

## 21th COP and Climate Changes: Will it go beyond Dominating Superficiality Since 2008 COP's?

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### Abstract

For the first time along the history of civilizations we are really facing global civilization challenges, particularly a gigantic socio-environmental crisis challenge. Many people are now searching for a new civilization project, based upon a new sustainability pattern. Within that last crisis, it is to be severely detached the nine great global environmental menaces and their presumed limits. And within this set of nine menaces, governments and people have detached the global warming. Some years ago, 2006-2007, it seemed that at least this last environmental problem would finally be part of international governmental agendas and of the real concerns of the planetary economic system. A series of consistent politic-economical "signals" along 2006-2007, some of them here presented, has helped to driven that presumed capitalist turn from an usual "externalization" to a new "internalization" of the environmental costs that the own system has – in a large amount, at least – provoked. However, the 2008 "financial crisis" has thrown away these hopes. The main objective of the present work is to display a new series of relevant politic-economical signals during 2014 and the first trimester of 2015 – analogously to the ones of 2006-2007 – suggesting that the 21th COP of Paris, December, may lead, this time, to a truly sustainable capitalist turn toward economical effective measures for facing present challenges of climate changes due to the global warming effects. The essential role of a growing people mobilization until the 21th COP is also emphasized.

**Keywords:** Climate changes; Global warming; Economic system; Little environmental periods: 2006-2007, 2014-2015; 21th COP

### Introduction

We are opening this work briefly displaying a background civilization pattern for the present environmental problems. Now, for the first time along the history of civilizations we are really facing global civilization challenges. That background pattern emerges with the XVIII century European enlightenment civilization project and, since the XIX century, it has leveraged a planetary industrial economic system that has generated a huge technological development, unemployment and inequality great waves and gigantic economic crises. Such crises (particularly 1929 and 2008 crises), in turn, have also helped promoting a gigantic environmental crisis (which in turn reacts back on the economic sphere), particularly highlighting global warming effects. Such a non-ecological trajectory of articulated contradictions seems to be pushing the world economic system to its ultimate limits. Many people, still dispersed or organized in very small clusters, are now searching for a new civilization project, alternative to capitalism, based upon a new sustainability pattern and a new scientific reason adjusted to that pattern; no longer the old Newton-Cartesian reason, adjusted to the enlightenment project.

From the Industrial Revolution, the era of fossil fuels was highly intensified in the twentieth century with the expansion of industries and intense urbanization. In 2007, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change I (IPCC) [1] published an alarming report, indicating that climate change would be caused by large-scale use of fossil fuels, which was causing an increase in greenhouse gas emissions, thus intensifying global warming and producing a fearful climate change [2-7].

Environmental impacts of major proportions are being expected, which will directly affect human society and biodiversity [8-14]. Therefore, we have a great challenge: the pursuit of a low carbon economy. During 2006 and 2007, with the release of the Stern [15] and the IPCC [1] reports plus several other events, it seemed that the

environmental problems would finally be part of international agendas and of the real concerns of the economic system. However, since 2008, a shift of priorities for the issues associated to the economic crisis has been conducted, drastically reducing the space for discussion of important issues such as climate change.

There is a crucial point to any future discussions about global warming effects. Nature published a special edition entitled "Prospects for Earth" [16-19], indicating the concern about the dangerous temperature range which can be achieved in this century and its dramatic consequences for human society. There is a concern in the scientific community [20-23] as regard the undesirable increase of global average temperature above 2°C compared to the average temperature of the pre-industrial era.

In the present work we will, first, display a series of relevant signals during 2006 and 2007 that has pushed the governments of central nations, within the realm of the U.N. organizations, to begin – more seriously than as usual – a phase of intensive discussions and proposals, with a sensible economical weight, as regard challenging environmental problems, mostly the global warming one. The 2008 economic crisis has thrown away all such a virtuous enterprise.

In second place, we will display a series of relevant signals during 2014 and first trimester of 2015 – analogously, we think, to the ones

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of 2006 and the first semester of 2007 – suggesting that the 21th COP of Paris, December, may lead to a new, maybe modest, but this time sustainable, turning point in economical effective measures for facing global warming effects. It is also emphasized the essential role of a growing people mobilization, reaching its highest peak around the time of the Paris event. And this role should be indispensable to anticipating the year of 2020 for the actual beginning of the Paris agreements about carbon emissions.

