



Durban's conference of polluters, market failure and critic failure

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abstract

The United Nations climate negotiations have failed to address what scientists agree is the world's greatest-ever threat to the human species and much other life on Earth. In Durban, South Africa, the December 2011 summit yet again turned to failing market mechanisms to address emissions cuts, without advancing beyond unambitious 2009 Copenhagen Conference of the Parties targets. As a banker remarked, the Durban deal was like 'a Viagra shot for the flailing carbon markets', but a commentator rebuffed, 'The problem with Viagra, of course, is that it only lasts for a couple of hours'. Carbon markets continued to fall for weeks after the COP17. Tragically, state delegations from the most adversely affected areas failed to speak up when it became apparent no climate-saving deal was possible (as had happened in Seattle and Cancun against harmful trade deals, thus slowing multilateral neoliberalism). And those in civil society observing the planned 'genocide' and 'ecocide', as Durban was appropriately described by the former Bolivian ambassador to the UN, were themselves (ourselves) implicated in the overall failure, insofar as inadequate analysis, strategies and tactics characterized both local and international climate activism. Only regroupment at the scales of national and subnational governments (for regulatory advocacy) and direct action against greenhouse gas emitters – as, after all, the climate justice movement has been pursuing for several years – offer better prospects for transforming the present market, state and social failures into system-wide structural change.

Introduction

Inside Durban's International Convention Centre in December 2011, world elites continued their do-nothing tradition at the seventeenth Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (the 'COP17'). They perhaps don't even realize the extraordinary damage being done through multilateral climate malgovernance, for two months later, in his State of the Nation speech to the parliament in Cape Town, South African president Jacob Zuma (2012) declared, 'Let me take this opportunity to congratulate the inter-ministerial committee on COP17 for making the conference a huge success. The final outcome of COP17 was historic and precedent setting, ranking with the 1997 conference where the Kyoto Protocol was adopted.'

In spite of the backslapping, it was obvious who won at Durban's climate summit. According to the *New York Times*, a top aide to chief US State Department negotiator Todd Stern remarked at the 2012 World Economic Forum in Switzerland that 'the

Durban platform was promising because of what it did not say'. After all, revealed Trevor Houser, 'There is no mention of historic responsibility or per capita emissions. There is no mention of economic development as the priority for developing countries. There is no mention of a difference between developed and developing country action' (Broder 2012).

But neither did civil society respond adequately, in effectively delegitimizing the COP17 as it happened. A few tried. Argued Bolivia's former UN ambassador Pablo Solon (2011), 'The COP17 will be remembered as a place of premeditated genocide and ecocide.' Reiterated Tom Goldtooth of the Indigenous Environmental Network, Durban offered the world 'climate racism, ecocide, and genocide of an unprecedented scale' (Petermann 2012). Added Friends of the Earth International's South Africa chapter groundWork (2012), the COP was a 'pitstop in the fossil fuel journey to global destruction.'

But as argued in this (auto)critical review of the main power dynamics and divergent strategies adopted by negotiators and their opponents (and also allies) in the environmental, community, labour and feminist movements, the overall impact of COP17 was highly deleterious for global-scale progress, leaving local and national scales even more important as sites of struggle for climate justice. However, in the process, African elites were drawn even further into a neoliberal climate policy framework and a project funding strategy based on financial markets that will mainly enrich speculators and impoverish the continent's poorest people. With more than 150 million additional deaths anticipated on the continent in the 21st century due to climate change, Africa will be 'cooked', as Nnimmo Bassey (2011) of the Niger Delta NGO Environmental Rights Action puts it in a new book. According to UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change director R.K. Pachauri (2007), 'crop net revenues could fall by as much as 90 percent by 2100.' 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. The danger is imminent, for eight of the twenty countries which the Center for Global Development expects to be most adversely affected by extreme weather events by 2015 are African: Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In the Horn of Africa, those affected by 2015 by these storms or droughts are anticipated to include 14 percent of Djiboutis, 8 percent of Kenyans, 5 percent of Ethiopians, and 4 percent of Somalis (Wheeler, 2011: 15).

In 2009, former UN secretary general Kofi Annan's Global Humanitarian Forum (2009: 9-11) issued a report worth citing at length, as it reflects at least a degree of elite awareness of the extent of the challenge. *The Anatomy of a Silent Crisis* provided startling estimates of damages already being experienced:

An estimated 325 million people are seriously affected by climate change every year. This estimate is derived by attributing a 40 percent proportion of the increase in the number of weather-related disasters from 1980 to current to climate change and a 4 percent proportion of the total seriously affected by environmental degradation based on negative health outcomes... Application of this proportion projects that *more than 300,000 die due to climate change every year* – roughly equivalent to having an Indian Ocean tsunami annually. The number of deaths from weather-

related disasters and gradual environmental degradation due to climate change – about 315,000 deaths per year – is based on a similar calculation... Over 90 percent of the death toll relates to gradual onset of climate change which means deterioration in environmental quality, such as reduction in arable land, desertification and sea level rise, associated with climate change.

Market 'solutions'

What can be done to prevent this? The climate justice movement's answer – drawing upon April 2010 Cochabamba, Bolivia conference declarations – includes not only the dramatic emissions cuts required to reverse the damage but also the decommissioning of carbon markets. This would also entail their replacement with a suitable climate debt payment system that directly channels resources to climate victims without corrupt aid-agency and middlemen or venal state elites (such as a basic income grant) (Bond 2012).

Instead, those who followed the COP17 heard that the solution to climate crisis must centre on markets, in order to 'price pollution' and simultaneously cut the costs associated with mitigating greenhouse gases. Moreover, say proponents, these markets are vital for funding not only innovative carbon-cutting projects in Africa, but also for supplying a future guaranteed revenue stream to the Green Climate Fund (GCF), whose design team co-chair, Trevor Manuel (South Africa's Planning Minister), argued as early as November 2010 that up to half GCF revenues would logically flow from carbon markets.

The European Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is the main site of carbon trading, following a failed attempt at a carbon tax due to intensive lobbying from resistant companies. Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects were created to allow wealthier countries classified as 'industrialized' – or Annex 1 – to engage in emissions reductions initiatives in poor and middle-income countries, as a way of eliding direct emissions reductions. The use of such 'market solutions to market problems' will, supporters argue, lower the business costs of transitioning to a post-carbon world. After a cap is placed on total emissions, the idea is that high-polluting corporations and governments can buy ever more costly carbon permits from those polluters who don't need so many, or from those willing to part with the permits for a higher price than the profits they make in high-pollution production, energy-generation, agriculture, consumption, disposal or transport.

But not only was the Durban COP17 utterly useless for making the vital greenhouse gas emissions cuts of 50 percent by 2020, for ensuring the North's climate debt to the South covers damages under a 'polluter pays' logic, or for establishing a transition path to a post-carbon society and economy. Even within the very limited, flawed strategy of carbon markets, there were mixed outcomes from the Durban COP17. To be sure, the markets were affirmed. South African National Business Initiative CEO Joanne Yawitch – who was a member of Pretoria's negotiations team and formerly the second-ranking climate policy bureaucrat – remarked that 'the most important' of Durban's outcomes is securing Kyoto's 'second commitment period and the carbon market' (Blaine 2011). However, as South African writer Andy Mason (2012) wryly observed, 'According to Abyd Karmali of the Bank of America in London, the Durban deal was

like “a Viagra shot for the flailing carbon markets”. The problem with Viagra, of course, is that it only lasts for a couple of hours.’

Notwithstanding Manuel's efforts to bring emissions trading into the GCF, where it does not belong, and in spite of the United Nations CDM Executive Board's decision to allow ‘Carbon Capture and Storage’ experiments to qualify for funding, the most profound flaws in the existing market were not addressed. Without an ever-lowering cap on emissions, the incentive to increase prices and raise trading volumes disappears. Worse, in this context of economic stagnation, financial volatility and shrinking demand for emissions reduction credits, the world faces increasing sources of carbon credit supply in an already glutted market. And fraud continues, including in Durban's own celebrated pilot CDM project, the Bisasar Road landfill which converts dangerous methane emissions into electricity, as noted below.

