

# Just Say “No” to the Paris COP: A Possible Way to Win Something for Climate Justice

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*For a Just Climate Future, We Must Have No Agreement in Paris*



*A very simple argument makes the scale of our failure absolutely clear.... let's just call it the Vicious Syllogism. It goes as follows:*

*Premise 1:* If we do not keep average atmospheric temperature rise below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, we are in for dangerous, unpredictable and potentially catastrophic climate change.

*Premise 2:* If the world does not keep further anthropogenic emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent to no more than (say) 1,300 billion tonnes, we shall not keep average atmospheric temperature rise below 2°C.

*Premise 3:* If [the UN FCCC is] not now even minimally embarked on a programme that might make limiting ourselves to such a carbon budget even remotely feasible, we shall not keep further anthropogenic emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent to no more than 1,300 billion tonnes.

*Premise 4:* [The UN FCCC is] not now even minimally embarked on such a program.

So (by Premises 4 back through 1):

*Conclusion:* We are (already) in for dangerous, unpredictable and potentially catastrophic climate change.

– John Foster, *After Sustainability: Denial, Hope, Retrieval* (London: Earthscan, 2015), 2-3, with “the UNFCCC” replacing “we” in the original

In the long-running medieval soap opera *Game of Thrones*, they say that “when you play the game of thrones, you win ... or you die. There is no middle ground” (season 1, episode 7 bears this title).

In the long-running contemporary soap opera *At the COP*, the same maxim holds true, it seems to me. “When you are dealing with the risks posed by climate change, you must play to win ... or people will die.”

This is why the global climate justice movement and its allies everywhere must pay attention to the COP21 meetings coming in December to Paris. And we will need to be very imaginative indeed to defeat our enemies – the largest corporations in the world, the global political elite, and the systems whose levers they believe they control: capitalism, the world energy supply, the mass media, and a largely-rigged brand of democracy that systematically excludes radical challengers.

The global climate justice movement must inevitably confront the looming nightmare of COP21 in Paris in a few short months, and live with its outcome long after that. Paris will attract large numbers of climate activists, concerned citizens, good, bad, and indifferent NGOs, young people, old people, journalists and communicators of every stripe. While few in the climate justice movement expect much of the fatally flawed and compromised climate negotiations that are supposed to finalize a “treaty” of some kind in Paris, it *is* a place where a good part of the world’s attention will be turned, and thus presents opportunities for increasing the momentum and strength of our beautiful movements.

Paris will also likely be the site of intense narrative and political contention over the value and outcome of the negotiations, since world leaders, especially from the global North, will be seeking to declare a victory on the basis of some common text they will do everything in their power to get their counterparts all over the world to sign onto.

The whole world will be watching (and actually, we have to make sure that as much of the world as possible brings its attention to the spectacle). Meanwhile, we must summon all the creative powers we have to gather a force capable of pulling the emergency break on the out-of-control locomotive of the COP before it takes us over a cliff.

### **“Paris is Coming”**

The Paris COP has been held up by the global one percent as the site for a climate treaty that will set us on the road to a definitive solution to the “problem” of climate change like some holy grail.

Those of us who have followed the COP over the years through the critical perspective of climate justice know better. In another strange parallel with *Game of Thrones*, the phrase “Winter is coming” heralds an apocalyptic never-ending winter where people must battle with zombie-like creatures risen from the dead, while ever since the 2011 COP17 in Durban, South Africa, negotiations have been set on a zombie-like track to catastrophic global warming where market solutions and national “pledges” have dominated the discourse. It has been plainer to see with every passing year that the treaty process will not close the emissions gap needed to keep the world under two degrees Celsius of warming (we can see what .9 of one degree is doing to the people of the planet right now so two degrees is not acceptable either). The negotiations will not produce the kind and degree of technology transfer and generous public money that would be needed to build the low-carbon infrastructure the global South needs to overcome the poverty that the same system increases every year. It will not fund the “loss and damage” mechanism that Philippine delegate Yeb Saño pleaded and fasted for at [COP19 in Warsaw in 2013](#). And it will not produce a legally binding treaty, the expressed goal of the negotiations for two decades. Even French President François Hollande, in a rare moment of candor, has [said](#) that a “miracle ... would be needed for a compromise to be reached on the future of limiting greenhouse gases that would involve both developed and developing countries” (in some elite form of magical thinking he is able to overcome any cognitive dissonance by avowing that he does of course believe that such a miracle will occur).

Reality suggests that we are on course to lock in an inadequate, woefully underfunded, and criminal set of non-binding “pledges” whose deadlines are laughably too late already. And the governments of the world at the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Climate Change Convention will be asked to hail this as a huge victory for humanity, with the transparent lie that it sets us on a course for what is needed at some unspecified future date. For the well-respected newsletter ECO, what’s [needed](#) in Paris are “equity, trust, solidarity, and action.” These are precisely the ingredients that will be missing.

