

# Lesson 4: Recent History

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this lesson is to make sure that your cast are aware of the recent history that shapes so much of this *Peace Child* musical story. Many of them will never have heard of Copenhagen Climate Change talks, or the Rio+20 Summit. Or R2P. We feel that it is important that they know the history before they try to re-enact it. And we want them to bring it right up to date! The recent hit play in London, *The Audience*, was about the Queen of England's weekly 'audiences' with her Prime Ministers – 12 of them since her first, Winston Churchill. Audiences were surprised, when it came to the scene with the current Prime Minister, David Cameron, to hear Mr Cameron referring to events that had happened that same month – sometimes even that same week! A simple trick – but one worth remembering as an attention-grabber for the *Peace Child* Musical: re-write the play right up until the days of performance – to take account of Recent History.

## BACKGROUND READING

- <http://rio20.ch/en/about-rio-20/histor/>
- <http://www.uncsd2012.org/history.html>

*These are a couple of 'Official Histories' of the recent history of Environment / Climate change negotiations. Both are written by UN / government bureaucrats thus do not give an objective account. I cannot find any decent history of the recent UN processes – which is why, as I was closely involved in much of this recent history, I make bold to offer you the following 6-page summary of my experience of the Copenhagen, and Rio+20 UN Summits.*

### **The United Nations? – well past its sell-by date?**

In its earliest days – in the 1950s – the UN was the go-to place to sort out international issues. Dag Hammarskjöld, the Swedish UN Secretary-General, is credited with ending the Korean War – and keeping the USA and USSR from each other's throats. When ever danger threatened, diplomats used to say: "Leave it to Dag..." And – more often than not – he would resolve it, until he died / was killed in a plane crash in the Belgian Congo. He was replaced by the shadowy figure of U Thant, a colourless Burmese diplomat who had none of the Swede's charisma or poetry. And – since the 1960s, - with one or two exceptions, the UN has been the passenger of international history, rather than its driver. From the genocide in Rwanda, to the current civil war in Syria – the UN has been all but powerless to 'save succeeding generations from the scourge of war' – or the abuse of human rights. Instead, it has busied itself by getting involved in development – and trying to eliminate poverty in a sustainable way: useful work, some of it – but not the diplomatic trouble-shooter that –anyway some! – of its architects imagined.

This version of the *Peace Child* Musical is inspired by – or a reaction to – this recent woeful history. As noted in Lesson TWO (*above*), it is absurd that two tiny countries, France and the United Kingdom, cling on to their permanent seats when huge countries such as India, Brazil and the entire continent of Africa – have no such representation. The UN's Rio Earth Summit in 1992 was a brief, glimmer of hope, following up Gro Harlem Brundtland's landmark Report on Sustainable Development, entitled: *Our Common Future*. But those hopes were quickly dashed by the failure of the OECD countries to come up with the additional funding required to achieve Agenda 21 – the UN's sustainable development agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Rather than put additional cash on the table, their contributions dropped – spurring the G-77 countries to say that: "*sustainable development is no development at all!*"

### **The United Nations and climate change?**

The process of meetings that emerged in relation to climate change produced the Kyoto agreement but, though the President of the USA signed it, he could not get his Congress to ratify it. Several other rich polluting countries (Australia, Japan, China) failed to support it. But the Parties to the Kyoto Agreement met every year in a process known as the 'Conference of the Parties' – or COP for short. At the COP-13 meeting in Indonesia in 2007, a Road Map was laid out, with targets and milestones, leading to the crucial COP-15 meeting in Copenhagen in December 2009.

### **Hopenhagen!**

It is hard to exaggerate the hope that was invested by organisations like our's in Copenhagen: for so long, nations had talked about limiting carbon emissions and dealing with the threat of catastrophic climate change. The USA had elected Barack Obama – and there was real enthusiasm in the environmental

community, and amongst politicians and business-leaders that the USA would come on board and drive forward framework legislation that would lead to the rapid construction of the Green Economy. Business was ready: *“Just give us the legal framework and a level playing international field and we will do it!”* – Dozens of Business Associations sprang up – just as they had around the original Rio Earth Summit: business knows, better than most, the cost implications of unstable energy supplies, and the insurance premium impacts of catastrophic climate change. And they were ready to do something about it – as soon as governments put in place the tax and subsidy regimes that would help direct their investments. Also, they had the technical means to build a green, sustainable economy: wind, wave and solar power – and the tempting prospect of 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> generation bio-fuels, which would use tube-grown algae, and vegetation grown on non-agricultural land. The Swedish province of Skane, just across the bridge from Copenhagen, was showing the way by committing, independently, to a zero carbon economy by 2030. The Danish island of ?? – had already shown the way by being zero carbon since 1996.