As carbon market specialist Payal Parekh (2012) concluded of Durban's COP17,

Since there is now a second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol, the CDM is still alive. The problem is that there are still no targets in the second commitment period; Japan, Russia, Canada and USA will not be participating, while Australia and New Zealand are mulling over participation. Given the current low price of the carbon credits coupled with economic downturn in Europe, there is unlikely to be a demand or need for carbon credits. According to the International Emissions Trading Association the Durban outcome did nothing to increase demand for carbon markets, the key issue in their view... The EU would like to have a new market-based mechanism designed under the auspices of the COP to ensure a harmonized global market. Since the EU has also banned the use of CDM credits from projects registered after 2012 in non-LDC countries (projects in non-LDCs that have their crediting period renewed post-2012 remain eligible), it would prefer a new market mechanism under the UNFCCC rather than having to make bilateral agreements with a number of countries... Rather than strengthen commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the carbon markets are being used to further weaken action on climate change. Given that pledges are so weak, it is quite incomprehensible why developed countries are even putting so much energy into expanding markets, instead of increasing ambition by committing to deeper emission reduction targets and closing accounting loopholes.

In sum, Durban left the world's stuttering carbon markets without a renewed framework for a global emissions trading scheme. Durban left the Kyoto Protocol applicable to only 14 percent of world greenhouse gas emissions, given Canada's retreat within 24 hours of the summit's close. Solon (2011) scolded Durban for turning Kyoto into a ‘Zombie, a soulless undead’. The 1997 treaty's soul was a commitment that emissions cuts would be binding, but several of the richest polluting countries – the US, Canada, Japan, Russia, Australia and New Zealand – won't sign on the second commitment period, and the main gist of the Durban Platform is to delay a potential write-off of Kyoto (likely in Qatar), with the prospect of turning the Copenhagen Accord, or something like it, into a new protocol by 2015. To sabotage Kyoto, Washington continues its voluntary ‘pledge and review’ policy pantomime. Kyoto's original brain contained a species survival mechanism: a pledge to keep the earth's temperature at a livable level. Now, the Durban Platform contains ‘less than half of the necessary cuts to keep the temperature increase below 2°C,’ according to Solon. Then, as the soul-deprived, brain-dead, heartless climate-policy Zombie stumbled off the Durban Platform last week in the direction of Qatar for the COP18 next year, it immediately tripped on the crumpled carbon markets.

Carbon market failure

Emissions trading can be expected to die completely if Qatar's COP18 does not generate more commitments to legally-binding emissions cuts. And judging by Washington's threat, it won't be until 2020 – the COP26 – that the United States will review its own targets: the Copenhagen Accord's meaningless 3 percent cuts offered from 1990-2020. By then it will be too late, because the Kyoto Protocol's mistaken reliance on financial markets means that the period 1997-2011 will be seen as the lost years of inaction and misguided financial quackery – when the world urgently needs the period going forward from 2012 to be defined as an era that humanity took charge of its future and ensured planetary survival.

There are no prospects that the European Union's Emissions Trading Scheme will turn around in the near future, and only a few minor national and subnational trading experiments appear on the horizon. Only the \$100 million World Bank-European Union 'Partnership for Market Readiness' continues the myth that markets are an appropriate strategy, through grants to gullible officials in Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Indonesia, Mexico, Thailand, Turkey and Ukraine. As even the pro-trading Point Carbon news service (Twidale, 2011) remarked just after the Durban COP17 ended,

such initiatives are essential to ensure new markets get off the drawing board because a nervous private sector has little appetite to invest in new programmes without further political guarantees that someone will buy the resulting credits... the so-called Durban Platform has done little to boost demand by getting countries to further cut emissions, meaning profits for investors will be slim... while a lot of the focus of the last fortnight of UN meetings was on supply of carbon credits, not one country deepened its carbon target, leaving international carbon offset prices languishing at near record lows – something unlikely to entice investors.

Confirmed Reuters (2011) news service,

Carbon markets are still on life support after [the COP17] put off some big decisions until next year and failed to deliver any hope for a needed boost in carbon permit demand... Many traders and analysts said the agreement will do little for carbon prices which are at record lows, as the two main EU and UN-backed markets are stricken by flagging investments, an oversupply of emissions permits and worries about an economic slowdown. 'It's a sedative situation, in which a sick market needs a cure and instead of deciding which cure to use, the doctors keep using pain relief to gain more time to make the final prognosis,' said AitherCO₂ carbon trader Jacopo Visetti.

The EU system was meant to generate a cap on emissions and a steady 1.74 percent annual reduction, but the speculative character of carbon markets gave perverse incentives to stockpile credits, since large corporations as well as governments like Russia (with 'hot air' excess emissions capacity subsequent to their 1990s manufacturing collapse) gambled that the price would increase from low levels to doubled or trebled prices (as promoters continually predicted). Instead, now, with the market collapsing, the next perverse incentive is to flood the market so as to at least get some return rather than none at all when eventually the markets are decommissioned, as happened to the Chicago climate exchange. Those who held shares in the Chicago exchange subsequently sued the high-profile founder, Richard Sandor, for misrepresenting the value of their assets – a strategy that could repeat across the world given the prolific false claims associated with carbon markets.

As a result, no investor believes there is any money to be made by utilizing carbon markets to direct climate-conscious investments. A month after Durban's denouement, it was evident to the French bank Societe Generale that 'European carbon permits may fall close to zero should regulators fail to set tight enough limits in the market after 2020' – and without much prospect of that, the bank lowered its 2012 forecasts by 28 percent (Airlie and Carr, 2012). The 54 percent crash for December 2012 carbon futures sent the price to a record low, just over €6.3/tonne. Worse, an additional oversupply of 879 million tons was anticipated for the period 2008-2020, partly as a result of a huge inflow of UN offsets: an estimated 1.75 billion tonnes. This glutting problem is not only due to the demand deficit thanks to the COP17 negotiators' failure to mandate emissions cuts, but is also in part due to the lax system the UN appears to have adopted. All manner of inappropriate projects appear to be gaining approval, especially in Africa, and even in a site – Durban's Bisasar Road – where there was such intense eco-social contestation that even the World Bank dropped its support.



Photo Credit: Tamra Gilbertson, Carbon Trade Watch, Durban, South Africa, 3 December 2011

Another problem, in the wake of Durban, is that many credits issued by middle-income countries are destined to become 'junk assets' with national governments writing them off by 2013. After assessing UN Data, Bloomberg (2011) news noted both the glut in the market as well as the consequences for 'phased' out stocks: 'A UN program that encourages reductions in greenhouse gases awarded almost twice as many credits this year as in 2010 for projects that destroy industrial gases known as HFC-23 and nitrous oxide...With Europe set to stop recognizing some credits in little more than a year, investors are 'racing to beat' the ban'.

To be sure, the fact that the Kyoto Protocol was nominally extended a few years means that CDMs will continue to be traded, even though from 2007 to 2010 the volume of activity fell by 80 percent. Jonathan Grant, director of carbon markets and climate policy at PricewaterhouseCoopers stated: 'Thanks to Durban, the CDM will live to see another day, but demand for credits for these projects is lackluster. Carbon markets are expected to stay in the doldrums, because of oversupply in the (European carbon) market as a result of the recession' (Reuters, 2011). According to Barclays Capital's lead carbon researcher, Trevor Sikorski, there are vast surpluses of credits – at least a billion carbon credits – and hence 'Supply is still the fundamental problem' (Reuters, 2011). That problem will be exacerbated by pressure on the voluntary markets from new Reducing Emissions through Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) offsets as well as by the UN Executive Board's decision to include Carbon Capture and Storage experimentation in CDMs.

Climate negotiators should have known that carbon trading was a charade that would do nothing to reduce global warming. What was an incentive scheme meant to provide stability and security to clean energy investors had become the opposite. A low and indeed collapsing carbon price – futures at around €4/tonne in mid-December 2011, down from a peak seven times higher six years earlier – was useless for stimulating the kind of investment in alternatives needed: for example, an estimated €50/tonne (at minimum) is required to activate private sector investments in 'carbon capture and storage', the as-yet-non-existent (and extremely dangerous) technology by which coal-fired power stations could, theoretically, bury liquefied carbon emitted during power generation. Substantial solar, tidal and wind investments would cost much more yet. The extreme volatility associated with emissions trading so far makes it abundantly clear that market forces cannot be expected to discipline polluters.

The only real winners in emissions markets have been speculators, financiers, consultants (including some in the NGO scene) and energy sector hucksters who made billions of dollars in profits on the sale of notional emissions reduction credits. As the air itself became privatized and commodified, poor communities across the world suffered and resources and energy were diverted away from real solutions. But one of the most powerful set of critiques came from the inside: internal contradictions which created a tendency to repeatedly crash the market and prevent it from carrying out actual emissions reductions.