Pat Mooney, in the aptly titled “[The Paris Climate-Change Spectacular](#)” sees the writing on the wall:

The United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris in December will feature all the tightly choreographed production values of a Hollywood blockbuster. The cast will be huge: presidents and prime ministers at center stage, supported by thousands of extras, including protesters, riot police, and busloads of media. The script may still be under wraps, but the plot has already leaked: This time, in sharp contrast to the failed negotiations in Copenhagen in 2009, the planet is going to win.

It is a seductive plot, but one that does not quite hold together. Goodwill and hard bargaining, the world will be told, paid off. Governments have agreed to voluntary reductions in greenhouse-gas emissions that will prevent the planet from heating more than 2° Celsius. Then, in a stunning *deus ex machina*, it will [be revealed](#) that the world’s largest fossil-fuel companies ... have agreed to bring net emissions to zero by 2100, by capturing carbon at the source, sucking it out of the

atmosphere, and storing it underground. The planet will have been saved, and the economy will be free to flourish. Cue the music and roll the credits.

The trouble is that the script is fiction, not documentary. The technology required has yet to be invented, and bringing net emissions to zero simply [is not possible](#). And, like a Hollywood production, the Paris conference's message will have been heavily influenced by those who have the most money....

The story that the Paris conference's producers will ask viewers to believe relies on technologies that are no more effective than smoke and mirrors. It is important that we learn to see past them. The curtain will rise on a set of false promises, and it will close with policies that can lead only to mayhem – unless the audience gets into the act.

This is the narrative and the outcome that we have to stop by the time Paris has come and gone.

How are we going to do it in little more than two months?

Here are a few of the ways that might open up a chance for a better outcome to occur: that **no** climate treaty is agreed to, because any treaty that could realistically (or even improbably) be agreed to in Paris will lock in already dangerous climate change and push us into the disaster zone.

**Delegitimizing the COP: scientifically, politically, economically, morally – in a word, as *climate injustice***

Part of our job is to counter the triumphalist narrative that has been scripted for Paris and described above. To this task we must bring all our ingenuity, knowledge, and imagination, and we must take advantage of the several fronts on which that narrative has gaping weaknesses

In particular, we must be prepared to counter the claims that the outcome – “however flawed” – is the “first step” in some “process” that will ultimately “save the planet” when we already know that it will not set us on a path to the steep reductions required by science and the justice demanded by humanity (I realize of course that some readers and perhaps many in the wider climate movement think otherwise, and it is with them as well as those who agree that I hope further discussion will arise).

How do we counter the mainstream media discourse?

*The radical implications of mainstream climate science need to be communicated*

The world's climate scientists gathered in Paris early in July for a four-day conference on “[Our Common Future under Climate Change](#)” which I attended and [reported](#) on. One of the scariest things I registered there for the first time is that most of the scenarios for limiting warming to two degrees Celsius require *negative net emissions after 2050* – which means that they assume that we will pass the greenhouse gas concentration levels that we have to stay under, and can

only get back under them by relying on taking carbon *out* of the atmosphere after having put it there. Some see this happening through increasing the world's forests and biomass to absorb more carbon, others through technological fixes which aren't yet and may never be deployable, like carbon capture and storage (CCS). For others, including Kejun Jiang of China's Energy Research Center as well as host nation France, both CCS and nuclear power are part of the plan. The mainstream thinking is that even though we will exceed the planetary boundary on climate change, we can reel it back later, or maybe deploy some massive scale geo-engineering fix to carry on more or less with business-as-usual. To be fair, most of the people I listened to made it quite clear that continuing the path we are on is a recipe for catastrophe. So there seems to be a kind of cognitive disconnect between the science and the solutions to our planetary dilemmas. The same could be said of those who hold out some hope for the COP process as it is currently constructed.

As the clock ticks and the planet warms, leading climate scientists such as James Hansen continue to make heroic efforts to warn the world of the threat posed by climate change, going back, in Hansen's case, to the [testimony](#) he gave before Congress in 1988. Hansen recently castigated the "reticence" of his colleagues in an [essay](#) that concludes "continued high emissions would result in multi-meter sea level rise this century and lock in continued ice sheet disintegration such that building cities or rebuilding cities on coast lines would become foolish." Noting that the stated goal of two degrees Celsius is not a safe target, he concludes: "The bottom line message scientists should deliver to policymakers is that we have a global crisis, an emergency that calls for global cooperation to reduce emissions as rapidly as practical." But let's face the facts: despite a chorus of scientists shouting this very message from the rooftops, what is on offer in Paris has no prospect for deep emissions reductions. On the contrary, after twenty years of COPs, global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are up from 23.6 gigatons to 35.2 gigatons, some [49.6 percent higher](#) than they were when we started with COP1 in 1995.