The Copenhagen meeting started so promisingly: tens of thousands of young people were there! Some had walked from China and India; many were doing hunger strikes, and all were lobbying their governments to strive for more ambitious targets. A Canadian group did a ‘Dinosaur of the Day’ Ceremony at the end of every day – a Oscar style ceremony where every one dressed up in Tuxedos and long dresses and awarded a plastic dinosaur to the government that had been backward in its commitments to dealing with climate change. (Many different governments won!)

All the G-8 Heads of State were coming – and though there were obviously wide differences, *(the Europeans all hoped that the USA and China would do more – the USA and China both hoped that the Europeans would agree to much less....!)* We, and the Danish hosts, felt that, after 15 years of bickering, a solid agreement was in our grasp. The Atmosphere was reminiscent of 1986 in Montreal when the protocol banning chlorofluorocarbons (which destroy the ozone layer) was passed.

### **Copenhagen Blues**

But it wasn’t to be. As reported by Mark Lynas, in an astonishing piece of 1<sup>st</sup> person reporting from the final, fateful meeting *(quoted in full below)* – the whole process was scuppered by the government of the People’s Republic of China. Opinions, and reports vary, but there is strong evidence to suggest that the Chinese Government was divided between the Foreign Ministry, who wanted to do a deal, and the President and the Politburo, who did not. The UN – and many senior diplomats – made the infantile diplomatic mistake of hearing only the views from that they wanted to hear *(from the Foreign Ministry)* – and not reading the very clear signals from the Chinese leadership, and their henchmen in G-77, who were making it absolutely clear to any one who bothered to listen to their almost daily statements, that they did NOT want a deal on anything like the terms that the Europeans and North America was offering.

But what could we – in Civil Society – do about such high political shenanigans?! We flooded the streets and the airwaves with our protests and our flag-waving: but all our hopes were dashed against the hard rocks of real politik – and the Chinese political imperative of continuing to open a dirty brown coal power station every week in the hope of bringing industrialization and prosperity to, and avoiding violent rebellion by, their millions of impoverished citizens living in the Western interior. China is a deeply divided and insecure nation: away from the economic miracle happening on their Eastern Coast – where huge cities and incredible wealth abound – there remains crushing poverty, racial tensions and instability.

Christmas 2009 was a bleak affair for environmental enthusiasts. We all got a bad case of the Copenhagen Blues! We had been so close! The media – the public – all but one government! – had been ready to do a deal. And the prospect of whipping up similar enthusiasm again for such UN processes was slim indeed. The UN’s Rio+20 Summit was announced during the Copenhagen Meeting – and those of us who had seen the writing on the wall about the ‘Catastrophe of Copenhagen’ were full of hope that, with its broader remit, 3-year run-in time-scale, and the possibility of brilliant leadership from Political and industry leaders – it could be the turning point we were looking for!

### **The United Nations Rio+20 Summit – for a Green, Sustainable Economy?**

We in Peace Child Intl. whipped up incredible enthusiasm around the world amongst youth for the Rio+20 Summit. It had so much going for it: it was about more than climate change! It was about accelerating sustainable development and the building of a green economy. Also – it was building on the original Rio Earth Summit process – which still stirred happy memories of a time when the United Nations was actually able to get things done. Also, it appeared that governments were really keen to get their young people invested in ‘creating the Future We Want’ – the UN’s slogan for the Summit. The US Delegation, at the first consultative meeting in May 2011, called Rio+20 a ‘Rio for 20-somethings!’ – and throughout the youth caucus made the running on a number of issues. PCI, itself, hosted or was involved 37 Youth Prepcoms in different countries around the world – calling for immediate government action,

through their tax and subsidy regimes, to reward the builders of the green, renewable, sustainable economy, and punish with heavy taxes those that remained addicted to the brown, fossil-fuelled economy.