### **2006-2007: Signs of Effective Action of the Economic System to Face the Global Warming and the End of this Process in 2008**

Within the long history of capitalism, with its large systemic “permanent” features, we can select small and contingent passages that are not fully explicable only on themselves. This is the case of the small period 2006-2007 that, in a first historical approximation, can be framed in the mainstream of the trajectory of a growing socio environmental crisis which was generated and faced by that system for at least about 80 years, that is, from its large (and, in general, contradictory) systemic responses to the 29 crisis. Among these responses, we highlight here the “planned obsolescence” [24], initially implemented in huge military-industrial sector and that has led to a great relative increase in the exploration of planetary natural resources, with many amplified deleterious environmental consequences since then. How can we characterize more specifically the small period of 2006-2007? a) The capitalist system started to focus in only one of nine major global environmental problems, the global warming [7], which is at least in part anthropogenic (caused by industrial emissions of “greenhouse gases”, which - most likely - contribute to raise the planetary temperature beyond the intensification of the natural greenhouse effect); b) Some central capitalist countries intended, backed based on scientific analysis that articulate economy and ecology and design climate scenarios and their economic repercussions that come to sweep the present century (Stern [15] and IPCC Report [1]), to effectively “internalize” environmental costs of global warming (via planned investments for a certain period and with certain goals to reduce industrial greenhouse gas emissions) generated by the economic system itself as a way to, on the one hand, avoid bear environmental costs possibly much larger caused by future climate disasters that could reach hard or even derail the planetary capitalist production system in the current scenario of “business as usual” and, on the other hand, manifest a “pious” intention to “mitigate” the greatest poorest people suffering from a great ecological crisis. What are the main indicators that really in 2006-2007 the items (a) and (b) above have been taken into account?

i) The surprising inflection of Bush administration in 2006 (with its very strong ties to the oil industry) through to (at least) admit the dangers of global warming; it is quite possible that the monumental effects of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans in 2005 influenced this policy inflection [25];

ii) The release of the book/movie “An Inconvenient Truth” - in mid-2006 – by the former US vice president, Al Gore [26]; discounting the fact that the book is a blatant marketing of the author and that Gore has strong ties with renewable energy market groups, this book/movie led to a major expansion media in the dissemination of environmental positions on the issue of global warming; certainly very knowledgeable, Gore waited for the “right time” to launch these planetary “environmentalist” vehicles, in advance to the “great weather reports” that would follow soon (see below);

iii) In the late 2006, the famous “Stern Report” [15], which is sponsored by the British government, is published; in this report, headed by Nicolas Stern, former vice president of the World Bank, there is an exercise hitherto relatively absent in the major capitalist governments: a deep ecology-economy articulation between “climate scenarios of global warming” until 2100 and possible economic effects associated to each of them. From this level, Stern confronts the historical capitalist trend of “externalizing” the social and environmental costs that have been produced by the own capitalist system via global warming (there are enormous possibilities, according to the Report, that such climate effects will cause in long term a huge economic recession) with a proposal for planned investments from central countries (at a much lower cost than that likely recession on the horizon) specifically geared to minimize / stop the possible macroeconomic and social consequences of global warming in the large poorest part of the world;

iv) In the first half of 2007, the IPCC report [1], which was developed by around 2,500 scientists from the entire world, is published. Even considering that this report was strong and politically influenced by the involved governments, this document was a remarkable and irreversible march about the severe threats to the political and economic sustainability that the capitalist system could face throughout the XXI century if it persists to repeat the traditional “externalization” of environmental costs. Both Stern as the IPCC report suggested the contribution of annual funds of around 50-100 billion dollars for long periods during the XXI century. However we are compelled to criticize a kind of “end decision” of the IPCC 2007 (rather, Government decisions on the final draft of the Report) on the climate scenario still “acceptable” by the planet (and that the Copenhagen COP 2009 ratified): a scenario that provides cutting future emissions of carbon so that the average increase in global temperatures since the beginning of the XIX century until the end of the next (almost) one hundred years does not surpass more than two degrees Celsius. This proposition considers only the global climate scenarios and not also the interpenetration of these scenarios with world economic growth scenarios. Our future climate seems to be essentially obscurely decided by governments / economies of the core countries without a massive participation of our societies;

v) Closing this still incomplete list, we record that the Nobel Peace Prize 2007 bestowed Al Gore and the IPCC.

However the economic crisis that exploded in 2008 annulled all this discussion and progress made in 2006-2007 and stifled what looked like a supposedly “growing and sustainable” pressure (at least considering populations of the central countries) by increasing investments in fighting global warming by the richest countries governments. As if, magically, the environmental and economic crises were not deeply interconnected within the same planetary economic system. Only now, in 2014 and early 2015, some signs remind 2006 and early 2007 and that can lead to December COP in Paris out of superficiality that were invariably condemned similar annual meetings since 2008.