The world needs to know the full truth about climate change, a truth which goes even deeper than the voluminous reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [the IPCC issues definitive state of the art summations of what is known on the topic every five or six years; AR5, the Fifth Assessment Report, was published in three volumes over the course of 2013 and 2014: one on [the physical science basis of climate change](#), a second on [impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability](#); and the third on [mitigation](#), or scenarios for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions]. Kevin Anderson and Alice Bows, both of the Tyndall Centre in England, are two of the leading climate scientists in the world and have been personal heroes since I heard them speak in Warsaw at COP19 in 2013, where Anderson [said](#) "Today, after two decades of bluff and lies, the remaining 2°C budget demands revolutionary change to the political and economic hegemony." In Paris this July he said to me that the IPCC and UNFCCC which oversees the COP climate treaty negotiations were both stuck in a discourse where they cannot understand or act upon the implications of their own science. He was the one who pointed out that almost none of the 160 future climate scenarios considered in the AR5 were going to achieve less than two degrees without requiring negative emissions after 2050, which, even if it were somehow possible, would be too late. In fact, Anderson said, most of the less than two degree scenarios had emissions peaking by 2010, wryly noting that in addition to a *deus ex tecnologica* this would require time travel! Perhaps the [scientifically-challenged](#) cli-fi thriller *Interstellar* would be the best model for this scenario...

What lies behind global elites' willingness to overshoot the atmosphere's [carrying capacity](#) and so blatantly ignore the [precautionary principle](#)? The fossil fuel industry's control of the process and the discourse, basically. And this brings us to the foundations of the problem, so pointedly put by Naomi Klein in the title of her invaluable book, [This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate](#), where she makes the case that we cannot get a grip on the defining existential challenge of our time without confronting global capitalism decisively. So, not only do widely available mainstream climate science and elementary political reasoning tell us we will need radical social change, we have to do it in a hurry, the sooner the better.

From a certain point of view, then, the COP is nothing more than a concentrated distillation of the system, not a distraction or a waste of our time. If the problem is capitalism, then you have to take the COP seriously on some level, and confront it.

*The political economy of climate change at the COP has to be discredited*

Recently, Nobel laureate in economics Joseph Stiglitz [called](#) the upcoming Paris talks “a charade.” If someone as visible as he believes this, maybe there *is* some hope of changing the narrative.

Along with bringing the radical implications of the science forward on every level and to every audience, we must undermine the political and economic distortions of the science into policy at the COP. Organizations such as [Corporate Europe Observatory](#), [Friends of the Earth](#), [Third World Network](#), [350.org](#), the [International Institute of Sustainable Development](#), and many others have been doing so for some time now (my apologies if I have left your favorite out).

Sunita Narain, Director General of the Centre for Science and Environment ([CSE](#)) in New Delhi, told a [gathering](#) I was at recently that the INDCs [Intended Nationally Determined Contributions – you can see those which have been submitted so far [here](#)] that are the mitigations centerpiece of the treaty text represent the stealth neoliberal replacement of the original UNFCCC foundational goal of a legally binding climate treaty, with each country in the climate negotiations to put their INDC (with the emphasis on the “I” for “intended”) for climate mitigation on the table before Paris. Narain blamed the United States for shifting the discourse away from binding emissions targets to the misnamed “bottom-up” hodgepodge of pledges, and noted that former U.S. negotiator Todd Stern’s definition of “equity” is that “every country has the right to determine its level of emissions,” while his interpretation of “national circumstances” for the United States is the political fact that the U.S. Senate is dominated by climate change-denying Republicans. Meanwhile, President Obama makes fine speeches, like [this one](#): “This year in Paris has to be the year that the world reaches an agreement. None of the nations represented here are moving fast enough... any so-called leader who does not take this issue seriously or treats it like a joke – is not fit to lead.” Narain predicts that Paris will end up being “a massive exercise in making it look like they [the major emitting countries] are doing something.” And so, these pledges should be scrutinized for their effectiveness, ambition, and contribution to equity.

Since the UNFCCC doesn't plan on releasing its own analysis of the INDCs received until fairly close to the start of the COP, we can seize the initiative by pre-empting that document with hard

work now, such as that proposed by Narain and her colleagues. One preliminary [analysis](#) of the pledges made so far is by the Leave It in the Ground Initiative ([LINGO](#)) titled “The Paris Mirage – Reducing emissions while increasing them.” It concludes that “While many governments will pledge to reduce their countries’ CO2 emissions at COP21, paradoxically, at the same time, most are working to increase them.” Another place to look is Tom Athansiou’s [EcoEquity](#) project. Many organizations, including the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance [PACJA](#), Friends of the Earth International ([FOEI](#)), [350.org](#), [Greenpeace](#), [Oilwatch](#), and with “representatives of Southern social movements of climate-impacted communities and of international faith, labor, development and environmental organizations,” joined together in July to form the [People’s Test on Climate](#), which has issued a set of [demands](#) that they will fight for at the Paris COP; these include deep emissions cuts, climate finance, loss and damage, technology transfer, and real, not false, solutions – in a word, climate justice.

The best analysis we have at the moment may be that of the [Climate Action Tracker Consortium](#) whose [August Briefing](#) makes clear which countries could be our allies inside the negotiations (an analysis I will turn to later) and who are the problem (hint: they tend to have two characteristics: they are wealthier and bigger emitters than most of the nations of the world).

