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Climate Change

U.S.-China "Climate" agreement: too little, too late, and dangerous

- IV Online magazine - 2014 - IV478 - November 2014 -
Publication date: Monday 17 November 2014

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The agreement between the U.S. and China in which they commit themselves to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions in order to limit climate change was widely reported in the media.

This comes only a few weeks after the publication by the European Union of its own objectives for reducing emissions. It increases greatly the chances that the conference on climate change in Paris at the end of 2015 (COP 21) will not be a remake of the Copenhagen conference (2009) but will result in a proper international agreement.

But at the same time, the general content of the commitment signed by the two biggest emitters of greenhouse gases confirms an even larger probability that this international agreement will be ecologically insufficient, technologically dangerous and thus socially unfair.

China's commitments

Let's start with the Chinese side of the agreement. The text presented in Beijing by Barack Obama and Xi Jinping stipulates that "China intends to achieve the peaking of CO₂ emissions around 2030" and intends to "increase the share of non-fossil fuels in primary energy consumption to around 20% by 2030". In order to judge this promise you must know that "zero carbon" sources in China represent in 2013, 9% of the primary energy consumption and the 12th five years plan aims at 15% in 2020. An extra growth of 5% in the next ten years is not a big performance: 65 billion dollars have been invested in "non-fossil fuels" in 2012. One must also know that "zero carbon sources" is not the same as "renewable sources".

The energy produced by the big hydro-electric dams and nuclear plants is not renewable (the dams will be filled by sediment, the uranium reserves are limited). But these energy sources are considered as being "zero carbon" or as "low carbon". In April 2014, China had 20 working nuclear plants and 28 plants under construction (2 of them being EPR). The nuclear program was suspended after Fukushima, but it has now been restarted: the nuclear capacity will be tripled in 2020!

And finally, we should know that, according to the IPCC, in order to respect the 2°C limit and taking into account the differentiated responsibilities of the different groups of countries ("developed", "emerging" and "others"), countries such as China should increase their energy efficiency "which means decrease their relative emissions" by 15 to 30% (depending on the level of development). With the objective of 20%, China remains at the lower level of this objective.

The U.S. commitment

Let us now look at the commitments by the U.S. According to this agreement, the United States intends to achieve an economy-wide target of reducing its emissions by 26%-28% below its 2005 level in 2025 and to make best efforts to reduce its emissions by 28%. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in 2005 the United States released 7.254 Gigaton (Gt) of greenhouse gases. A reduction by 26% in 2025 would mean that emissions go down to 5.368 Gt (and 5.223 Gt for 28%).

Several elements have to be taken into account in order to understand the meaning of this objective:

According to the Kyoto protocol (signed but never ratified by the USA), Uncle Sam should have reduced his emissions by 8% in 2012 in comparison with 1990. This means that emissions should have gone down from 6.233 Gt (figure in 1990) to 5.734 Gt. But emissions rose at an average rate of 0.2% per year reaching 6.526 Gt). In other words: Obama pledges if achieved would take us to a place which is only a **small improvement in 2025** than the objective the USA should have reached **two years ago**.

Emissions have been increasing in the U.S. between 1990 and 2005, after which they declined by 1.4% per year on average. This decline is in part due to the use of shale gas replacing coal in electricity producing plants. According to this agreement, emissions would go down from 6.526 Gt in 2012 to 5.368 Gt in 2025, or a reduction of 96 Gt per year " exactly 1.4%. In other words, Obama promises simply to maintain the current rhythm of lowering emissions thanks to the catastrophic exploitation of shale gas [1]

And last but not least: in order to keep a reasonable chance not to go beyond the 2°C, and respecting the principle of differentiated responsibilities of the different groups of countries, the emissions in the developed countries should, according to the IPCC, decline by 25 to 40% from now until 2020 in comparison with 1990. In the case of the U.S. this would mean aiming at emissions between 4.665 Gt (- 25 %) and 3.740 Gt (- 40%) in 2020. Compare this with the agreement: 5.368 Gt emissions in 2025.

Nuclear energy, shale gas, capture and sequestration

Let's look at the means the U.S. and China will use to reach their objective. The text of the agreement is clear: "The two sides intend to continue strengthening their policy dialogue and practical cooperation, including cooperation on advanced coal technologies, nuclear energy, shale gas and renewable energy, which will help optimize the energy mix and reduce emissions, including from coal, in both countries."

The term "advanced coal technologies" refers to the geological capture and sequestration of CO₂. In earlier articles I already pointed to the fact that this technology of the sorcerer's apprentice is being imposed as THE capitalist (and hence false) compromise solution between the fight against global warming and the interests of the fossil fuels multinationals.

The agreement between China and the U.S. confirms this analysis. Indeed, the agreement mentions the following: "establishment of a major new carbon storage project based in China through an international public-private consortium led by the United States and China to intensively study and monitor carbon storage using industrial CO₂ and also work together on a new Enhanced Water Recovery (EWR) pilot project to produce fresh water from CO₂ injection into deep saline aquifers;"

In other words: the two major coal producing countries China and the U.S., want to continue to burn their enormous stocks of coal (200 to 300 years at the current rate of consumption!) by storing the CO₂ resulting from this combustion, into the soil.

Capture and sequestration is one of the geo-engineering techniques imagined by those doctors Strangelove who consider capitalist growth as a law of nature, even more unavoidable than the laws of gravity!

The risks of the capture are real, beginning with the danger of massive CO2 leaks in case of an earthquake (which could, according to some, even be provoked by such capture!). But nothing should hinder the pursuit of profit. The U.S.A. will deliver the technology and China the locations for the sequestration. And under the leadership of the Communist Party, the workshop of the world will be able to continue to use fossil fuels for the production of cheap commodities to be sold massively on the western markets. Injecting CO2 into saline aquifers, will allow them to recuperate this water, which, once it is being desalinated, will constitute a precious exploitable resource of course to be paid for in hard currencies.

These crackpots who rule the world!

According to this system, the fight against climate change is only conceivable if and to the extent that it allows business to be made. If this is the case, it proves that it is good policy, no? Just like the agreement says: "The global scientific community has made clear that human activity is already changing the world's climate system." At the same time, economic evidence makes increasingly clear that smart action on climate change now can drive innovation, strengthen economic growth and bring broad benefits.

Let's go for those profits and don't listen to the Cassandras.

This agreement between China and the U.S. reminds one of the famous sentence from Churchill: "Too little, too late". This is really the situation and herein also resides the danger of its violent antisocial dimension. We should continue to explain: it is the poor who will pay for global warming (this is already happening!) and this price will be colossal. Let us mobilize with our organisations, our unions, our women's and our youth movements. Let's make those crackpots who rule the world, retreat. Together we should impose an energy transition which is at the same time efficient ecologically and socially just.

14 November

[LCR-SAP](#)

[1] According to Kevin Anderson, director of the Tyndall Centre on Climate Change Research, the developed countries should lower their emissions immediately by 11 % per year until 2050.