Some of these crashes are a function of blatant corruption, such as the Hungarian government's resale of carbon credits, which when exposed in 2010, drove the price of a ton down from €12 to €1 and crashed two emissions exchanges (Pointcarbon, 2010). In December 2010, even the ordinarily pro-trading World Wide Fund for Nature and Öko-Institut (2010) attacked steel producers ThyssenKrupp and Salzgitter as fraudulent carbon profiteers, demanding that 'the EU put a halt to the use of fake offsets'. In late January 2011, the EU ETS was suspended for more than two weeks due to theft of emissions reductions credits from the Austrian and Czech governments, with some of the better-functioning market regulators – e.g. Finland and Sweden – requiring a full two months before resuming operations (EULib.com 2010).

To underline the market's fragility and vulnerability to fraud, the country that has been the biggest supplier of emissions reductions credits, Ukraine, was suspended by the United Nations from carbon trading in August 2011. The move blocked delivery of more than 78 million units from carbon-reduction projects through 2011, because according to the ICIS Heron (2011) consultancy, Ukraine's government 'under-reported its greenhouse gas emissions. Experts advising the enforcement branch said Ukraine had failed to act on earlier warnings and it was in non-compliance. The Ukraine argues that many of its actions have stalled due to lack of funding since the recession.'

By that time, it was obvious that emissions markets were in crisis, as Oscar Reyes (2011: 211) explained:

Trading has become ever more concentrated around the EU ETS, which could well see carbon permit prices drop to zero if the 27-country bloc adopts stricter guidelines on energy efficiency. Overall carbon trading volumes were lower in 2010 than in the previous year. The CDM, the carbon offsetting scheme at the heart of the Kyoto Protocol, has declined for four years running, with fewer credits purchased from new projects than at any time since the Protocol came into force in 2005. The price of CDM credits continues to fall, and they are now 'the world's worst performing commodity.'

These flaws did not prevent the new 'sectoral markets' from being proposed for Durban. For governments from the EU, Japan, Australia and Canada – those advanced economies meant to reduce emissions most under Kyoto but which largely failed to do so – the ideal outcome of Durban would be retention of the Kyoto Protocol's carbon trading mechanism without its emissions-reduction targets. But without the US taking a lead on promoting carbon trading in its vast financial markets, the other major emitters would not do so. With the resurgence of Congressional climate deniers in 2010, the US elite debate over the optimal technical fix to climate change ended, apart from in California where it was delayed by community activists who argued the state's Air Resources Board had not considered other (non-trading) options to comply with state climate legislation.

Rogue pilots and self-destructive sequestration

Durban is an important guinea pig, not only for hosting the COP17, but for initiating SA's lead CDM pilot, the Bisasar Road landfill. There, methane from rotting rubbish is converted to electricity and fed back into the municipal grid. The CDM was set up illegally because it fails the crucial test of its validity for raising international funding, 'additionality'. It was always assumed that the R100 (\$14) million estimated cost of the project would not be justified by the small amount of electricity fed into Durban's municipal supply, and hence that financing would have to come from external sources. But Durban officials now concede that the Bisasar Road methane-electricity project would have gone ahead without the external credits.

After helping set it up, the World Bank refused in August 2005 to take part in marketing or purchasing Bisasar Road emissions credits. The reason was growing awareness of Durban's notorious environmental racism, via activism and an environmental impact assessment challenge. In March 2005, just as the Kyoto Protocol came into force, a *Washington Post* front-page story revealed how community organizer Sajida Khan

suffered cancer from Bisasar Road's toxic legacy (Vidanter, 2005: 1). Back in 1980, the landfill – Africa's largest – was plopped in the middle of Durban's Clare Estate suburb, across the road from Khan's house, thanks to apartheid insensitivity. Instead of honoring African National Congress politicians' promises to close the dump in 1994, the municipality kept it open when \$15 million in emissions financing was dangled. After Khan died in mid-2007 after her second bout with cancer – which she believed was landfill-induced – Clare Estate civic pressure to close Bisasar subsided and Durban began raising €14/tonne for the project from private investors (Bond, 2010).

In late 2011, an *Africa Report* investigation by Khadija Sharife (Centre for Civil Society, CCS 2012) unveiled Bisasar Road's CDM proposal as a scam. The crucial factor in raising funds, according to Durban officials, is that 'Landfill gas offers a viable renewable energy source only when linked to carbon finance or CDM.' Based on the assumption that without outside funds, the project could not be justified, in 2006 the United Nations listed Bisasar Road as an active supplier of CDM credits through at least 2014. On an official tour of Bisasar, journalists from *Africa Report* and San Francisco-based *Pacifica News* interviewed Durban Solid Waste manager John Parkin, who admitted, 'We started the project prior to the CDM. We were already down the road. It just made it come faster because the funding was there.' Sharife interprets:

It is questionable as to whether the project should have been approved as a CDM initiative at all, as approval requires the existence of 'additionality'. According to the UN, 'Additionality is the cornerstone of any credible CDM project, basically answering the question whether a project is additional, or would it proceed anyway, without the CDM.' That is, without qualification as an additionality, the CDM shouldn't be approved. (CCS, 2012)

Parkin confirmed to the journalists,

We already started the project and we were going ahead no matter what. So whether CDM became a reality or not, the project was going to go ahead. We don't have a partner to buy them at the moment. But we'll probably get €8 to €9 if we're lucky. As the City, if we can make some money out of it, I don't see why it shouldn't be done and the whole moral issue is separate from the project. The project is successful. The moral issue, I have no influence on that – as a technocrat, I do my job. (CCS, 2012)

Similar controversy surrounds the Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation programme. In theory, REDD sells investors forest protection. But at Cancún, notwithstanding disagreements in civil society, it was seen as a boon to voracious commercial forestry and a danger to indigenous peoples, given that proper safeguards were not adopted in Cancún. And everyone from EU climate commissioner Connie Hedegaard (a Danish conservative who hosted the 2009 Copenhagen summit) to Greenpeace warned that REDD could wreck fragile carbon markets, not only due to socio-ecological forest controversies but because a fresh glut of credits would again crash the price (Lang, 2009). As Hedegaard put it, REDD 'could undermine the entire carbon market' (Cheam, 2010). Likewise, an emerging idea (mainly promoted by the World Bank) that soil-related carbon sequestration should be rewarded with carbon credits would also flood world markets at a time of both oversupply and receding demand.



Photo Credit: Tamra Gilbertson, Carbon Trade Watch, Durban, South Africa, 3 December 2011

In short, the return of market mania to climate negotiations is a dangerous diversion from a daunting reality: the US, China, South Africa and most other big emitters want to avoid making the binding commitments required to limit the planet's 2000's temperature rise, ideally below the 1.5°C that scientists insist upon. Naturally the (binding) Kyoto Protocol is a threat to the main emitting countries, which have been working hard since early 2010 to replace it with the voluntary, loophole-ridden Copenhagen Accord. This is the easiest way to understand the procrastination and lack of ambition in the December 2011 Durban Platform.

And naturally, the North's failure to account for its vast 'climate debt' continues. To illustrate, Pakistan suffered \$50 billion in climate-related flood damage alone in 2010, yet the total on offer from the North to the whole world was just \$30 billion for 2010-12, according to promises made in Copenhagen. By the time of the Durban COP17, there was no realistic chance that \$30 billion in North-South flows would actually be delivered.

The case for decarbonizing South Africa

It is revealing to explore the host country's carbon-addiction in light of the COP17. Had it been serious about changing course, the South African government had many opportunities to make shifts in policy and projects:

- Halt the \$40 billion worth of coal-fired electricity generators being built by Eskom at Medupi and Kusile (the third and fourth largest in the world) and instead redirect the electricity wasted by the single biggest consumer, BHP

Billiton, which receives the world's cheapest power thanks to apartheid-era deals;

- Shut the world's single largest CO₂ emissions source, Sasol's Secunda plant which makes oil from coal and gas;
- Reverse the \$10 billion heavy oil refinery authorized for construction at Coega, north of Port Elizabeth;
- Deny approval to 40 proposed new coal mines in Mpumalanga, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal provinces which are allegedly needed to supply the plants and export markets in coming years, on grounds that – just as at the Cradle of Humankind northwest of Johannesburg, which is suffering threats of debilitating acid mine drainage – these will cause permanent contamination of rivers and water tables, increased mercury residues and global warming;
- Open state-owned renewable energy facilities where the private sector is failing, as called for by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa; and
- Offer a Just Transition package to all affected workers, transforming their thousands of lost jobs in fossil fuel industries into employment in renewables, public transport, building refurbishment, appropriate production and disposal, reformed agriculture, healthcare and education, as demanded by labour, environmentalists and communities in the Million Climate Jobs campaign.