Broadcasting far and wide the shortcomings, dead ends, false solutions, and faulty logic embedded in the [negotiating text](#) is a necessary task for shifting the narrative playing field in advance of Paris. One innovative approach is that of the [Deconstructing Paris](#) group of law students and graduates in Wellington, New Zealand, whose aim is to “deconstruct the language that is being negotiated for the Conference of Parties in Paris in November/December 2015.... to highlight where countries are trying to insert ‘weasel words’ which allow them to avoid playing their role in preventing dangerous climate change.”

Let’s think about how to amplify all these voices as far and wide as possible as they make their findings known.

### **What might we do at the COP? The spectrum of inside-outside strategies**

The climate justice movement has been trying to find promising strategies of repudiation of the UNFCCC and the Paris process and outcome, together with organizing to build numbers and turn the larger movements and NGOs in the more radical direction that the crisis we face requires of us. Hundreds of thousands of people will march; thousands more will likely pursue direct action in many forms and concrete acts; still others will create spaces to articulate and build post-Paris visions of climate justice; and many of us will be communicating with our frontlines back home. What follows are just a few of the possibilities for building movements for climate justice around and in Paris.

#### *Climate Justice: the inside game*

For years, scores of dedicated activist organizations and committed NGOs have tried to influence or protest the discourse and outcomes of successive COPs by maintaining a presence as civil society delegates on the inside. At COP after COP we have seen inventive, symbolic actions and a variety of practical and visionary side events, as well as press conferences and counter-

narratives sent into global webspaces. The Climate Action Network's publication [ECO](#), the International Institute for Sustainable Development's [Earth Negotiations Bulletin](#), the reports done by the [Third World Network](#), and the broadcasts of [Democracy Now!](#) have been invaluable sources for what happens at the COPs, and will all certainly be upping their efforts in Paris. For those who will not be present, as well as those inside the negotiating halls and outside on the streets, these are indispensable resources for tracking and reacting to events in close to real time.

The global youth climate justice movement will no doubt be using both inside and outside tactics to build their own capacity while continuing to make crucial contributions to the broader global climate justice movement. I have seen the radicalizing potential and the power of young activists at the last four COPs, compiling a set of interviews for an [e-book](#), observing their creative actions, holding [press conferences](#) with them, and cheering them on. They will be one of the most numerous and diverse sectors of civil society inside COP21.

Mithika Mwenda, Secretary General of [PACJA](#), a network of more than one thousand organizations, holds no hope for the negotiations, but will insist, both inside and outside the negotiations, on climate justice for the massive frontline of Africa. Dozens of organizations will be doing the same in various ways, from [FOEI](#) to [CAN](#), [Greenpeace](#) to [350.org](#), the [Sierra Club](#) to [Idle No More](#).

I have myself observed and participated in these efforts since Durban and tried to amplify their messages to the world (see [reports](#) here). In 2011, for example, Anjali Appadurai electrified the COP on the final day in Durban with a message in which she [asked](#) "Where is the courage in these rooms? Now is not the time for incremental action. In the long run, these will be seen as the defining moments of an era in which narrow self-interest prevailed over science, reason and common compassion." This critique continues to ring true today and will remain just as apt a question to pose in Paris.

One of the most striking [pun unavoidable] actions in the history of these civil society efforts was the large [walk-out](#) that took place just before the close of COP19 in Warsaw in 2013. Seeing no meaningful progress in the talks, finding themselves excluded from the process on many levels, and witnessing the blatant corporate presence – even sponsorship – at the meetings, hundreds of activists staged a walkout from the National Stadium, most of them vowing not to set foot in it again. By any reckoning, a significant portion of all civil society delegates to COP19 simply walked out. The mood was defiant; the white shirts said "Polluters talk, we walk!" and on their backs, "Volveremos!" – "We will be back!" The messages were clear, passing judgment on the complete inability of the UNFCCC to advance the treaty process at COP19, and signaling that this walkout was tactical, that the movement would return, with renewed force, to the 2014 COP20 in Lima, Peru, and to Paris this year. My comrades at the [Climate Justice Project](#), Summer Gray and Corrie Ellis made a [video](#) that captures the elevated mood of the participants as they turned their backs on the Warsaw COP. Despite its symbolic success, however, the great civil society walkout at Warsaw must be seen for what it was: a major event and statement laid down by a movement that by its own admission is still too small to do what it needs and wants to accomplish – the herculean feat of somehow making the outcome of the negotiations reflect the global demand for climate justice.



### *Marching in numbers to change the world*

Most of the people who come to Paris to bear witness will be on the outside of the COP space, of course, and the various parts of the climate movement itself have proposed a variety of approaches. Some will join with [Avaaz](#) and its NGO allies to stage a [massive march](#) on the model of the great People’s Climate March of September 2014 before the COP begins, with the aim of influencing the negotiations in the direction of something that can lay the foundations to somehow save the planet. They intend to take the rhetoric of global leaders and turn it into a weapon with which to shame or encourage them into doing the right thing.

