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Climate crisis

COP27, new summit of greenwashing, green capitalism and repression

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The 27th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is beginning in Sharm-el-Sheikh, Egypt. It is massively sponsored by multinational corporations (who ransack the planet) and organized by the dictatorship of General Sisi (who jails activists). The credibility of this COP is nil. It is a total illusion to believe that it could take the radical decisions necessary to seriously limit the catastrophe - not to speak of stopping it in a way that takes social justice into account. In reality, from COP to COP, the march to the abyss continues, and this infernal mechanism will continue as long as a convergence of revolts does not make the possessing classes tremble.

Like the previous ones, COP27 revolves around four challenges: reducing greenhouse gas emissions (“mitigation”), adapting to the now inevitable part of global warming, financing the necessary policies, all the while respecting the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, and differentiated capabilities. In short: both in terms of mitigation and adaptation and financing, wealthy people and rich countries, who bear the main historical responsibility for the accumulation of CO₂ in the atmosphere, must assume their responsibilities regarding poor people and poor countries.

Bad weather for the climate

Basically, over the course of the annual COPs, and despite increasingly urgent warnings from scientists, these four challenges have been met only in words. Paris (COP21) and Glasgow (COP26) clarified the objective on paper (stay below 1.5°C, or limit overshoot as much as possible, by staying “well below 2°C”) but have not taken the necessary steps to make it happen. It would take a miracle for it to be otherwise in Sharm-el-Sheikh.

The summit is in fact taking place in a climate of growing inter-capitalist competition and geostrategic confrontation. Contradictions are sharpening at all levels: between powers, between blocs of powers, between North and South, between groups. Since the end of the pandemic, marked by phenomena of economic desynchronization, and even more so since the Russian imperialist aggression against Ukraine, tensions over energy supply have had contradictory effects: increased investment in long-term renewables, and revival of fossil fuels - therefore emissions - and nuclear power in the short term [1]. As a result, profits are exploding in the oil, coal, gas... and arms sectors. Far from disengaging from them, finance is launching new investments that reinforce dependencies, the phenomena of “technological lock-in” [2], fuel leaks... and the tendency to armed conflict. No wonder CO₂ emissions from burning fossil fuels and methane emissions hit record highs in 2021 [3].

At the same time, evidence is accumulating that shows that the catastrophe can no longer be avoided: in Pakistan, in Niger, in Siberia, in Europe, in the Horn of Africa, in Central America... everywhere, the growing violence of extreme meteorological phenomena, and the growing number of victims [4], echo the particularly strident cry of alarm launched recently by the IPCC; everywhere, the popular classes are hit hard. We must act, immediately, in social justice. But this message is less likely than ever to be heard. At the end of debates that are more difficult than ever, the best result that can be expected from this COP is that the protagonists - who have a common interest in making it appear that they are in control of the situation - will finally come together for the family photo, swearing that they have once again taken “a step forward”. No one can be fooled.

Mitigation: ambitions at half-mast

At the time of COP21 (Paris), governments could not help but notice the deep gap separating their climate plans (or “nationally determined contributions”) from the objective of “staying well below 2°C while continuing efforts not to exceed 1.5°C” while respecting “differentiated responsibilities and capacities”. It was therefore decided to revise the climate plans every five years, in order to “raise ambitions” at all levels (mitigation, adaptation, financing). COP26 (Glasgow) failed in this task. As the next revision would have taken place too late in relation to the crucial deadline of 2030 (45 per cent reduction in global emissions to stay on the path to a maximum of 1.5°C), the participants agreed that the “mitigation” component of the climate plans, which is crucial, would be revised every year until the end of the decade.