Aside from adverse power relations, something stands in the way: the so-called 'false solutions' to climate change promoted by financiers and their allies, especially in South Africa where carbon capture and storage and carbon trading have fascinated former environment ministers Valli Moosa and Marthinus van Schalkwyk. Led by Manuel, the Durban COP17 advanced these approaches, to the detriment of a genuine strategy, with carbon capture and storage now approved as a CDM investment.

For South African elites, with the exception of housing minister Tokyo Sexwale – 'COP17 was a missed opportunity. The agreement we got was only a procedural agreement' (Groenewald, 2012) – it was tempting to ignore the stench of failure and declare Durban 'an outstanding success,' as did South African environment minister Edna Molewa (2011). 'We have significantly strengthened the international adaptation agenda', she explained about the Green Climate Fund (GCF). 'The design of the fund includes innovative mechanisms for bringing private sector and market mechanisms into play to increase the potential flow of funding into climate change responses.' In reality, there is now a GCF, but only a handful of countries made tokenistic contributions, revealing Hillary Clinton's 2009 Copenhagen pledge to find \$100 billion per year as a feint.

The hosts can be blamed because the COP17 chairperson, foreign minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, acted whimsically at best, or with the interests of global and domestic capitalists at worst. Those who argue her failure was based on whimsy point out that less than four months before the COP17, she revealed her commitment to the

planet by hiring a R240 000 executive jet to take her from Norway to Bulgaria when she refused to board a commercial flight which required that her handbag be whisked through the Oslo airport metal-detector, as for all such dignitaries. Such frivolity appeared again when Nkoana-Mashabane ignored applications for the Dalai Lama's visa, as far back as June 2011, so he could have attended the October celebration of Archbishop Desmond Tutu's 80th birthday party – reminding us of the same situation 30 months earlier when Beijing proudly announced Pretoria was under its thumb.

The COP17 host's self-interest was, simply, to protect the crony-capitalist 'minerals-energy complex', in which Zuma's family has been dabbling, in the process exhibiting extreme environmental irresponsibility as witnessed by a nephew's and legal advisor's destruction of the Aurora mines, its workers' wage claims and the surrounding environs. This was most explicitly revealed in the blatantly corrupt \$5 billion African National Congress (ANC) deal with Hitachi to supply boilers to the Medupi and Kusile powerplants, a multimillion rand *bonsala* for the ruling party approved by former SA Environment Minister and then-Chairman of Eskom, Valli Moosa. In that deal, SA Public Protector Lawrence Mushwana found in 2009, Moosa 'acted improperly' because he awarded the price-busting contract in blatant conflict of interest, for simultaneously he served on the ANC's finance committee.

That fact didn't bother the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's carbon trading desk, which at a Bonn meeting in February 2012 offered Moosa chair of the 'High-Level Panel on the Clean Development Mechanism Policy Dialogue'. The panel's September 2012 report will almost certainly attempt to justify carbon trading, the privatization of the air, in spite of repeated European emissions-market episodes of fraud and corruption, not to mention a dramatic price crash. Moosa also sits on the boards of Sun International hotels, Anglo Platinum, Sanlam insurance and Imperial Holdings transport and tourism – all major contributors to climate change. When as SA Environment Minister in 2002, he organized the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, next to no mention was made of the climate, aside from carbon trading advocacy. For good measure, Moosa also chairs the World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature's South Africa chapter, which promotes carbon trading.

As both victim and villain, South Africa is a poster-child for elite mismanagement of the climate threat. A good measure of local economic elites' addiction to fossil fuels is *carbon intensity per capita unit of output*, and South Africa has amongst the world's highest, about *twenty times higher* than even the US. An insignificant contribution to the energy grid – less than 4 per cent in 2010 – comes from South Africa's incredible renewable potential in solar, tidal and wind sources. Instead, electricity produced by burning filthy coal is cross-subsidized so it is the cheapest available anywhere in the world for two of the world's largest mining and metals corporations, BHP Billiton and Anglo American Corporation, as noted in more detail below.

Worse, these are not SA companies reinvesting in the local economy, for the main metals/mining firms export their profits both through illegal transfer pricing – a general practice costing South Africa a fifth of GDP in 2007, according to a recent study (Fine, Ashman and Newman 2011) – and through straight repatriation of dividends to shareholders in London (Anglo) and Melbourne (BHP Billiton), given the relocation of

so many megafirms' financial headquarters out of SA a decade ago. Meanwhile, SA internal consumption of their metals is constrained due to notorious local over-pricing.

At the same time, millions of poor people are regularly disconnected or denied access to the grid due to extreme poverty, affecting nearly half the country's families. Warfare is underway against municipalities and Eskom in the form of ubiquitous 'service delivery protests' whose recent root causes in high-priced electricity can be traced to climate change via the bill for Medupi/Kusile construction, controversially financed by the World Bank's largest-ever loan. The Bank claims Medupi will help the poor, once again standing reality on its head. Moreover, because of backsliding from clean electricity to dirty household energy like coal, wood or paraffin, the passage from HIV-positive to full-blown AIDS status is rapid via respiratory-related opportunistic infections, including the raging TB epidemic, especially affecting women exposed to particulates when cooking over biomass.



Photo Credit: Tamra Gilbertson, Carbon Trade Watch, Durban, South Africa, 3 December 2011

In this context, Zuma's February 2012 State of the Nation address was remarkable, for it offered no relief to poor people and the planet, and mainly expanded a to-do list of climate-destroying investments:

First, we plan to develop and integrate rail, road and water infrastructure, centered on two main areas in Limpopo: the Waterberg in the western part of the province [where Medupi is located] and Steelpoort in the eastern part. These efforts are intended to unlock the enormous mineral belt of coal, platinum, palladium, chrome and other minerals, in order to facilitate increased mining as well as stepped-up beneficiation of minerals... Among the list of planned projects is the expansion of the iron ore export channel from 60-million tons per annum to 82-million tons per annum..., development of a new 16-million-tons-per-annum manganese export channel through the Port of

Ngqura in Nelson Mandela Bay... and expansion of the iron-ore rail line between Sishen in the Northern Cape and Saldanha Bay in the Western Cape. (Zuma, 2012)

Speaking to *CityPress* newspaper after the speech, Zuma elaborated: 'By 2014, I'd want to see the cranes, building, digging everything. I'd like to see people employed. We are looking at a new kind of city at Waterberg. That's how Johannesburg began, as a mining town' (DuPlessis and Haffajee, 2012). Set aside that Johannesburg is the world's least sustainable city, Zuma neglected to consider an alternative infrastructure strategy: simultaneously solving the country's vast national housing shortage and vast surplus of unemployed people, for building homes doesn't require cranes, but does create far more jobs per unit of capital spent. Zuma also neglected to factor in that the largest platinum mining operation, Implats, fired 17,000 workers just a week before his speech, and their only partial rehiring led to massive protests immediately after the speech, with hundreds of arrests and at least one death.

As for non-renewable resources now being drawn from South African soil with only a pittance for communities, workers and the government fiscus, Zuma protected multinational mining capital from ANC youth leader Julius Malema's populist nationalization demands by setting up a commission whose report is already drawing ridicule. Malema, who became exceptionally wealthy in recent years allegedly by influencing Limpopo Province tenders for large payouts, was predictably hostile. As he explained, the lead researcher on the ANC mining research commission, Paul Jordaan, was 'compromised' for opposing 1955 ANC Freedom Charter nationalization promises: 'Jordaan and the research team visited 13 countries and the only conclusion they could come up with are the opinions held by Comrade Paul Jordaan in 2010' (Malema, 2012).