Youth also spoke out against nuclear weapons – instruments clearly with no place in a green, sustainable economy. Alone amongst the pressure groups – youth also sought to remind the UN and its member states of its Charter Commitment to protect humanity from the ‘scourge of war’ – which again threatened to destroy young lives in Syria, the Great Lakes region of Africa, South Sudan and elsewhere. This commitment had recently been bolstered by the passing, in 2005, of what became known as the R2P legislation. Reacting to the Bosnian, Rwandan and South Sudanese ‘genocides,’ this called on all governments to observe the ‘Right to Protect’ its citizens – and permitted the international community to step in when a government was clearly failing to protect its citizens. Even as the Rio+20 process was advancing, there was the instance of a cyclone which hit the coast of Myanmar (Burma) – when the Military Junta in that country refused to allow international relief organisations into the country to assist the displaced, the sick and the wounded. Later, the principles of R2P were well and truly smashed when the UN allowed the government of Bashir al Assad to terrorize the Syrian people – creating millions to flee to the safety of Jordan and Turkey, and internally displacing millions of others.

But – promising though the Rio+20 agenda looked, and successful though Civil Society organisations like our’s were at banishing the Copenhagen Blues and getting people revved up and excited about the possible outcome, the seeds of its failure were sown early. For a start, none of the G-8 leaders agreed to come: Obama and Cameron signaled early that they would NOT come. We earnestly hoped that Angela Merkel, whose country, Germany, was proving that a rapid transition to the Green Economy was financially as well as ecologically profitable – would announce in September 2011 that she would come. But she didn’t. In the end, only Francois Hollande of France turned up – and he only for an hour to make a speech and pose for the photograph. It was shameful.

But more shameful – and incompetent – was the performance of the UN and its staff. Back in the day of “Leave it to Dag...,” – the UN leadership knocked heads together and came up with agreements that all might not be fully happy with – but with which they could live. The weakly UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, appointed China’s senior diplomat, Sha Zukang as the secretary general of the Rio+20 Summit. Given China’s performance at Copenhagen, this was not a promising step, especially as Zukang protested that he knew nothing about Sustainable Development. He was also an idiot, frequently drunk, and mostly famous for shouting at Ban Ki-Moon in a ludicrously drunken scene at a meeting in Salzburg. Zukang appointed a bizarre Frenchman, Bryce Lalonde, and the former Minister of Environment of Barbados, Barbara Thompson, to be the principle organisers. Neither was a political heavy-weight – and neither had any clear idea of what they wanted out of the Summit – except the transition of the UN Environment Programme to being a full-scale UN Agency. (Hardly something that you needed a Summit to achieve!)

### **Zero Draft – Zero Content!**

Zukang then set the already stretched staff of the Commission for Sustainable Development to manage the summit. Though a ton of excellent ideas and strategies poured into the UN from all quarters ahead of the November 2011 deadline for submissions, the Zero Draft Agreement delivered in January 2012 was a pale a sickly document. One of the UN staff people confided to me that this was all part of a ‘Cunning Plan’: *“By pitching the Zero Draft low and weak, we will encourage member states to think: ‘We can do better than this...!’ And they will!!!”* But of course, they didn’t: the member states did, indeed, protest the weakness of the document, but they did little to change it. And the ‘Negotiations’ descended into their normal extended frenzy of word-smithing and idea insertion – most of which remained in ‘brackets’ (ie. Not agreed) – right up to the Final Prepcom, a few days before the 100+ Heads of State who had agreed to come were scheduled to arrive.

