

The Danish Text

Written by Rodger A Payne

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The Danish Text

<https://www.e-ir.info/2009/12/09/the-danish-text/>

RODGER A PAYNE, DEC 9 2009

Should environmentalists and other progressives get worked up over the recently leaked “Danish text”? Today's *Guardian* summarized the key concerns raised by this alleged draft agreement among the rich states:

- Force developing countries to agree to specific emission cuts and measures that were not part of the original UN agreement;...
- Not allow poor countries to emit more than 1.44 tonnes of carbon per person by 2050, while allowing rich countries to emit 2.67 tonnes.

The Danish text would also abandon Kyoto and transfer most climate-related development assistance to the World Bank.

In many ways Kyoto is already dead. US Climate Envoy Todd Stern basically acknowledged as much earlier this year. The US never joined, even the EU nations have not met their emission reduction targets, and the reductions were far too modest to make much of a difference in the long run.

Eventually, environmentalists might even come to appreciate the death of Kyoto as a desirable turning point. A similar moment occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when after initial skepticism, arms controllers eventually had to concede that START was vastly superior to SALT. The deal was impossible to achieve until the former U.S.-Soviet enemies realized they had to stop gaming the process as part of geopolitical competition and become partners in significant disarmament.

Copenhagen might similarly prove superior to Kyoto — if a new deal includes the US, leads to real reductions by all major polluters, and obtains “buy in” from the developing world.

The carbon cap numbers circulating certainly sound unfair and problematic, but everyone should realize that they would be a dramatic improvement over the status quo. Indeed, the proposed ceilings should probably be framed in terms of percentage change. Many developing states would be allowed to maintain or in many cases significantly increase their emissions, while rich states would have to reduce their emissions on the order of 50 to 85% by mid-century.

In fact, dozens of developing states currently emit less than 1.44 T per person. Collier's “bottom billion” poorest peoples live in those states — most of Africa (including populous Nigeria and Ethiopia), the poorest areas of Asia (including populous Bangladesh and Pakistan), much of Central America, etc. India is also currently just below that ceiling. This is potentially 35 to 40% of the world that would be granted a helpful common, but differentiated responsibility.

By contrast, affluent states currently emit well above 2.67 T of carbon per person, which means that meeting the target would require unprecedented transformations in energy systems and lifestyles. The US is at 19 T, Canada at nearly 17, Germany nearly at 10, UK a bit over 9, etc. Even nuclear France is at 6.

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I suspect for the purposes of this 2050 target, China (and maybe India) would have to be included with the affluent countries. China is at 4.6 T/person and moving up the list at a rapid rate. India aspires to this position and is quickly proving itself economically capable.

In sum, the leaked potential agreement looks at first glance like just another example of the strong doing what they can at the expense of the weak (who must suffer as they will). However, it is also a reasonable snapshot of what must occur.

Backers need to work on the PR and framing.

About the author:

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