Other critics were just as harsh. Explained University of Cape Town political scientist Anthony Butler (2012), a leading mainstream commentator, 'The document's intellectual quality is uneven. The research "methodology" involves lots of foreign travel and "stakeholder workshops". The study team also makes unacknowledged use of "less scholarly" resources, such as Wikipedia and answers.com. The credibility of the report is damaged by long passages that bear a remarkable resemblance to the work of retired North American mine-tax expert Charles McPherson'. As Butler (2012) complained, in one of many

unfathomable coincidences of word selection and arrangement (such borrowings are far too extensive to set out fully here) both [the ANC and McPherson] call for 'the explicit recognition in budgets and planning documents of the financial and fiscal costs and risks associated with state participation'. Did McPherson help draw up the ANC's report? If so, was the ANC's national executive committee aware that a former oil-industry executive, who only recently ended his career in the fiscal affairs department of the International Monetary Fund, was commissioned to contribute to its study?

Butler (2012) worries that the report still supports elements of Malema's 'phoney nationalization drive', such as transferring mineworker pension funds 'into special purpose vehicles in the service of developmental objectives. In reality, such instruments would be abused to fund corporate welfare for the politically connected.' Indeed under conditions of neoliberal nationalism, the outcome of most public policy in South Africa is inevitably crony capitalism rife with corruption. In February 2012, a 600-page ANC-initiated forensic audit into corruption in the second-largest city, Durban, revealed

massive illegalities especially in \$400 million worth of privatized housing construction contracts under the 2002-11 leadership of city manager Mike Sutcliffe. The overall problem is not housing, though, which remains an area of vast underinvestment. It is the incessant construction of white elephants and prestige projects.

These were what the former trade union leader Ebrahim Patel – now Minister of Economic Development – was reduced to celebrating, to justify the vast infrastructure investments. In his parliamentary response to Zuma, Patel (2012) remarked, ‘We took account of the lessons of the 2010 World Cup infrastructure and the growing experience in the build programmes for the Gautrain, the Medupi and Kusile power stations, the Freeway improvement programme and the major airport revamps.’ The lesson not to build such infrastructure would have been the logical reaction, for with one exception, the new and refurbished World Cup stadia are all losing vast sums of money on operations and maintenance. The Gautrain’s speedy lifts from the Johannesburg airport to the financial district and government buildings in Pretoria are too expensive for the masses. The power stations have already raised the price of electricity by more than 150 percent, with another 25 percent increase scheduled in April 2012. The public-private highway tolling partnership with an Austrian firm is so unpopular that on March 7 the trade union movement will embark upon a strike against it, joined by the Johannesburg and Pretoria petit-bourgeoisie. The utterly unnecessary airport revamps are, again, for elites only.

Zuma’s pandering to mining houses is especially revealing. As if to celebrate the state’s renewed orientation to big business interests, the ‘Mining Indaba’ – Africa’s biggest such trade fair – in Cape Town in February 2012 was capped with a keynote speech by an extreme climate-change denier, David Evans, whose ‘performance’ was ‘well received by an audience of miners, who come from an industry that often feels the pinch of climate control in the regulation of their industries,’ reported the *Mail&Guardian* (Bauer 2012). Zuma’s crucial challenge, under such influences, is to continue opposing the rhetoric of an institution he co-chairs, the United Nations High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability, with Finnish president Tarja Halonen. In their summary article about eco-social and economic crises (‘Seizing sustainable development’) from the report *Resilient People, Resilient Planet*, they suggested a variety of neoliberal fixes (‘Pollution, including carbon emissions, must no longer be free’) and obvious reforms (‘Price- and trade-distorting subsidies should be made transparent and phased out for fossil fuels by 2020’) along with sanctimony: ‘We need to place long-term thinking above short-term demands, both in the marketplace and at the polling place. Promoting fairness and inclusion is the right thing to do – and the smart thing to do for lasting prosperity and stability’ (Zuma and Halonen, 2012).

These words were published on 6 February 2012, three days before his State of the Nation Address, and as that speech demonstrated, nearly everything he and the big corporates are doing in South Africa place short-term demands above long-term thinking, both in the marketplace and at the polling place, promoting unfairness and exclusion, and thus preventing lasting prosperity and stability. It’s from such accumulation dynamics that South Africa has come to specialize in ‘talk left, walk right’ politics. Whether it is the ‘Black Economic Empowerment’ fronting scams, such as Hitachi and Chancellor House, or the greedy corporations’ influence, the ruling party

appears addicted to unsustainable underdevelopment hyped by big-business cheerleading. Illustrating the latter was *Business Day* editor Peter Bruce (2012), who three days after the State of the Nation speech glibly commanded, 'mine more and faster and ship what we mine cheaper and faster.'

Critic failure

In these circumstances, overambitious organisers and their supporters (e.g. Bond, 2011; 2012) argued that a massive confrontation awaited the COP17. We were mistaken, having relied too heavily on Durban's radical traditions and extreme eco-social contradictions, having overestimated popular consciousness in South Africa and internationally, and having also underestimated the SA presidency's specific appeal to a Durban base – which was on display on December 8 at a City Hall meeting where, before Zuma's eyes, three critical activists (from the Democratic Left Front, Greenpeace and ActionAid) were physically assaulted by dozens of temporary municipal employees, simply for holding up posters saying 'Don't sell out Africa'. Aside from that incident, a few Greenpeace arrests and deportations during a foiled banner-hang, and the December 2 protest of around 1000 Rural Women's Assembly and Democratic Left Front activists on the road in front of the Durban Convention Centre, the performance of civil society during the COP17 was rather civilized and pedestrian (Austin-Evelyn, 2012).

Aside from (valid) gripes about conditions for long-distance community activist travelers to Durban (Sacks, 2011), the harshest auto-critique of activist impotence came from radical intellectual Ashwin Desai, author of the book that heralded the arrival of South Africa's new social movements a decade earlier, *We are the Poors* (Desai, 2002). In the wake of the main march of an estimated 8000 people on the Durban Convention Centre on December 3, Desai (interviewed by Saul, 2012) criticized 'big name spectacle NGOs' which dominated: 'The local grassroots organizations were reduced to spectators, and were allowed only the occasional cameo appearance with most often a single line; "Amandla!" [Power!]' That march, complained Desai,

delivered the Minister of International Relations, and COP17 president Maite Nkoana-Mashabane to the masses gathered below. She used the opportunity to say how important civil society was and promised to study a memorandum. She was gracious and generous. I could see the NGOs on the truck preening themselves in the glow of this recognition and probably increased funding.

Desai would be the first to confess how few Durban community activists made the effort to link climate to their most immediate, burning concerns, including rampant electricity prices due to coal-fired power plant construction; severe storms (one causing at least eight fatalities on November 27, on the eve of the COP17); and the local petrochemical industry's regular explosions, such as the Engen oil refinery fire six weeks before the COP17 began, which hospitalized 100 kids at Settlers Primary School in South Durban. For Desai, who assisted with mobilizing there immediately afterwards,

There's a litmus test. In 2001 [at the World Conference Against Racism] there was a huge march here, with some 10,000 people in the streets, a completely different march: militant, scathing of the local ruling class, with swear words on its placards. The Durban Declaration was a visceral

indictment of our ruling class as an agent of global capital and its economic policies which were deepening inequality and increasing poverty.



Photo Credit: Tamra Gilbertson, Carbon Trade Watch, Durban, South Africa, 3 December 2011

Sadly, no matter how hard South Durban Community Environmental Alliance leaders tried to organize in the weeks preceding the COP17 in the city's most radical anti-corporate protest site (where I too am a lay-member and resident), Africa's industrial armpit could not consistently deliver more than a few hundred protesters from the 300,000 victims residing in the vicinity.

The logical question, then, is whether climate change is a hopeless issue with which to motivate the South African masses? The Durban COP17 offered a sobering test about a problem I discussed four years ago (Bond, 2008):

It is tragic but understandable that South African society ranks – with the United States and China – at the bottom of a recent worldwide climate-consciousness survey by polling firm Global Scan: only 45 percent of us believe global warming is a 'serious problem'. Latin Americans polled above 80 percent, and Europeans near 70 percent, while the US's consciousness is at 48 percent and China's is at 39 percent.

It is understandable that we have been kept in the dark, because even in the midst of the worst national energy crisis in South Africa's living memory, the simple act of questioning who abuses our coal-burning power generators is off the agenda. Instead, to get a meagre conservation reduction of 40 megawatts, energy minister Buyelwa Sonjica tells us: 'Switch off all lights in the home when not in use and go to sleep early so that you can grow.'

Critics rightly call this a trivialising blame-the-victim game, whose broader aim appears to be distracting attention from those who are most to blame: the government and crony corporations like BHP Billiton.