At which point, the Brazilian hosts were seriously worried: another ‘Copenhagen Catastrophe’ threatened – and this one would be worse for them as they were so identified with the Rio+20 initiative. So – over the final weekend, they demanded the right to create a ‘final, non-negotiable text’ – and duly did so, delivering it to a shocked audience of media, politicians and civil society on the Monday morning. They had, of course, done so with the full agreement of the shamefully compliant Sha Zukang and the UN authorities. And when the Europeans and others protested loudly at the feebleness of the non-negotiable text – Sha and his cronies sided with the Brazilians: they had, after all, paid for the summit, and the UN knew on which side its bread was buttered. Also – they bet, correctly as it turned out, that the Europeans would fume and spit rage for a while, but eventually fall into line. And they did. Nick Clegg, the British Deputy Prime Minister, leading the British Delegation, wanted to ‘pull the plug’ on the whole thing. So did Janez Potocnik, the European Commissioner for the Environment – who recognized that the Brazilian text represented a massive betrayal of the Road Map to Resource Efficiency – and the other carefully prepared

documents that his staff had prepared for Rio+20 over the previous 18 months of work. But they didn't walk out – or raise their voices. They politely wrote off millions of Euros of investment in the summit, and opted for the easy life.

### **A Missed Opportunity**

This was a great mistake: had the Europeans had the guts to walk out – as our youth did – it would have become clear to the Brazilians and the G-77 (poorer) countries, that there is indeed a gulf between those countries that are working towards a bright, green sustainable future – and those wedded to the brown, dying fossil-fuelled economy that is driving climate change and draining the world of resources at an alarming rate. Rio+20 would not have been the big success we had all hoped for – but it would have set a marker, and created a coalition of those willing and eager to drive the rapid transition from the Brown to the Green economy.

As it was, they were left with a mess and a muddle – and absolutely no progress on any front: as many commentators pointed out – the Rio+20 statement represented a huge step backwards from the commitments agreed at the original Earth Summit – 20-years earlier. For PCI – after its 37 prepcoms – the weakness of the language on education for the Green Economy was in stark contrast to the courageous claims of Chapter 36 of the original Agenda 21. The Rio+20 document parroted UNESCO language about continuing the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development – an initiative of such astounding failure, it was impossible not to laugh at the naivete of the drafters of the Brazilian text.

### **Learning through Disillusion**

Those of us who had worked so hard – and the young people who had contributed so many startling and original ideas – for education, for youth participation, for youth-led development and green job creation, were all heartily disgusted by the Rio Process. The 360 young people whom PCI had accredited for the Summit, all tore up their ground pass cards – and walked out of the Summit in protest. Prior to their walk out – they had a chant & repeat session: the scene from which we have a short extract in the musical.

Those of us who wanted to hear Mr Zukang defend his indefensible behavior at the Summit's final press conference were disappointed: he announced that the Summit had been a huge success – and that many commitments had been made. And that he would retire from the UN on the Monday following – and that he would take no questions. With that he got up and left – leaving the sad Frenchman, M Bryce Lalonde, to field what – by that time – had become a fairly abject and sullen press corps.

### **The Death of the COP Climate Change Process?**

Meanwhile, the Copenhagen Conference of the Parties (COP) maunders on – with another meeting scheduled for December 2013 in Warsaw (in Poland – a country well-known for its commitment to coal-sourced energy!) – and a possibly final COP in Paris in 2015. Every one seems resigned to the fact that the COP process is going nowhere. A climate change agreement appears to be beyond humanity's reach: there are just too many countries – and political imperatives – standing in the way of it. And so, because there appears to be no immediate prospect of the planet disappearing in a puff of smoke any time soon, politicians are delighted to be able to take the easy way out, and abandon all pretence of reaching a solution. (In May / June 2013, the climate change experts from different governments met for an expensive meeting in Bonn, Germany: but the Russian delegation had been offended by something that the Qataris had said during their COP meeting in Doha in 2012 – and so proceeded to stall 'all substantive discussions' during the Bonn Meeting. And these people claim to be acting on behalf of future generations?! What a joke!

### **The Next Big UN Thing?**

At the time of writing, the UN is engaged in a somewhat confusing parallel process:

- 1) Drafting Sustainable Development Goals to replace the Millennium Development goals which expire in 2015; – *and* –
- 2) Preparing a Post-2015 Development Agenda.

For the latter, David Cameron and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf chaired a High-level Panel to come up with ideas and a strategy for the Post-2015 Agenda. Their Report is intriguing – and very well written by highly competent UN staffers and UK Development Professionals. But one cannot help but be bewildered by the parallel process – which everyone asserts is linked – but which shows no sign of convergence.