Each government therefore had to communicate to the United Nations an updated version of its mitigation objectives before COP27. The UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) has summarized this through its annual report on the gap between what is done and what should be done in terms of reducing emissions. The result is an insult to the populations that are victims of climate change. Indeed, these new commitments represent less than one per cent of the 45 per cent effort to be made by 2030! This is an announced reduction of 0.7 Gt, mainly thanks to the catch-up by the “bad students” who had not “raised their ambitions” before Glasgow (Australia and Brazil). Moreover, this year too there are “bad students”: Turkey has not submitted new commitments, Great Britain has submitted a commitment similar to the previous one, India and Russia have submitted objectives involving ... more emissions than their previous commitments! [5]

Quantity is not the only issue. A group of scientists has looked at the quality of reduction pledges and found that a disproportionate share comes from tree planting and soil restoration projects. In total, government plans in this area would supposedly mobilize 1.2 billion hectares (almost one tenth of submerged land, minus areas covered with ice or rock!). This would inevitably generate contradictions with the requirements of food production. Most of this area (623 million ha) would be devoted to tree monocultures (very harmful to biodiversity). The real impact of these plantations on carbon emissions and absorptions is difficult to certify and rather slow to materialize (in certain ecosystems - savannahs for example - the IPCC notes that this technique can even have a negative effect on absorption of CO₂). But planting trees is easier – and cheaper for the sectors concerned! – than reducing the use of fossil fuels, decarbonizing food systems or ending deforestation. All the more so since, in very many cases, these “forest emissions compensation” mechanisms are not the subject of either serious regulation or rigorous scientific control. [6]

UNEP's verdict is clear: “the 1.5°C ‘window’ is closing.” Because of the inaction of governments, commented the UN Secretary-General. The reason is pointed out in the report: “Most of the financial players, despite their stated intentions, have shown limited action in terms of reducing emissions because of their short-term interests, opposing objectives (“conflicting objectives”) and the lack of adequate recognition of climate risk.” [7]. To put it clearly, what is in question is really the very foundation of capitalism: the race for profit between private groups who own the means of production. Because of this absurd logic, not only the 1.5°C maximum is compromised, but in addition the objective of remaining under 2°C of warming risks being pulverized. According to UNEP, in fact, the current policies and the complementary promises (if they are kept!) would lead to a warming of 2.4 to 2.6°C during this century. [8]

Adaptation, how far?

Since global warming is partly inevitable, the question of adaptation is becoming increasingly acute. Capitalist governments seize on it all the more willingly because they see in it the possibility of new markets in the sectors of construction, public works, regional planning, etc. Many forget the very clear warning given by the IPCC: mitigation and adaptation are two sides of the same coin; the more the warming increases, the more the possibilities of adaptation decrease.

It may no longer be possible to adapt to the most extreme phenomena, such as the terrible floods that hit Pakistan this summer. However, these phenomena are the result of a warming of just 1.1 to 1.2°C compared to the pre-industrial era. It must therefore be said clearly: any slippage beyond 1.5°C increases the dangers of ruin, disease and death for the poorest 50 per cent of the world's population, whose responsibility in climate change is insignificant., who lack the essentials, and who, by virtue of climate justice, have the right to multiply their emissions by three to meet their needs. As for the prospect of a warming of 2.4 to 2.6°C, it must be said without ambiguity: to trivialize it would be to put up with a mass massacre, a crime against humanity, on a scale worse than all the genocidal horrors committed in the twentieth century.

It is therefore very worrying to hear certain rumours lending to certain governments the temptation to question the objective of +1.5°C, adopted in Glasgow. The member countries of the G7 dare not touch this objective. At their June 26-28 summit, under the German presidency, they reaffirmed their desire to reach net zero by 2050, passing by a reduction of 45% in CO2 emissions by 2030. But some G20 countries (which also includes those of the G7) are less clear. The meeting of their finance ministers, in Bali on July 15-16, 2022, was unable to adopt a clear position. Above all, during the meeting of the Ministers of Energy and the Environment of the member countries of the G20, in August, the representatives of China and India apparently pushed to put the accent rather on the 2°C. The Chinese representative is said to have even declared that this objective is “scientifically more realistic”. [\[9\]](#)

It is too early to draw conclusions from such fragmented information, but one thing is certain: in all countries, it is highly likely that a certain number of political leaders will say to themselves *in petto* that 1.5°C is unachievable. ...and hypocritically wait for the insufficiency of their policy to provide “proof”. During a recent interview, Greta Thunberg related a significant anecdote: “one of the 'most powerful people in the world', with whom she spoke at length in private, confessed to her: “If we had known what the Paris agreements really implied, we would never have signed them!” [\[10\]](#)

Who will pay ?