In a presentation he delivered to big business on January 21, Eskom CEO Jacob Maroga bragged that at US\$0.03 per kilowatt hour (kWh) for industrial customers after 2007 increases, his prices still remained competitive. That's the understatement of the year, given that US electricity is three times and Danish electricity eight times more expensive than what the average firm here pays.

South African households pay more than double the industrial rate; with BHP Billiton trying to take over Rio Tinto, which is taking over Alcan, Eskom's smelter incentive at Coega will offer even cheaper power, less than \$0.02 per kWh.

So it is not surprising – though something of a secret from the public – that measured by carbon dioxide emissions per unit of per-person economic output, South Africa emits 20 times more carbon dioxide than that Great Climate Satan, the US.

Although most electricity consumers, the service industries, manufacturers and some gold mines have taken a hit, it appears that the foreign-owned electricity-guzzling aluminium smelters have been untouched by the crisis. According to business journalist Mathabo le Roux: 'For the duration of the power cuts, BHP Billiton's Bayside, Hillside and Mozal smelters received their full electricity complement – a formidable 2500MW.'

The smelters' consumption of electricity is hedonistic; their metals prices are 10 percent higher for local consumers than for international markets; they employ only a few hundred workers; their profit streams go to Melbourne; and their employees have, in the past decade, included former finance minister Derek Keys, former Eskom treasurer Mick Davis, and former national electricity regulator Xolani Mkhwanazi.

In four subsequent years of organizing for energy justice, there appears to be no progress on redistributing electricity from BHP Billiton to poor people; indeed, the reverse since low-income residents will suffer a 500 percent price increase from 2008-14 while BHP Billiton retains its late 1980s deals at what local industry expert Chris Yelland (2012) calls 'extraordinarily low prices':

In essence, the price of electricity supplied in terms these special deals would not be determined by Eskom on a transparent, cost-reflective basis, but through a secret formula based on a number of fluctuating variables that are independent of the cost of electricity generation in South Africa, such as the aluminium commodity price on the London Metals Exchange, the US dollar / SA rand exchange rate, and the US PPI inflation rate...

Eskom's electricity prices have risen sharply in response to the new-build programme and increasing capital, primary energy and staff costs. Average annual Eskom price increases of 27%, 31%, 25% and 25% in the years 2008 to 2011, and further increases of 25% per annum for the next three years from 2012 to 2014, indicate an average Eskom price increase of five times over the seven year period from 2008 to 2014. The recently published, policy-adjusted, 20-year, national Integrated Resource Plan for electricity, IRP 2010 – 2030, indicates that further price increases significantly above the inflation rate can be expected for the years 2015 to 2021...

But these massive price increases do not apply to a select few with long-term, commodity-linked pricing agreements with Eskom, and in particular, to BHP Billiton. Despite threats by Eskom to sue the DA, it was revealed in parliament in April 2010 that Motraco, the electricity transmission company owned by Eskom that supplies electricity to BHP Billiton's Mozal aluminium smelter, was paying some R0,12 per kWh for its electricity – significantly below Eskom's operating cost of R0,28 per kWh for the year ending 31 March 2010, while the average price being charged by Eskom to its customers in that year was about R0,32 per kWh. Yet, with Eskom's current average selling electricity price now at about R0,50 per kWh, the price being paid by BHP Billiton for electricity remains a secret, and the special pricing deal for its Hillside aluminium smelter only expires in 2028!...

Some questions the public would like to know the answers to include:

- Why are the details of the commodity-linked electricity deals with a select few kept secret, while all other domestic, commercial, agricultural, industrial and mining customers pay transparent tariffs that are openly published?
- Why should a foreign company get electricity at below cost, while local customers face massive increases that effectively subsidise the losses Eskom incurs on the secret deals?
- Why should thousands of GWh of locally produced electricity be sold below cost for export by a foreign-owned company in the form of aluminium ingots, while security of supply in South Africa is threatened and local industry is starved of electricity?
- Does it really add value to the South African economy when bauxite is mined and refined to alumina elsewhere, then shipped to South Africa with the specific intent to take advantage of subsidized electricity purchased at below cost to convert alumina into aluminium ingots for export?
- Does aluminium production in this way really contribute to jobs in South Africa, when staffing at the smelters is relatively low, and there are no upstream and few downstream value-adding activities?

Unfortunately, though, these are questions asked by a tiny South African 'public' with access to the very few periodicals (e.g. Business Day newspaper) where the matter of pricing is occasionally discussed, and even there it is nearly impossible to identify *climate* linkages between excessive price increases to build more generation capacity (mainly for BHP Billiton's benefit) and Eskom's construction of the world's third and fourth largest *coal-fired* power plants at a time renewable energy is severely underfunded.

On the other hand, there has probably been slight progress on climate awareness amongst ordinary people, although this is subjective since the last global comparative poll taken that included South Africa was in 2008. That poll showed only 47 percent believing that climate change is a 'very serious' problem and another 19 percent believing it is 'somewhat serious' (in combination the second-lowest of the 16 countries surveyed, lagging only Pakistan). This was a slight change from 2006 when, respectively, 44 and 28 percent answered 'very serious' and 'somewhat serious' question (Council on Foreign Relations, 2011).

The raised consciousness required to make dramatic shifts in public policy – such as the 1999-2004 period during which the Treatment Action Campaign defeated President Thabo Mbeki's denial of AIDS medicines to the 5.5 million HIV-positive South Africans – is not yet at the critical mass required when it comes to climate. However, from Cape Town's Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC), Thembeka Majali (2012) rebuts this pessimism about popular consciousness by deploying a narrative that was popular in activist circuits during COP17:

People know what climate change is as they relate with that on their daily struggles and they know how to adapt to climate change – droughts, floods that are displacing people [who] migrate to other parts of the continent, unproductive agricultural land and fishing, etc – but they understand that recently this became too much and that they need government intervention for their livelihoods and they now understand this is a threat to human life.

Still, such demands – when made rarely by activists in the major cities (and very rarely elsewhere) – consistently fall on deaf ears. Instead, for Desai (in Saul, 2012), organizing against the COP17 had this depressing result: ‘civil society as meticulously controlled spectacle, reducing people to choreographed cheerleaders, acting as an accomplice to power.’ Bobby Peek (2012) of the leading radical NGO groundWork (SA’s Friends of the Earth chapter) agreed that the timing was all wrong:

... are we going to continue chasing the agenda and dates set by the presently powerful? In the Dirty Energy Week before the COP which we organized with various comradely organizations, it was abundantly clear that trying to engage with the COP agendas and forums in a powerful way needs strong global and local organising that is done much in advance. Not one year, but rather years in advance. And not done in the halls of the prep-coms etc (we have to have some of our comrades there gathering intelligence so we can expose the psychopaths) but by engaging in real struggles on the ground and then working with these struggles to build an effective resistance. It was interesting that in groundWork’s first meeting with community people in January 2012, there was very little mention about climate change but lots about oil refineries, toxic waste, mining, Eskom and electricity. It was strange – as if COP never happened. People deal with real struggles, and the COPS/Rio etc do not have real agenda’s. On the issue of a broad coalition, it was up to the CJ movement at the COP to build and hold an effective coalition based upon CJ principles. We tried – we were not very successful – we all need to take some of the heat for this.

Activists who supported the unifying ‘C17’ coalition of civil society – a network formed at a January 2011 meeting in Durban with representation from 80 organizations – offered all manner of excuses for the weak showing, including erratic funders. Even huge NGOs (WWF and Greenpeace) apparently contributed only staff time but no other resources, and therefore the C17 changed its policy in mid-2011 to accept South African state funding.¹ The large NGOs and others who served on the C17 committee, such as faith communities and some trade unions, held competing events to the C17’s ‘People’s Space’, at locations across town, defeating the purpose of the civil society convergence.

Remarked David le Page of the main religious-justice network, ‘I’m guessing the National Intelligence Agency doesn’t even bother to hire agents provocateur! I can see the report item: “Thanks to infighting in civil society this year, no agents were required for infiltration and disruption.”’ Yet, infighting was, perhaps, logical, for intrinsic NGO conservatism overwhelmed the C17 logistics team, according to radical cultural activist Stephen Murphy (2012), who complained of continual emails offering assistance which went unanswered:

I gave up even trying to get even the smallest tasks delegated, and turned my efforts to OccupyCOP17 and durbanclimatejustice.net – a site which, by the way, with no budget or mandate managed over a thousand more hits than the C17 website, and if you include conferenceofpolluters.com and occupycop17.org which I was also running, more than double.