Some, such as Patrick Bond, have already [questioned](#) the wisdom of this strategy in the context of Avaaz’s [praise](#) in July for the G7’s [statement](#) on reducing emissions to zero by 2100: “Avaaz’s ... premature celebration is *dangerous*. After all, the conservative (pro-market pro-insiderism anti-activism) wing of ‘climate action’ politics – as distinct from climate *justice* advocacy – is gaming us all now, arguing that the Paris COP21 can result in a victory. Avaaz just amped up that narrative.”

A more focused version of this people power approach is that of Yeb Saño, inspired like millions of others by Pope Francis’s bracing climate encyclical [Laudato Si](#). Saño has been helping to build the [People’s Pilgrimage](#), which, like the encyclical itself, is open to people of all faiths (including the climate justice faith). As he [said](#): “Paris is not our destination. Our real destination will be the hearts and minds of people, so our journey continues even after Paris.” In Italy, he told us: “Paris is merely a six-year delay of what was promised in Copenhagen. Paris will give us a ten to fifteen page ‘Motherhood’ statement with lots of ‘creative ambiguity.’ Unless we change the system, the same system that got us into the crisis, the negotiations process cannot, for the life of me, I cannot see it get us out of it.”



*Yeb Saño in Delhi, August 2015: “In the face of climate change and all the adversity we have to face in this world, this is not just a journey. It is a battle – one that we cannot afford to lose.” [Source](#).*

It is crucial to see that these marches are not in competition with other activities in some kind of mutually exclusive zero sum game. Movements appeal to new members in a variety of ways, and different people respond to different messages. Forging a truly broad and deep climate justice movement will require moving more and more people into and through climate action to climate justice, and these marches can be (literally) steps in that direction.

### *Creating a People's Space*

The movements have also sought to create strong counter-spaces on the occasions of the COP meetings, and the impact of these projects too on countless activists would be hard to overestimate.

Copenhagen's [Klimaforum](#) at COP15 in 2009 may have been the biggest and most consequential of these happenings. My own formation as a climate activist was indelibly shaped by attending some remarkable events. I laughed when Naomi Klein presented the "[Angry Mermaid](#)" awards to the big fossil fuel industries and lobbyists and the politicians that aid them in exchange for money. I watched with admiring amusement when the somewhat uncharismatic but lovable Bill McKibben had to hold the crowd for an indefinite period while we waited for the arrival of an important guest, who turned out to be [Mohamed Nasheed](#), the president of the Maldives whose passion for climate justice lifted us all. The fact that he had come straight from the airport to talk to *us* – the movement – rather than going to his hotel or the negotiating halls spoke volumes about the significance of what we were doing.

In Lima last December a remarkable experiment was the CasActiva temporary convergence space organized in large part by the Bolivian-Peruvian group [TierrActiva](#). This was a smaller, more youth-directed and direct action-centered counterspace where activists such as [Majandra Acha](#), [Juan Soriano](#), [Nicky Scordellis](#), and many others met up to engage in group projects and life-affirming exchanges. This had happened in Warsaw, too, a year earlier, where the walkout was largely conceived in such a space.

In Paris, the network of French and global organizers who have come together as [Coalition Climat21](#) will build on these achievements and try to do even more to enable us to share insights, teach skills, strengthen bonds, plan actions, and envision futures across a variety of venues. One of these will be a two-day [Citizen Climate Summit](#) on December 5 and 6, in Montreuil, a working-class neighborhood of Paris. In the words of the organizers of the Coalition Climat21, this will be a place "to put forward solutions tackling climate change. Let's show decision-makers that these solutions already exist and are building a better world: with more justice, more solidarity, more happiness! During the Citizen Climate Summit you will also have the opportunity to pay a visit to the World Village of Alternatives to learn more on concrete alternative solutions to fight against climate change.... Putting in common our experience, analyses, struggles, and hopes will enable us to anchor our movement for the long-term."

This will be followed between December 7 and 11 at the [Climate Action Zone](#) (ZAC) at the CENTQUATRE-PARIS in the northern part of Paris, where "All people are welcome – from the activists who will come from every corner of the world to local French high school students. Here one can get basic information on the climate crisis and the UN negotiations, as well as meet with others to share information, create, and organize." During the "crunch time" of the second week of the COP when the negotiations will likely be floundering, participants in the Climate Action Zone will generate plans for their movements' actions and messages at the end of the COP on Saturday, December 12, thereby creating the chance to "have the final word" on COP21.

A parallel initiative is the [Climate Games](#), the latest brainwave of the [Laboratory of Insurrectional Imagination](#) (le Labofii), which has issued a call for a series of “hackathons,” to “bring artists, activists, designers, scientists, hackers, architects, gamers, performers and other citizens together to conceptualise, and build and rehearse effective new tools and tactics of resistance to be used during the COP21.” The idea of staging Climate Games was pioneered by [GroenFront](#) in Amsterdam in the summer of 2014, who will work with the Labofii to stage the 2015 games in Paris. Teams of activists will form to engage in “a mass participation transmedia action framework that merges the street, disobedient bodies and cyberspace, and turns the city into a total resistance performance event open to all.” For details, and to enter, stay tuned [here](#).