Maintaining the “1.5°C maximum” objective is only possible within the framework of a policy that strictly respects the principle of the “differentiated responsibilities and capacities” of countries. However, this commitment, made in 1992, does not materialize any more than the promises to reduce emissions. The developed capitalist countries are putting the brakes on. The Cancun COP (2010) decided to create a Green Climate Fund. Its function was to help the countries of the South to meet climate challenges, in terms of mitigation and adaptation. Rich countries pledged to pay one hundred billion dollars a year from 2020. This promise has not been kept. In Glasgow, we learned that there was only 80 billion in cash. COP26 has therefore decided to hold a debate, which should culminate in 2024, on a new objective from 2025. In the meantime, it seems that 100 billion per year could be reached in 2023, but mostly in the form of loans, not of donations. However, the principle of “differentiated responsibilities” should imply donations!

An even more important aspect of the funding issue concerns “loss and damage”. The countries most affected by climate change, and which are not responsible for it, are demanding that rich countries pay them compensation in the event of a disaster. In Glasgow, the developing countries (“G77”) had requested that a specific fund be created for this purpose. The United States and the European Union are strongly opposed to it; they used the lack of time as a pretext to evacuate the problem. After the disasters in Pakistan and Niger - among others - the issue will come back in force at COP27. Pakistan, which chairs the G77, estimates the reconstruction bill at 35 billion dollars. At the moment, the aid he has received is less than 8 billion, and most of this sum, here too, is disbursed in the form of loans. This is unacceptable for a country whose external debt already amounts to 130 billion dollars. Combined with the rise in energy and food prices, the refusal of rich countries to pay for “losses and damages” risks accelerating the plunge of countries in the South into a new spiral of debt. The architect of the Paris agreements and head of the European Climate Foundation, Laurence Tubiana is right: “the legitimacy of the entire United Nations climate process

will be called into question" if there is no progress on this point in Sharm-el-Sheikh. [\[11\]](#)

Finally, COP26 made much of the mobilization of the financial sector. Mark Carney, ex-Governor of the Bank of England, triumphantly announced the creation of the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ). According to him, bankers and pension funds around the world were itching with impatience at the idea of putting their capital at the service of the climate. One hundred and thirty billion dollars had already been collected. A year later, the balloon is deflating. BlackRock and Vanguard have stated bluntly that they will not abandon fossil fuel investments. Several partners are reluctant to subject the "greenness" of their investments to United Nations criteria. They claim that these criteria would put them at odds with anti-trust law... [\[12\]](#)

Cynicism, cheating and repression

Even more than the previous ones, the Sharm-el-Sheikh COP is placed under the triple sign of cynicism, cheating and repression.

The cynicism of sponsors this year is embodied by Coca-Cola. Plastic pollution and the use of fresh water have successively crossed the thresholds of global ecological sustainability. [\[13\]](#) In this context, the fact that a giant of water grabbing and the consumption of plastics is sponsoring the COP is eloquent and does not deserve comment. The multinational asserts boldly that its support for the COP "is in line with its scientifically based objective of reducing its emissions by 25 per cent in 2030 to reach zero carbon in 2050". To clarify this statement, we will simply mention that Coca-Cola, between 2019 and 2021, increased its consumption of plastics by 8.1 per cent, to bring it to 3.2 million tonnes...

