken up the struggle again informing us and protesting the destructive practices of many Canadian-based mining companies,

especially overseas, including the demands and protests of local communities against HudBay Minerals in Peru.

As their news items, articles and reports show, each citizen's organization and protest group has taken up their challenge again with new determination. In Paris it became clearer than ever that citizens worldwide are the not-so-silent majority and that it will be up to international, regional and local education and action groups to hold governments and corporations accountable and hold them to a basic change in policies that are ecologically and socially just and will begin to halt and reverse global warming. Such programs of action will lead to a fundamental 'systemic change' politically and economically, and not just climate change. Such a systemic change would not lead to a new form of capitalism, nor to a Marxist or socialist approach, but to a third alternative that would bring healing to the planet and well-being to all peoples. It will be a truly equalitarian, inclusive, fair and from the bottom-up change. There is a new realization that it is up to citizens' organizations, climate action groups, farmer and fishing cooperatives, youth and students groups and many others to bring about the change that is needed. It gives new inspiration, motivation and meaning to the activities of all citizen groups as in our local community, like NDACT, CORE, Protect Mono, MC2, HFFA, organic farmers and producers, local art groups and bookstores, and many others. Together we will persevere for the sake of our children and all children of the world. Only people power can bridge the deep gap between non-binding national pledges made in Paris and actual initiatives and action.

There is one social justice issue among several others that does not get a lot of attention. It is one of the many consequences of global economic practices and the structural adjustment programs (SAP) enforced by the WB and International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO) and other lending institutions. That is the issue of the imprisonment and enslavement of millions of children across the globe. It highlights all that is wrong with corporate capitalism and its neo-colonialism. These heart-wrenching conditions of children's prisons are the result of forced cut-backs in social programs, education, and health care. When political and corporate leaders are driven by a *one-dimensional worldview of economic progress* at the expense of everything else, they do not see the ecological decline of the environment nor the countless instances of social injustice across the globe. These consequences become mere externalities. They are of no concern to governments and industry unless it stands in the way of economic progress.

The cries of millions of imprisoned children in Africa, Asia, South America and Eastern Europe living under the most degrading and hopeless conditions will not be silenced. Nor will the cries of the thousands of Palestinian children and young people in Israeli prisons be silenced or forgotten. Nor will the agony of millions of enslaved and bonded boys and girls throughout the world go unnoticed, nor the street kids everywhere sniffing glue to dull their pain, stealing or selling their bodies to survive, or just ending their short lives. Their faces are on YouTube for all to see. It's heartbreaking to hear them talk and watch their faces. Many have lost the will to live and no longer care what happens to them. Their cries echo through the universe. To deal with such evils and injustices will require a societal transformation of values and priorities.

It will be up to the children, teenagers, students and young adults of the world to *free the children* and take up their cause, seek justice for crimes against humanity and create a liveable and just world. They need all of us to stand by and prepare the way.

“People shouldn’t be surprised that the deal is bad. Industry has heavily influenced these negotiations. Grassroots people who are advocating for the alternatives are not allowed in these negotiations. So we shouldn’t be surprised. Instead we are using this moment to reinvigorate our base, to continue forward demanding climate justice, and to show the world, show the countries, show the corporations what people can do when we unite for climate justice.” (Dallas Goldtooth of Indigenous Environmental Network)

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