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COP26 climate summit ends in failure

As the global climate summit COP26 drags out to its miserable end this week in Glasgow, Scotland, the major capitalist powers and the banks and corporations that call the shots in national and world politics have largely failed in their efforts to use the summit to provide a semblance of “progress” in resolving the global climate emergency.



Climate activists march through the streets of Glasgow, Scotland, Friday, Nov. 5, 2021 which is the host city of the COP26 U.N. Climate Summit. (AP Photo/Scott Heppell)

The rival powers have been unable to reach any significant agreement, even on the type of half measures and purely voluntary arrangements that characterized the last major world summit in Paris in 2015. And the pledges and promises made at that summit have largely fallen apart, as reports issued on the occasion of the Glasgow meeting have made clear.

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Business Insider declared the event a “historic failure,” while an editorial in the *Financial Times* spoke of “More hot air than progress at COP26,” noting that the US’s decision not “to sign up to a deal to phase out coal production... struck a severe blow to what was meant to be a flagship policy of COP.”

One report appearing over the weekend underscored an obvious reason for the abortive character of the Glasgow event. The environmental campaign group Global Witness analyzed the provisional list of conference attendees, provided by the United Nations, and determined that representatives of fossil fuel companies have the largest single delegation at COP26, more than any single country.

The group found that at least 503 people linked to coal, gas and oil companies were in attendance, counting both direct representatives and those coming as part of groups acting on behalf of the fossil fuel industry. “The presence of hundreds of those being paid to push the toxic interests of polluting fossil fuel companies will only increase the skepticism of climate activists who see these talks as more evidence of global leaders' dithering and delaying,” a representative of Global Witness said.

Patricia Espinosa, head of the UN’s climate agency, said each of the 190 countries participating was free to send delegates of its own choosing. “It is really the sovereign right of every government to accredit every representative as part of its delegations, persons it deems appropriate,” she told CNN.

While throwing open the doors to the big polluters, the summit has largely excluded representatives of NGOs and environmental activist groups. The coronavirus pandemic has been cited as a reason either for barring entry into Britain entirely—with the Johnson government serving as a sort of palace guard for COP26—or keeping those activists on the ground in Scotland away from the summit itself.

One year ago, when the climate summit was postponed for a year out of pandemic-related health concerns, there were 20,000 cases a day in Britain. Today, the number of infections in Britain has risen to 30,000 a day, despite mass vaccination, thanks to the brutal policy of the Johnson government in reopening schools and businesses.

Over the course of the year, both the pandemic and the climate emergency have worsened, and the threat to humanity from both dangers has intensified.

Last Friday, an estimated 100,000 people, most of them young, marched through the streets of Glasgow, delivering a vote of no confidence in the officials gathered at COP26. The demonstration was more a protest against the summit than an appeal to it, at least judging by many of the placards and banners, and the enormous applause given to speakers like Greta Thunberg, the youthful Swedish activist, now 18, who condemned the proceedings as a sham.

It is hard to argue with Thunberg's characterization of the summit as "two-week-long celebration of business as usual and blah, blah, blah."

She told the huge crowd, "The leaders are not doing nothing. They are actively creating loopholes and shaping frameworks to benefit themselves and to continue profiting from this destructive system. This is an active choice by the leaders to continue to let the exploitation of people and nature, and the destruction of present and future living conditions to take place."

Thunberg has been an eloquent voice of the outrage among young people worldwide but offers nothing in the way of a political perspective besides continued, and inevitably more impotent, protests.

There can be no solution to the looming environmental disaster, any more than there can be an end to the global pandemic, without turning to the one social force whose interests are bound up with the struggle against both: the international working class.

Climate change, like the pandemic, is a crisis created by capitalism, and the only alternative is socialism—the revolutionary mobilization of the working class to put an end to the profit system, abolish the reactionary nation-state framework, and establish a global socialist society.

It is noteworthy that in the mass of media coverage of the Glasgow summit, there has been almost no mention of the fact that 100 global corporations are responsible for 71 percent of world emissions. This was first detailed in the 2017 "Carbon Majors" report, which identified giants like ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell, BP, Chevron, Peabody and BHP

Billiton, as well as the national coal and oil companies of China, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Mexico, Kuwait, UAE and Iran, among others.

One of the main apologists for global capitalism, perhaps the world's leading practitioner of "blah, blah, blah," former US President Barack Obama, made a day-long series of appearances Monday in Glasgow.

His speech to the summit was not mere blather, although there was plenty of that, citing his island origins (he was born in Hawaii) as proof of his sympathy towards the beleaguered island nations that face being overwhelmed by rising ocean waters, and touting the record of his own administration in fighting climate change.

The truth is that during Obama's eight years in the White House, the United States was continually at war—a not insignificant contribution to global warming—and American corporations created incalculable amounts of carbon and toxic waste.

Obama delivered several thrusts against Russia and China, the major targets of American imperialism under the administration of Joe Biden, his former vice president. He denounced Russian President Vladimir Putin and China's President Xi for not attending the summit, saying this demonstrated a "dangerous lack of urgency."

He took credit for the purely illusory gains of the 2015 Paris climate agreement, while admitting that since then "we are nowhere near where we need to be." And he openly threatened the living standards of American workers, declaring, "All of us have a part to play. All of us have work to do. All of us have sacrifices to make... But those of us who live in wealthy nations, those of us who helped to precipitate the problem... we have an added burden."

He also used the occasion for a typically sanctimonious lecture to the youthful protesters outside, essentially telling them to go back to their home countries and become foot soldiers in capitalist politics. He advised them against being "purists," in other words, telling them to join the political campaigns of the Democratic Party in the United States and similar parties of a completely corrupt and conformist character.

Obama is being reinforced by a delegation of congressional Democrats, and even a few Republicans, this week, as the climate summit draws to a close. House Speaker Nancy

Pelosi and other Democrats will pretend that the infrastructure bill they just approved and the social spending and climate bill they just agreed to postpone add up to a huge US commitment to resolve the climate crisis.

The truth is just the opposite. Both the Democrats and Republicans are willing to slash the consumption of American workers in the name of climate change, but not to cut a penny of the profits of American corporations.

The Biden administration aims to use the climate summit as part of its anti-China policy, which is directed, sooner rather than later, at unleashing military violence against the world's second-largest economy and third-largest nuclear force.

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