

Converge faster; the UK's role now in the UN Climate Negotiations

In 2000 the UK's Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution [RCEP] made a key recommendation about climate change to the UK or Her Majesty's Government [HMG]. This was to put the Contraction and Convergence [C&C] principle as advocated by GCI since 1990, at the centre of their strategy for global negotiations at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC]. This was the "*big idea*". After an 8-year struggle, HMG finally made the C&C principle central to the UK's Global Climate Act which was passed into law in 2008.

The global carbon budget in the Act starts in 2000, recording that global emissions were at 8 billion [Giga] tonnes of carbon [GTC] per annum. It said global emissions must peak by 2016 at no more than 12 GTC for that year and fall thereafter at an average of about 4% a year until 2100. By 2050 it said global emissions must have fallen by about 50% of 2000 levels to 4 GTC a year and by 2100 effectively to zero GTC globally. It also said that by 2050 and within that emissions cuts in the UK and the Developed Countries must be by 80% of the 2000 level, to converge on the global per capita average of consumption arising under that contraction budget saying, "*it is hard to imagine a global deal based on anything else*". They claimed this budget - '2016 4% Low', with a total weight for this 100 year global 'carbon contraction budget' set at 480 GTC - would give us odds of 46% for keeping global temperature rise to no more than just over two degrees Celsius as they claimed that only 137 GTC of that would stay in the atmosphere.

In October 2009 and just before COP-15 in Copenhagen, Mr Miliband our then Minister at the 'Department of Energy and Climate Change' [DECC] betrayed his confusion in the evidence he gave to the Environmental Audit Committee. He appeared to be unaware that the C&C principle was already embedded in the UK Climate Act as in questioning, he rejected it claiming that arriving at a date for convergence was simply "*too complex*". Then, led by this same Minister, the UK was part of a group of Industrial Country Governments who went and prescribed these rates of C&C to the rest of the world at COP-15 in Copenhagen. Since, overall this prescription gave Developed Countries on average twice the per capita entitlements of the Developing Countries while 80% of the budget was consumed by 2050, the entire thing was [unsurprisingly] vigorously rejected by those countries - China memorably amongst them - as arbitrary and unfair to them. Mr Miliband returned home to publicly and naively denounce China for 'wrecking the negotiations'.

Mr Miliband has gone on to better things, but the bigger obstacle is that DECC's prescriptive mentality remains. In July 2009, fully five months before COP-15, the Chinese Government publicly accepted the C&C principle for the UNFCCC negotiations, and stated a willingness to negotiate rates of C&C based on immediate convergence to per capita equality of emissions entitlements worldwide. They stressed the difference between actual per capita emissions and emissions 'entitlements' and pointed out that international emissions trading can absorb the difference between the two. DECC and its allies however, completely ignored the Chinese offer to negotiate that way at COP-15. Even since then, DECC has not shown any willingness to negotiate, rather than just 'prescribe', this major and substantive equity issue. Continuing like this suggests we will remain deadlocked all the way to climate disaster as the global split between Developed and Developing Countries continues to fester. The US supported C&C at COP-3 but continues to reject any renewal of the 'one-sided' Kyoto Protocol, because it logically refuses a way forward that excludes Developing Countries from emissions control. They, on the other hand continue to reject prescriptions from Developed Countries that they regard as unfair.

Mr Huhne, is now our Minister at DECC and he has said of C&C, "*there is no other way to solve the problem*". Nick Clegg the Deputy PM and Vince Cable the Business Secretary are Liberal Democrats and they are all committed to C&C in their party Manifesto as well as in their personal correspondence and published writings. The way to break this deadlock is obvious: the UK should stop prescribing and become willing to broker negotiation to an agreement at the UNFCCC, based on the C&C principle but a faster rate of convergence to equal per capita emissions entitlements globally. This way all nations or regions become part of an agreement that will be rational, consensual and fair. We can call it post-Kyoto-1, Kyoto-2, or C-Three-Pio - the name is not the issue - and we can all look our kids in the eye because with this principle we can get on with achieving UNFCCC-compliance at rates that retain some chance of avoiding dangerous rates of climate change. On sight of a letter on this point to Ban Ki Moon [another C&C supporter], the Chinese Government again showed interest. Why don't we?

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US India China Africa Group at COP-3: - http://www.gci.org.uk/COP3_Transcript.pdf

Chinese Government Statement: - http://www.gci.org.uk/Documents/China_Research.pdf

UNSG C&C support: - http://www.gci.org.uk/endorsements_UN_Bodies_ADB_Signatories.html

Letter UNSG: - http://www.gci.org.uk/Documents/GCI_Letter_to_Ban_Ki_Moon_08_08_11_.pdf

C&C Endorsements: - <http://www.gci.org.uk/endorsements.html>