### *A People’s Climate Strike to build a movement with teeth*

Another intriguing and promising new strategy is to build support for a “[global climate strike](#)” in the run-up to, during, and after the COP. This idea has been put forward by the [Global Climate Convergence](#), a coalition of U.S.-based activists involved with the Green Party, 350.org locals, [System Change Not Climate Change](#), and others – the same group who organized two days of workshops and events around the New York City People’s Climate March and the next day’s [Flood Wall Street](#) action in September 2014. As Ben Manski and Jill Stein [explain](#): “What makes a strike different from mere protest? A strike is an economic stoppage. A strike does not plead. It does not demand. It simply *does*.”

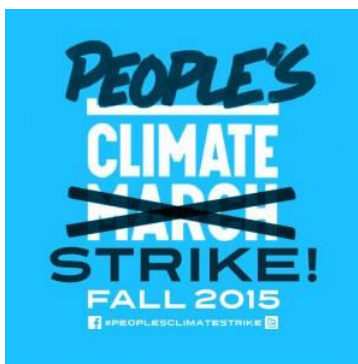


Image: <http://globalclimateconvergence.org/2015/07/peoples-climate-strike-a-call-to-action/>

At this point, the plan is for decentralized actions to occur around the world starting on November 26 just before the COP starts and continuing through December 12, to coincide with the final actions planned in Paris. “A People’s Climate Strike is being planned – to bring the engines of economic and ecological destruction to a grinding halt, demonstrate our growing power, and promote community-controlled, just, and green alternatives. It will take place in cities and villages across the globe in solidarity with the Paris protests against the final UN Climate Summit sell out this December, 2015. The People’s Climate Strike will move us from the symbolism of marches towards the assertion of power in the streets. We will begin to develop a tool that has been essential for democratic social change throughout history.”

Another form of the strike calls on students (including children) to skip classes or turn their schools into sites of climate action on November 30, the day the COP opens.



Image: <http://climastrike.net/>

### Could We “Seattle” the COP?

The idea of “Seattle-ing” a COP was first [raised](#) by legendary South African activist and poet Dennis Brutus for COP15 in Copenhagen 2009, shortly before his death. Back in March, another South African, Patrick Bond, [wrote](#) from a meeting of members of the movements at the World Social Forum in Tunis: “If you are serious about climate justice, the message from these [past] COP experiences is unmistakable. Going inside is suicide.” He and others have raised the possibility that we might be able to “Seattle Paris,” as suggested by Canadian author and activist [Pat Mooney](#) of [etc](#): “It should start like New York [where 400,000 marched together in September 2014] and end like Seattle [where the global justice movement shut down the meetings of the WTO in December 1999]. Shut the thing down!”

On Saturday, December 12, many activists will converge in the streets of Paris under the rubric of a Blockadia-style series of actions that have yet to be determined but about which discussions are now being held. As the Coalition Climat21 [website](#) puts it: “We do not want to remain mere spectators of the end of the UN conference, patiently awaiting the verdict of the negotiations! We will show that the movement for climate justice possesses the energy and determination to impose its solutions, and to grow even stronger in 2016!” One discussion document that is circulating called “Redlines Are Not For Crossing” notes:

Thousands of people are estimated to take part in D12, the December 12th mass action during the last moments of the COP. Following the success of Ende Gelände, the open cast coal mine shut down in August, D12 could well be the

world's biggest act of disobedience for climate justice. The inevitable bad agreement will be a death sentence for the poor and the planet and a blessing for corporations, but world leaders will have no problem pretending that it is a success and the "best" they could do. We cannot let such a deal pass unchallenged. The call for D12 is that "We (the movements) will have the last word" but the actions which accompany "the last word" cannot simply become a footnote to the main story.

John Jordan, who has written a moving [account](#) of the Ende Gelände ["Here and No Further"] action mentioned above, writes:

**IMAGINE:** When the summit inevitably crosses these red lines and just as the final UN plenary begins – the church bells, synagogues, minarets and civil defense sirens blast across Paris. This is the sign for the start of the action, people begin encircling the summit.

Three circles are made. On the inside of the Le Bourget conference center, hundreds of civil society NGOs, scientists and defecting delegates hold hands and refuse to let the delegations leave. Outside a middle ring of people surround the conference center, their backs turned towards it. Some have come with wind turbines, solar panels, bikes and mobile gardens, others are setting up tents "Occupy" style, hundreds of chairs re-appropriated from banks funding climate crimes form an alternative assembly as a barricade, farmers have driven tractors into place together with the frontline communities from la ZAD to the Pacific islands, everyone is calm and determined but refuses to be moved. If country representatives want to leave Le Bourget, then it will be by walking over the bodies of the very people they claim to represent.

Transport hubs and other roads that would enable delegates to leave Paris are also being blocked by smaller affinity groups; and finally an outer ring of tens of thousands, unable to come to Paris, take solidarity Blockadia actions in their own territories. The "red lines" meme appears everywhere, drawn across train tracks carrying coal, stretched across the entrances of institutions that refused to divest, marking the fields where fracking rigs are planned.

