

Kyoto2: for an effective Climate Protocol

I'm sure you have heard the story of the man who got lost on his way to Heathrow airport. He stopped a passer-by to ask for directions, and the reply was: "Now if I was going to Heathrow Airport, I wouldn't be starting from here!" After Copenhagen, we are in a similar position when it comes to achieving an effective agreement to halt climate change: a long way away, with many difficulties ahead and with no obvious route to get there.

Let's start with a quick recap of the Copenhagen circus. First, the strong turned against the weak. The mainly European high-emitting countries, led by Denmark as conference chair, put together the "Danish text" which – quite aside from its merits and demerits – appeared to pre-empt the proceedings of the conference by attempting to impose a pre-determined outcome. There were consequent howls of protest from the weak, low-emitting nations – many of whose delegates were already hopping mad after being kept waiting for hours in the freezing cold just trying to get in.

Second, the conference organisers, police and Danish Government then turned against civil society. Peaceful protestors, and anyone else who happened to be in the way, were attacked by police,

Oliver Tickell, author of *Kyoto2*, assesses whether the Copenhagen climate change summit leaves us with any hope of stemming the threat which climate change poses to our planet.

arrested and brutalised. Accredited non-governmental delegates, having travelled from across the world, were kept waiting outside for days on end for their badges and were finally excluded from the conference altogether. Even journalists were kept out – including the *Guardian's* George Monbiot, who spent an entire day trying to satisfy ever-shifting bureaucratic requirements only to be finally excluded because he was "freelance", despite being fully accredited to the *Guardian's* delegation.

No satisfactory explanation was ever offered for the appalling conduct of the conference, or the shameful treatment of official delegates, or the monstrous behaviour of the police. Denmark's positive international image as a harmonious, well organised society with an enlightened government and respect for civil society has suffered a severe blow. Some might say it's about time, too: the country is now ruled by a right wing government, elected mainly for its hostility to Muslim immigrants. When faced with a vibrant global movement calling for effective climate action, the Government's instinct is to bang its collective head against the back door of a police van and then arrest it for criminal damage.

The next thing that happened was that the stronger-still turned against the strong. China, India and the US put their own deal together, with Brazil and South Africa in attendance – the Copenhagen Accord. The EU agreed to it – reluctantly, since it was far weaker and vaguer than it had wanted, with no emissions targets and insufficient finance for adaptation and mitigation in developing countries.

Thus the strongest turned not only

against the strong, but also against the weak and climate vulnerable. The Maldives and other highly vulnerable states proposed that temperature rise be limited to 1.5C, only to have China strike down their proposal. Also at China's insistence, emissions targets for 2050 (that the world should cut its emissions by 50% and Annex 1 industrialised countries by 80%) were removed. China's desire for coal-fired economic growth - described in the *People's Daily* as its "right to develop" – overcame its anxiety over climate change.

The G88, which encompasses both low-emitting vulnerable countries like Maldives and Tanzania and wealthy, rapidly industrialising countries like China and India, was split. Some, like Sudan, took China's side. Others broke from the old "you lot have had your turn to burn fossil fuels, get rich and destroy the planet, now it's our turn to do the same!" G88 consensus, replacing it with a call for rich countries to finance poor countries' low-carbon development based on renewables and efficient energy use, as represented by the Vulnerable Nations Forum.

The final resolution of the conference was only to "take note" of the Copenhagen Accord. The outcome of the conference has not been to bring the world together in a constructive, co-operative agreement to safeguard the global climate. It was the opposite: to widen existing fault lines between Annex 1 and other countries; to reveal China in its new belligerent colours; to split the G88 down the middle; to marginalise the EU as a world climate leader (albeit a far from perfect one); and to leave behind an ill-smelling reek of



Protestors in Copenhagen condemn western governments.

Photo: Terry Conway

acrimony that will persist through further meetings of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change this year in Bonn and Mexico. Also the prospect of progress on “secondary” but important climate issues, from forests to HFCs (powerful warming gases used in refrigeration), methane and black carbon (soot to you and me, from biomass burning and smoky engines) which may be the main agent causing ice and snow melt, was kicked into the long grass.

Are there grounds for hope? Yes, there are some. First, we should not confuse legislation or international agreements with actual delivery. For example, it is not obvious that the Kyoto Protocol has delivered any emissions reductions. The rate of increase of world emissions promptly accelerated after the treaty was adopted, instead of going down as intended, as high-emitting industries moved from Annex 1 states to developing countries.

Canada, despite ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, did nothing to try to meet them and faces no sanction as a consequence – whereas China, India, the US and Brazil, despite having no obligation to reduce their emissions, are nonetheless taking action to do so. Brazil has committed to an 80% reduction in Amazonian deforestation. China is making itself the world’s renewable energy superpower, dominating world production of solar PV panels and wind turbines and making greatly increased energy efficiency mandatory. India is committed to a massive solar energy programme. Under

Obama, US emissions are on a firm downwards trend thanks to firm executive action – with strong standards on energy efficiency in cars and appliances, huge investments in renewables which are displacing planned coal fired power station construction, and an Executive Order to force sustained emissions reductions across the federal Government.

With investments into renewables and efficiency on the multi-billion dollar scale now taking place, renewable energy will become increasingly cost-competitive with fossil fuels. Developing countries will increasingly opt for development based on renewable sources of energy because it will be the cheapest, cleanest, most secure and most sustainable choice. Sheikh Yamani famously commented that the Stone Age did not end for lack of stone. The fossil fuel age may indeed not end for lack of oil, coal and gas.

Will this powerful – and perhaps now irreversible – trend be enough to tackle the climate challenge? Probably not. Demand for oil is strong and will probably get stronger, stimulating the development of highly polluting unconventional oil sources like the Canadian tar sands and Orinoco bitumen. However, once governments can see for themselves that fossil fuels are not essential to development and prosperity and that viable alternatives exist, they will be increasingly willing to sign up to a global climate agreement that will effectively phase fossil fuels out over a period of decades.

The interval until such an agreement is signed may well last several years – long

enough to devise a more effective, fair and efficient framework for global climate governance than that of the Kyoto Protocol. My own Kyoto2 proposals set out one such approach. Also, by the time we get there, the scale of emissions may force us to geo-engineer to prevent the climate from spinning out of control – and we need to be researching the options now, so we are ready to deploy them if needed. Increasing the reflectivity of marine clouds, expanding forest cover, sequestering carbon in farmland and accelerating the weathering of silicate rocks are all techniques deserving of investigation and experiment.

As for Britain’s role in all this, the one place where we can make a really big difference is here, at home. We need to be planning and demonstrating our own path of low carbon growth: developing key renewable energy technologies, increasing our climate resilience and reducing energy demand by making our houses, factories and businesses and vehicles more energy efficient. Not only will this make Britain a better and more prosperous country, it will also show the way to other countries and reduce their fear of committing to a low carbon future.

Our Climate Act is an important symbol of our climate leadership – now we must deliver what it promises.

● Oliver Tickell is the author of *Kyoto2: How to manage the global greenhouse* (Zed Books, 2008). For further information, visit www.kyoto2.org/



Protestors in Copenhagen stress the need for urgent action.

Photo: Molly Cooper