1 Due, however, to chaotic procurement processes, such funding was not made available to the C17 until just before – and in once case mid-way through – the COP17, rendering large parts of some grants (e.g. from the environmental and foreign ministries and the City of Durban) useless. The C17 spent less than \$500,000 on the three main events: the December 3 march, the ‘Climate Refugee Camp’ that housed more than 1000 visitors from December 1-4, and the poorly attended ‘People’s Space’ alternative summit at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, a site chosen because officials at the preferred Durban University of Technology closer to the Convention Centre and with a working-class tradition charged \$180,000 for their facilities, nearly four times what was paid for facilities at UKZN.

Why? Because we created the space for political positioning and comment, even if we weren't ourselves making those comments.

Murphy's critique of C17 apoliticism was widely shared, given the coalition's failure to take a justice-based stand against climate change. At its main mid-2011 summit in Durban, a list of 26 demands was submitted to forge an overall political manifesto – yet, C17 facilitators somehow agreed that any member of the crowd could veto any single demand, leaving just four left over as the bland lowest-common-denominator. As an original C17 member, Rehana Dada (2012) put it, 'I would dearly have loved to have seen stronger politics and a more organized national climate justice movement but that was not C17's job.' Agreed a key environmental-justice movement intellectual, David Hallows (2012),

It is no good to blame C17 for not leading a political process that they had no mandate to lead. Politics was subordinated to unity, involving not only WWF and Greenpeace but also several of the unions and community groups and movements. This last workshop confirmed that there was and is no coherent climate politics across civil society.

Melita Steele (2012) of Greenpeace replied, during a February 2012 report-back session of 100 activists in Durban, that within C17,

there are differences with some organizations working with business and some being anti-capitalist, which led to difficulties, which meant it was difficult to do messaging. In the July 5 meeting, the political strategy subcommittee was suggested, but that was out of the original mandate and not pursued. So that should have been done. The problem was under-capacity and we were under huge pressure to deliver.

Yet, the excessive breadth of the C17 coalition was a problem that disturbed one of the core radical funders, Jos Martens (2012) of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (writing personally not institutionally):

We have to deeply analyse what path (if any) can be followed in the trade-off between trying to reach a broad public through a broad coalition and losing the essence/ the necessity of a much more radical message (in this case with the entrance point as climate change). *Personally, I opt for NOT going the broad coalition way. I think we make the mistake to equate a broad coalition with a) more publicity, plus b) more acceptance by the general public and moreover, c) more 'impact' on the mainstream actors/negotiators.* If a message gets too watered down it loses its essence, its political content: 'Unite against climate change' is as apolitical as the 'Do more, do more' the COP17 president Nkoana-Mashabane tried to coax the crowd to chant at the hand-over of the memoranda (the latter another strategic compromise mistake). To make a big jump: what if Gandhi had compromised on the non-violence principle for the sake of a broader coalition strategy?

What we need in my humble opinion is: *a) more radicalism preferably coupled with very militant non-violence, necessitated in the first place by the other urgency of radical change NOW, b) a clearly worked out step by step strategy on how, what and whom to tackle (a war, also a non-violent one has to be planned and prepared) and NOT let our agenda be determined by the COP, WEF, WTO etc. agenda's, c) an extremely clever, creative, deliberate and high-priority PR strategy and execution* (sometimes I think we love to remain marginal, so little we do to break out of our own small circles). (original emphasis)

From AIDC, one of the foci behind the Democratic Left Front's large presence was Brian Ashley (2012), who also complained of the

... failure to represent and build a political process appropriate and relevant to the global crisis that we face of which climate is a critical dimension. We need a report that deals with why C17 failed to develop a climate justice platform setting the frame for participation of popular movements. The excuse of having to accommodate movements that did not share this perspective lest they split and form a counter process (Greenpeace, WWF) does not wash. The vast majority of organizations participating in C17 held a strong climate justice view. We self-censored ourselves in a useless attempt at ensuring a false unity on no platform. The period leading to COP should have focused on strategy and tactics in relation to the South African government's position on climate change and on the COP. We should have focused on how we collaborate to mobilise an array of social forces and movements. In terms of what was at stake in Durban C17 should have been a facilitator of radical and militant mobilization. Compare C17 to the Brazilian process for Rio + 20 which is ambitious, anti-capitalist and political where the focus is on the challenges of the global crisis of capitalism and the multiple ways that humanity and the planet is at great risk.

In terms of the major component force that were brought to Durban: Rural Women's Assembly, Climate Jobs and the DLF there was very little support from C17 creating huge logistical challenges. C17 failed even at a logistical level. Having to manage logistical crises prevented many of us from doing the politics effectively. Yes, there were challenges in terms of funding, staffing and finalising the venue for the People's Space but they do not explain the hopeless failure to mount a political challenge to the Conference of Polluters. That is what we should have focused on.

To be sure, many activists justifiably praised six core members of the C17 committee for hard work (though 11 others went AWOL). But C17's meager impact – reflected not only in the negotiators' failure to cut emissions but in the broader movement's abject failure to generate momentum for climate justice – doesn't auger well for civil society unity in future campaigns to save the climate and SA economy from the Minerals-Energy Complex and finance ministers. In short, a sober accounting of the disastrous climate summit must also offer an autopsy of civil society counterpower, and hopefully, too, either a diagnosis for reviving that corpse or instead for rejecting contradiction-ridden unity of such breadth as to fuse carbon traders and eco-socialists, when after all, they're much better off engaged in constructive conflict.

Finally, much of critique of critic-failure above relates to the way local South Africans and especially Durban organisers prepared for protest and the alternative climate summit. But what of the Occupy COP17 inside the Durban Convention Centre as well as on a small plot of ground ('Speaker's Corner') just outside? Two autocritiques can be offered, first that these represented stunts with little local grounding, and second that even the climax of such protest – entailing 500 people engaged in disruptive changing on December 9 just outside the door of the main hall with end-of-summit deliberations underway – was tamed. First, Desai (2012) condemns Greenpeace's *modus operandi*:

You can see how the substitutionism works in tandem with the politics of spectacle so beloved of Greenpeace. If people parachute in, do their little stunt, and leave, or get deported [as did several Greenpeace activists attempting a banner hang on a nearby hotel roof] for example, then what do they understand about Durban? What do they understand about the real difficulties of organizing around climate justice? There are real tensions and challenges that people face here, as a stitch between a kind of crony capitalism and African nationalism, but also a kind of rank modernization theory; a 'why the fuck shouldn't we have these things'; 'who tells us we shouldn't have cars and TV sets?'

A hundred people were taken to the hospital after the explosion of the Engen refinery, but large swathes of that community are employed by the refineries, so they can't make the move to ask for their closure. And then the climate justice movement asks for them to be closed. What does it

mean that people have arrived here, marched and never been to the South Basin? There are 150 smoke stacks. Cancer is everywhere. Nearly every kid carries an asthma pump.

By parachuting in and substituting yourself for local struggles, you won't have a sense of any of that. The way the international NGOs conduct themselves is to adopt the same tactics and strategies everywhere. They have flattened the world and in the process our histories and traditions and our subjectivities.

Local struggles need to speak to the global struggle, but does there have to be a slavish copying? In Durban we had a call to 'Occupy City Hall' as a response to 'Occupy Wall Street'. It was very badly supported but there was a photo shoot sent across the world on the networks. No work was done on the ground to make this a popular struggle. But Durban was included as another city in the global day of action! We have become branders, lying about struggles in the most despicable of ways. While we were organizing to 'Occupy City Hall,' the most decrepit of NGOs occupied the social movements.

Second, in complaining of how the insider-disruptive Occupy COP17 protest played out, Global Justice Ecology Project activist Anne Petermann (2012) offered this critique of Greenpeace leadership from the frontline:

After two hours or so, Will Bates from 350.org explained to the group that he and others had arranged with UN security for the protest to be allowed to leave the building and continue just outside where people could carry on as long as they wished. There was vocal opposition to this suggestion. People could feel the power of being in that hallway and were unhappy with the idea of leaving. But the mostly male leadership refused to cede control.