The mass act of legitimate disobedience fills the front pages and the airwaves, the social media sphere buzzes, washing away the world governments' greenwash with images of creative resistance, no one believes that a bad deal is a good deal anymore, everyone sees it for what it is – the ultimate false solution. Plans for a mass shut down of 'carbon bombs' across the world in the spring of 2016 are announced as the blockades are lifted. Rather than a Copenhagen hangover, we return from Paris filled with confidence and a much clearer path emerges towards climate justice in the months and years ahead.

Stay tuned for the development of this set of possibilities at the Coalition Climat21 [website](#), whose final form will take shape in further discussions over the course of the fall, and can only

fully emerge as events themselves unfold. What is clear to me is that history will be made in the streets of Paris on that day.



Source: <http://coalitionclimat21.org/en>

### **Just Say “NO” to the COP!**

With people everywhere who are truly concerned about the planet’s future we need to discredit the COP and not let it declare victory. But is there any chance of it actually ending as an unmistakable failure that even world leaders and the global media would be unable to deny?

COP21 is the best chance for all those countries (and there are many) who will get very little out of the treaty on the table to use their veto and say “No, not without \$100 billion or more annually in new money (not aid that has already been committed or loans with the usual awful conditions) for the Green Climate Fund, not without equally substantial funding for Loss and Damage, not without free technology transfer, not without closing the huge emissions gap to stay under 1.5 degrees so our populations don’t starve, drown, die of thirst, or get killed in floods, not without a treaty that is legally binding, and much more.”

These are merely, after all, the promises made in Copenhagen, Durban, Warsaw, and Lima, none of which look likely to remain standing when the Paris outcome is announced on December 11 (or 12 or 13).

Can we not imagine a different, more unscripted ending to COP21, even a complete collapse, as with the WTO in Seattle, with NO possibility of declaring the outcome a success?

Pablo Solon has already floated this idea, [noting](#) that “A bad deal in Paris will lock in catastrophic consequences for the future of the planet and humanity.” In March at a meeting of climate activists at the World Social Forum, he said: “I think we need a clearer narrative: let’s stop an agreement that’s going to burn the climate. We already know that agreement exists. If China peaks emissions only by 2030 or if we accept Obama’s offer to China, we all burn. The Paris agreement will be worse than the draft we’ve seen. The point is not to put pressure for something better. It’s to stop a bad deal. We are against carbon markets, geoengineering and the emissions targets.”

Two diametrically opposite and legitimate objections may be made to the “No” argument: the first is that it may not be possible to achieve it, as Patrick Bond has cautioned in one of the best [analyses](#) of movement options to date, while the second is that it would be a mistake in the first

place to prefer no agreement or condemn in advance the agreement that we might be able to get in Paris, which may after all be a step on the road to something better, as Avaaz hopes. I have tried to address each of these already, and I welcome more discussion of the options, but it should be clear that at this point, like Pablo Solon and Patrick Bond, I believe that the movement should investigate ways to bring about such an outcome.

Blocking something bad – until something better can be constructed – can be a recipe for climate justice. When the Keystone pipeline, which looked sure to be approved when it first surfaced early in Barack Obama’s first term was opposed by a handful of activists, this delayed approval until facts on the ground changed enough for it to be almost inconceivable today: a slam-dunk turned into a very likely “no,” and built a movement in the process. Why should we aim for anything less?

### **Next Steps: Where can we go right now?**

Who could be our allies inside the negotiations? Which countries might stand up as strongly as Bolivia did in Cancún in 2010, or as individual leaders and negotiators from the Maldives, Sudan, or the Philippines have done in the past? Clearly, an important task is to know enough about each country’s and each bloc of countries’ positions on the key issues, and who will be negotiating for each. Another key task will be to find ways to communicate and dialogue with these potential allies (assuming they exist) before and during the COP.

There are various candidates for stronger stands to be taken in this COP. In May, the Climate Vulnerable Forum – twenty countries in front-line positions as climate change advances – issued a [statement](#) that “Two Degrees Celsius is Inadequate.” These countries include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Barbados, Bhutan, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Kiribati, Madagascar, Maldives, Nepal, the Philippines, Rwanda, Santa Lucia, Tanzania, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Vietnam. The coastal nation of Belize has joined Aruba, Bahamas, Grenada, and six other islands (not all are countries) who have each [pledged](#) to go to one hundred percent renewable energy; Belize will do this by 2020.

A 2012 [document](#) prepared for the Rio+20 debacle, “The Peoples’ Sustainability Treaty On Transitioning to a Zero Fossil Fuels World,” notes: “There are champions emerging, such as the governments of Bhutan, Samoa, Maldives, Costa Rica, Ethiopia and Denmark who have set themselves ‘carbon neutrality’ or zero fossils targets.”