On the cheating side, we have a choice. We could make an inventory of all the so-called "agreements" - in reality simple declarations of intent - concluded with great fanfare by groups of countries at COP26: "agreements" on methane, on deforestation, on stopping fossil fuel investments, on "green defence",... and so on and so forth. Of all this, there remains nothing, or very little. The downside, when you pull such rabbits out of your hat, is that the trick quickly loses credibility. There are however thousands of private climate actors who are bursting with ideas out of the same barrel. One example among many: the Independent Science Based Targets.

Set up in 2015 by major pro-green capitalism environmental associations (such as the World Resource Institute), the ISBT aims to certify by science the "net zero" plans of companies (for which the public authorities have not set any standards or regulation of any kind). In reality, the smart guys at ISBT are content to take the emission data provided by the companies that pay them at face value and put a nice "science-based" stamp on their "net zero" plans. As the data in question serves as a reference for the "net zero" plans, the crudest cheating is possible. The *Financial Times*, which is not an ecosocialist newspaper, cites the case of a pulp company that established its baseline by reporting emissions from forest fires on 139 ha. A specialist in satellite observation of forest fires proved that, that year, more than 3000 ha of plantations of this company had gone up in smoke... and in emissions [\[14\]](#).

On the repression side, finally, we will limit ourselves to recalling that 60,000 prisoners of conscience languish in the jails of General Sissi. The dictator has decided that "his" COP will take place in an orderly fashion. This week, his gendarmes arrested nearly 70 people who had "plans for protests", according to the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF). People have been arrested for "spreading fake news" after they shared content on Facebook calling for protests around the summit. [\[15\]](#) According to Al Jazeera, Indian environmental activist Ajit Rajagopal was also arrested during a peaceful march from Cairo to Sharm-el-Sheikh. Etc...

This COP will be a new summit of greenwashing, green capitalism and the police state. It is a total illusion to believe

that it could take the radical decisions necessary to seriously limit the catastrophe - not to speak of stopping it in a way that respects social justice. In reality, from COP to COP, the march to the abyss continues, and this infernal mechanism will continue as long as a convergence of revolts does not make the possessing classes tremble. It is up to us to work in this perspective.

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This article first appeared on the Belgian site Gauche Anticapitaliste

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[1] See a statement by the Reuters agency (18/10/2022) on the revival of fossil fuels, in particular coal, in Europe and worldwide.

[2] In the EU, there have been 50 billion Euros of new fossil investments since the beginning of the Russian war against Ukraine. The shares of solar and wind power in power generation have increased (respectively by +32 and +26 per cent) but those of coal, lignite and gas also (respectively by +20, +17 and +23 per cent) from January to August 2022 (compared to the previous year). Investments related to the import of US LNG, in particular, raise fears of a lasting slippage of the Green Deal (*Financial Times*, 20/10/2022).

[3] 36.6 Gt of CO₂ from the combustion of fossils were emitted in 2021. This is an absolute record. As for the annual increase in methane emissions, it has been unprecedented since the start of measurement of it (*Financial Times* 27/10/2022).

[4] According to the *Lancet*, the number of heat-related deaths globally has increased by two thirds in the last twenty years (*Financial Times*, 27/10/2022).

[5] UNEP, Emissions gap report 2022.

[6] *Financial Times*, 1/11/2022.

[7] UNEP, op cit.

[8] The UNFCCC gives a slightly wider range: 2.1 to 2.9°C.

[9] According to *Climate Home News*, 2/9/2022.

[10] *Le Monde*, 10/14/2022.

[11] *Financial Times*, 10/10/2022.

[12] *Financial Times*, 8/10/2022 and 18/10/2022.

[13] These thresholds have therefore now been crossed for six of the nine indicators identified by scientists: climate, biodiversity, soil, fresh water, plastics, nitrogen and phosphorus.

[14] *Financial Times*, 2/11/2022

[15] <https://www.reuters.com/business/cop/egyptian-security-arrests-dozens-ahead-cop27-climate-summit-rights-group-2022-11-01/>