### **2014-2015: Will the Paris COP-2015 get out of the Superficiality of its Recent Predecessors?**

As we said above, there are signs that point as a whole to possibilities of Paris COP, which will occur in the end of 2015, finally leaves the superficiality of environmental meetings (global warming) which preceded it since 2008. We can list these supposed signs:

i) **The first signal** has been brought through an analogy with the Katrina disaster in 2005: a report emerging in June, 2014 and built up

by the leadership of the former New York Major, M. R. Bloomberg [27] and with collaborators like two former U.S. Secretaries of the Treasury: H.M. Paulson Jr. and G.P. Shultz. Just like the hurricane Katrina in 2005 has, probably, contributed to a change in the Bush government as regard at least the question of the global warming effect in 2006, so, probably, the hurricane Sandy in 2012, New York, has stimulated this Bloomberg's report by the same global climate effect;

ii) **The second signal** was the spectacular GDP U.S. decreasing (2.9% in the 2014 first trimester), issued in press in June, 2014 [28] due, at least partially, to a very strong winter this year: one may conjecture that due to this disastrous effect (only suspicions about a causal relationship between that local disastrous winter and global warming effects), president Obama has announced, now in June 2014 one of the stronger measures of the U.S. government, as appeared in press [29,30] up to that moment: a regulatory proposal cutting carbon emissions expelled by thermos-electric power in 30% up to 2030 as regard 2005 levels;

iii) **The third signal** was the important joint initiative of the US and Chinese governments in November 2014, in which the US government has committed to reducing its emissions by 26 -28% by 2025 and the Chinese government, to reduce their emissions by 20% by 2030. US and China emit more than a third of global emissions of greenhouse gases [31-33]. The joint statement highlights the important role that the two countries should play in combating climate change. This joint action aims to expand global climate negotiations seeking to reach a climate agreement in Paris;

iv) **The fourth signal** was the recent initiative of Obama's administration, in 18/03/2015: the US government has committed to reduce by 40%, compared to 2008, carbon emissions over the next 10 years (2025) [34,35]. The US government plans to reduce energy consumption in federal buildings; reduce greenhouse gas emissions in federal fleets, in part, using more hybrid vehicles;

v) **The fifth signal:** The United Kingdom leaders of government and opposition signed a joint commitment to tackle climate change, to protect the national security and economic prosperity. The Prime Minister, deputy prime minister and the opposition leader declared: "Climate change is one of the most serious threats facing the world today. It is not just a threat to the environment, but also to our national and global security, to poverty eradication and economic prosperity." [36,37]. "Combating climate change is an opportunity for the UK economy to grow in a stronger, more efficient and more resistant way", said the joint statement;

vi) **The sixth signal:** A group of founders of some of the largest companies on the planet known with B-Team requested on 05/02/15 to the UN Climate Convention efforts to the governments include in the Paris climate agreement the goal of zero net issues of world's greenhouse gases in 2050 and no longer wait for that goal in 2100 [38,39];

vii) **The seventh signal:** The Bank of England warns, in Tuesday 3 March, 2015, of huge financial risk from fossil fuel investments. Global action on climate change could cause insurer's investments on fossil fuels to take a huge hit, says bank's prudential regulation authority. Climate change is to be limited to 2°C, as pledged by the world's governments [40]. The bank will deliver a report to government on the financial risk posed by a "carbon bubble" later in 2015;

viii) **The eighth signal:** Pope Francis wants to achieve a feat that has escaped the secular powers and motivate decisive action on climate change. In 2015, the Pope will pronounce a message about it to the

world 1.2 billion Catholics, in a speech at the UN General Assembly and call a summit of major world religions [41]. According to Marcelo Sorondo, chancellor of the Vatican Pontifical Academy of Sciences, the Pope wishes to directly influence the UN climate meeting in Paris, when countries will try to complete 20 years of negotiations with a global agreement to reduce emissions;

ix) **The ninth signal** was the somewhat surprising "ExxonMobil reports to shareholders on managing climate risk" [42]. Financial Times [43] has told that "ExxonMobil, the US oil group, said [in that report] it was highly unlikely that the world would cut greenhouse emissions sufficiently to keep global warming within the internationally agreed limit of 2°C".

x) **The tenth signal:** Just like 2007, the new IPCC report has a remaining part predicted for 2015 [1];

xi) **the eleventh signal** were the marches in several cities in the world in September, 2014, notoriously in New York, congregating around 300.000 people [44-46] and where almost simultaneously has occurred the United Nations Climate Summit;

xii) **The twelfth signal** was the new and very recent Al Gore's (former U.S. vice-president) book [47], that just like his book/movie "An inconvenient truth" in 2006 [26], as we have commented above, "came in the right time and at the right place".

## Conclusions

All those and other signals from here to December, 2015, will only contribute to at least modest but consistent results in Paris, only if they are severely strengthened by people mobilization. Governments are primarily concerned with politic-economical intra and international compromises that bring them stability. Only large mass and pacific movements can introduce a piece of a wealthy instability inside such a quiet environmental scenario. However, in ultimate instance, only organized people around new sustainability and social banners – as it was discussed in the Introduction – will definitively push governments of central nations to necessary and urgent providences as regard a growing environmental crisis.

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