More recently, in a study of the formal pledges made to date the [Climate Action Tracker Consortium](#)’s [August Briefing](#) points out that AOSIS, the 44-member strong Alliance of Small Island States, has endorsed keeping warming under the safer, if more difficult limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius, and has called on the nations of the world to be fully de-carbonized by 2050. The 48-member Least Developed Countries bloc issued a statement in February calling for “emissions peaking for developed countries in 2015, with an aim of net zero emissions by 2050 in the context of equitable access to sustainable development.”

With a little bit of imagination and respect (ok, leavened by a healthy dose of “hopeful” thinking) other possibilities might include Germany, Bolivia, Cuba, Venezuela, Ecuador,

Mexico, and Norway – none of whom, of course, are paragons of actualized climate justice as of yet – and others whom we must identify and seriously consider as potential voices willing to say no in the name of climate justice, intergenerational equity, common but differentiated responsibility, and plain human common sense inside the negotiations.

The most hopeful sign to date is the just concluded Africa Climate Talks in Tanzania, where negotiators met civil society activists, including Patrick Bond, who argued for their joint collaboration, as [reported](#) in a PANA Press account:

Once it is clear that a deal, which will be nowhere near to 2 degrees Celsius will be adopted, “this is when we need African societies to demand that they don’t negotiate further”, Bond said, in reference to the global agreement on the emission reduction required to control global temperature increases to 2 degrees Celsius by 2050.

All evidence indicates, however, that for Africa and the Small Island Developing States, temperature increases above 1.5 degrees Celsius are already catastrophic.

“If they (African negotiators and the civil society) unite and decide to walk out, they will deny consensus and then force the next COP (Conference of Parties) which is going to be in Africa, Morocco in 2016, to then change the power balance in the meantime,” Bond stated.

Is this a pipedream? Possibly. Maybe probably. But what have we got to lose from trying this approach? And what might be gained for the planet if an opening in the global climate talks is somehow breached?

Let’s remember that the great civil society walkout in Warsaw was preceded two days earlier by a walkout of representatives of 133 countries of the global South over the non-inclusion of loss and damage at that point in the negotiations. Venezuelan negotiator Claudia Salerno [explained](#) why they walked out: “When you see developed countries being so bold to tell you that they are not even considering reducing their emissions, but they are not even considering paying for the costs that those inactions have in the life of others, that is really rude and hard to handle it politically, that we are heading to a point in which countries are not ready to take responsibility for their acts. And in this case, even more pathetic, they are not wanting to be hold responsible for their inaction and their lack of responsibility with humanity and the future generations.”

For those who agree, the next questions are: How do we do that? How do we communicate this? With whom do we work? Who is already working toward this end?

*What could we do after Paris?*



# LET'S MOBILIZE AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGHOUT 2015

Source: <http://coalitionclimat21.org/en>

A “No” in Paris would compel the world’s governments to come back and negotiate seriously lest they be the ones condemned in global opinion for lacking the courage to take action for the common future of humanity.

Surely we will also need to figure out ways to elect governments that would go to the COP with ambition, wherever that is possible (and we should be attempting to go beyond the possible, as radicals do all the time). It’s high time for a new UNFCCC altogether – let’s imagine what it would look like and how to make it happen.

Maybe it will take some new combination of radical social movements and a hitherto unknown, more horizontal kind of political party to bring about deep transformation of our societies in the direction of economic equality, climate justice, and participatory democracy. Determined movements can force parties to make good on their promises, and radical governments must draw their strength and legitimacy from uncompromising movements in order to stand up against the forces that will seek to destroy us all. There is no easy path, as Syriza proved in Greece, but new paths have ways of opening up to those who dare to seek them. There have been [hints](#) of this in the past, and this possibility remains alive in the present, and always in the future.

I continue to believe that many approaches hold promise. Our movements – if they are real – can’t be competing with each other. They *must* learn to work together, despite their diversity of tactics, and yes, even of strategies. For [John Jordan](#), “Only a broad space of disobedience where we do not condemn the actions of others will keep us strong. We must hold ourselves together in unity and diversity, just like the rich networks that make up the resilient ecosystems we are protecting.” Perhaps we should be trying to identify and combine the multiple strategies that give us the best chances of creating “tipping points” of our own for climate justice. As Cam Fenton has recently put it in an [essay](#) that should be widely read: “In the end, if we are constantly building alignment along fault lines, any big tent will be stronger and more valuable in the long run. After all, fault lines are the points that have raised mountains, carved shorelines and shaken the earth with powerful quakes.”

I dream of radical climate action of the kind needed to address the interlocking crises of capitalist globalization, militarism and violence, and the disillusionment of so many people with politics as usual. To deal with simultaneous social, economic, and political crises while managing climate change as best we can requires deep systemic change and a movement that can create a non-linear trajectory into the future. To weather this storm, we will need both the spirit of [Blockadia](#) – that “vast but interwoven web of campaigns standing up against the fossil fuel industry” *and*

[Alternatiba](#) – the web of sustainable, life-affirming alternatives to the death spiral of fossil-fueled neoliberal capitalism.

The climate justice movement may just have a world-historical role to play in bringing these new things into the world.

*For a Just Climate Future, No Agreement in Paris!*

All are invited to join in this conversation at [The Road to Paris](#) website.



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