'If you choose to stay', Kumi Naidoo, executive director of Greenpeace, warned, 'you will lose your access badge and your ability to come back into this climate COP and any future climate COPs.' The question was posed about how many people planned to stay and dozens of hands shot up. The leadership then warned that anyone who refused to leave would be debadged, handed over to South African police, and charged with trespass.

In response a young South African man stood up and spoke out. 'I am South African. This is my country. If you want to arrest anyone for trespass, you will start with me.' He then led the group in singing Shosholoza, a traditional South African folk song sung by migrant workers in the South African mines. The hallway resounded with the workers' anthem.

When the occupation still refused to budge, Naidoo, who seemed determined to control the message of the protest, said, 'Okay. I have spoken with security and this what we are going to do. We will remove our badge [he demonstrated this with a grand sweeping gesture] and hand it over to security as we walk out of the building. No one will be able to accuse us of trying to disrupt the negotiations'...

A young woman named Karuna Rana from the small island of Mauritius off the southeast coast of Africa also sat down, saying, 'I am the only young person here from Mauritius. These climate COPs have been going for seventeen years. And what have they accomplished? Nothing. My island is literally drowning and so I am sitting down to take action – for my people and for my island. Something must be done.'

At that point, Naidoo told the occupiers, 'When security taps you on the shoulder, you have to leave. We are going to be peaceful, we don't want any confrontation.' He then led a group of protesters down the hall, handing his badge to UN security. Those who remained sitting on the floor were then taken by security, one by one, down the hallway and out of the building.

As another participant (Bobby Peek) recalled to me, 'Sadly, the very many who were chanting "Save Africa" were not prepared to actually participate in the final sit-in,' nor

were African activists from outside South Africa in solidarity. And outside, there was very little awareness of this last-gasp disruption of what critics considered to be COP17's genocide planning. Durban's depleted community and environmentalist activist ranks were exhausted, and the final gavel on the summit occurred on Sunday the 11th accompanied by no further protest.

Nor can we reasonably expect more in 2012, given the lull in macro climate politics following Copenhagen. The Rio+20 Earth Summit is anticipated to take forward carbon trading (and related gimmicks such as CDMs and REDD) as part of the overall strategy of Payment for Environmental Services, and there will be resistance at a counter-summit but no major change in the balance of forces anticipated. The Occupy movement and related anti-austerity activism will probably continue to see climate justice as an allied struggle, in which different kinds of economy, transport, energy, extraction, production, consumption, disposal and financing systems will be required – and in which the threat of climate change is just one of many compelling reasons to shift the status quo. No matter how inspiring in 2011 we found Occupy, the Spanish 'Indignados', the Greek uprising, the Arab Spring's democratic anti-neoliberal wing, and so many other economic dissents, the most urgent task they face is defeating financial power over politics.

Even by December 2012, no real heightening of conflict between the 1 percent and 99 percent over global-scale climate politics will likely occur at the COP18, to be held in the repressive pro-Western regime of Qatar. The last major such event there, the 2001 World Trade Organization (WTO) ministerial – whose 'Doha Agenda' did at least offer African states an exemption from the Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights for AIDS medicines – was the recovery round after the disrupted Seattle protest of 1999. But soon enough came the 2003 Cancun denouement, a defeat for the forces of liberalization, from which the WTO never recovered. Finding parallels between global trade politics and global climate governance is indeed appropriate, insofar as the 'deglobalization of capital' required to limit trade (and finance) and to balance economies is also a prerequisite to decarbonizing and transforming economic systems. And this entails the 'globalization of people', as shown in so many international solidaristic settings, such as the struggle for AIDS medicines which could not have been victorious against the US and South African governments, Big Pharma, the WTO and the very notion of intellectual property, were it not for allies across the world.

The downturn in mass climate consciousness (e.g. resistance to corporate 'climate denialist' propaganda) and, as Durban reflected, in global-scale activism about climate change contrasts with hopes immediately following Copenhagen by many optimists (myself included) that the spectacular failure of mainstream strategies – especially elite COP negotiations and the carbon markets – would necessarily generate space for CJ politics. It is revealing to return to a statement two years ago, by European Climate Caravan activist Olivier De Marcellus (2010):

For many of us coming back from Copenhagen full of hope and energy, it was strange to see that many people who followed the summit from afar see what happened there as catastrophic. But it has been clear for some time that 'at best' they were only going to impose their false (but highly profitable) solutions. Clear headed political analysts, like leading scientists such as James Hansen, were already saying that No Deal would be better than a Bad Deal. Finally the deal was so bad that

it was impossible to impose (the so-called Copenhagen Accord was not agreed by all parties). Appalled by our rulers' greed and total irresponsibility, many don't realise that this tragic farce – and the unified action of different grassroots networks – has opened a new political space where real solutions have a chance...

The French Revolution is generally said to have begun when part of the clergy and minor nobility deserted their respective assemblies, which had been convened by the king, to join the assembly of the commoners, the Third Estate... While the world's powers lost all credibility, fighting among themselves to grab as much CO₂ (that is to say as much production and profits) as possible, hundreds of accredited NGO delegates (our modern equivalent to the clergy of the Old Regime), and the governmental delegations of Bolivia, Venezuela and Tuvalu decided to leave the Conference in order to join the People's Assembly and discuss the real solutions. That was our best case scenario.

We never dreamed that our enemies would be so stupid as to dramatise their fear of our action: excluding hundreds of NGOs that they suspected would join us, kidnapping the demo spokespersons and 'leaders', seizing the sound truck and above all using clubs to drive back the demo of official delegates who tried to force their way out to join the Assembly. After the massive police infiltration, the dozens of arrests and the trumped up charges against Ya Basta people during the police attack on the assembly in Christiania two days before, the searches and seizures of all sorts of material (even bikes and banners !), this apparently irrational level of repression probably reflects how much power felt menaced by our project...

The critical point is that this Assembly was not a chance and fleeting moment. It marked a longer term convergence of different networks and political cultures: global networks of movements and progressive NGOs like Climate Justice Now and Our World Is Not For Sale, networks composed more of young northern activists like Climate Justice Action, the Climate Camps, old Peoples' Global Action hands, etc. Political victories aren't just about getting the better of the cops (and even less about the results of the official summit). Victories are about coming out the battle more credible and more united than before. Credible: today, hopefully the people who imagined that it would be enough to pressure our rulers into a 'good' deal, will better understand the necessity of building ourselves the solutions and imposing them through grass-roots popular power. United: since the Zapatistas called forth the anti-globalisation movement 13 years ago, there has never been such a broad alliance of organisations calling for 'system change.'

Conclusion

The global-scale strategy didn't work at Durban, either for the elites or the critics. And indeed notwithstanding what appears to be excessive hopefulness by De Marcellus (2010) in his assessment of Copenhagen, the foundational lesson is quite similar to that many of us in Durban have learned:

Spontaneously, the same proposition came out of the evaluations of CJA and CJN: organise People's Assemblies everywhere, to tackle climate change issues at the local and regional level. These could organise against local sources of CO₂ (in transport, for example) or false solutions (nuclear power, etc.), but also impose or construct directly real solutions (organising local food distribution systems). At the same time, by their links to the other assemblies, they would build a global movement... Now we all have to go home, get the word out and make it happen. Now it's clear that we can only count on ourselves. The challenge is colossal, but everywhere there are people who know that we don't have any other choice.

In short, in spite of the mishaps – many organic and many imported – associated with the excessively 'civilized society' reaction to the opportunity presented by the COP17, we should remind ourselves of the most important features of a future climate justice

politics: in thinking locally, nationally and globally, and also acting in each sphere with the appropriate analysis, strategies, tactics and alliances. The Cochabamba summit in April 2010 laid out a coherent critique and alternative to global climate malgovernance. Since climate justice movement work took on a globally-networked form at the Bali COP13 in 2007, however, the subsequent COPs in Poznan, Copenhagen, Cancun and Durban did not offer propitious conditions for a full-fledged expression of both critique and alternatives. Nor will Doha's COP18 or the COPs that follow.

And that may be the most crucial lesson of Durban's climate summit, one that South African justice activists can (possibly) agree upon: delegitimization of global capitalism's climate policy reformism, especially when reliant upon the self-destructing carbon markets, should have been the starting point for a coherent political-intellectual demolition of the COP17, and a matching activist programme. Without that in place, it makes more sense to dedicate time and energy to the national, subnational and local sources of the crisis, and return to the global scale – perhaps in 2013 or later (although time is running out) – with a formidable array of recent climate justice victories, momentum and cadres.

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