Peace Child Intl. has learned its lesson: the UN has let young people – and the planet's future – down one time too many. We are focused now on concrete development work – and educating young people to transition from the Brown to the Green Economy – the generational challenge of their lifetimes. That – and creating jobs for the billion young people who will come on to the job market in the next ten years – is our

priority. That – and raising awareness amongst the rising generation through this Peace Child play.

As for the UN? – well, they used to call the Ottoman Empire the ‘*sick man of Europe*’ before the 1<sup>st</sup> World War put it out of its misery: the UN is now the sick man of the international community – its institutions reviled and dysfunctional, its staff demoralized, and its purpose unclear. It is impossible to think that any one will be able to stir up any enthusiasm for a COP or a Rio process in the lifetimes of the youth currently passing through our schools – unless – UNLESS!!! – something along the lines of what happens in the musical happens in real life.

And that – that! – is the purpose of studying the recent history: you have to imagine a shiny new UN – re-invented for the Internet age. And circumstances are converging – and might reach critical mass in a few years time – to ensure that such a transformation does happen!

### **Signs of Hope!**

Climate Change experts have, at last, gotten over their Copenhagen Blues! A number of interesting papers have conspired to give a new sense of urgency to the climate change question:

1. **Loss and Damage**: At the Doha COP meeting, a new section appeared in the legislation under consideration, called: Loss and Damage section. It was significant as President Obama had just bailed out the insurance companies for their liability for the damage wrought by Superstorm Sandy to the Eastern Seaboard of the USA. The figure quoted was \$85 billion dollars – but in fact, it was probably closer to \$50bn. At the time of writing – very little of the money has gotten to the people whose homes were destroyed. But – all at once – real estate agents and insurance companies were extremely concerned about who would foot the bill for catastrophic climate change if – or when – it started to happen. It would flood millions of acres of valuable coastal real estate destroying trillions of dollars worth of expensive homes. Insurance Companies clearly don’t have deep enough pockets to cover such losses; oil companies might – but they screamed that it was NOT their fault as governments had taken no steps to prevent them drilling for, refining and producing oil, coal and gas. So – catastrophic climate change will be paid for by the tax-payer. The real estate merchants who build their new developments on coastal land, and the insurance companies who cover them, will likely not pay a penny. Nor will the fossil fuel companies.

Needless to say, the Loss and Damage clauses were quickly struck out of the Doha Declaration in favour of some mealy-mouthed language about considering compensation for victims of climate change at some later date. But – the blow had been struck: suddenly, governments – ALL governments – realised that, at some point in the future, climate change, like pensions, was going to cost them – BIG time! And some – in some parts of government and industry – are beginning to contemplate the economic consequences of those costs. And what might be done about it.

Perhaps the most perceptive of these analyses was a 2006 Report by World Bank Economist, Nicholas Stern. In an intriguing echo of the Classical legend of the Sybilline Books, Stern pointed out that preparing for the transition from the Brown to the Green Economy, would cost about 1% of GDP – IF – the work started immediately. If the world waited 10 years, it would cost about 5%; wait 20-years – it will cost 15% - wait 50 years, and it would cost close to 100% of GDP! That was seven years ago – and no one – NO ONE! – is talking about it.

2. **Carbon Bubble**: in April 2013, Nicholas Stern produced a new Report. It pointed out that when, eventually, governments get around the recognizing the seriousness of the climate change catastrophe about to over-take them, and recognise the imperative of passing legislation that will force oil and coal companies to keep their prized assets in the ground, the economic consequences to our Business Community would make the crash of 2008 look like a minor economic blip. Stern imagines the consequences of the Big Seven Oil Companies being forced to keep two thirds of their known reserves in the ground. If those reserves are worth – say \$10 Trillion dollars, the legislation would, at a stroke, wipe \$10 trillion dollars off the share value of 7 of the world’s biggest companies.

Needless to say, none of the governments – or the oil companies – wanted to even think about the new Stern Report. They ignored it – BUT – most of the leaders of those companies and those governments will be dead when Stern’s predictions come true. The young people passing through our schools today have a right to know about the challenges that are coming hurtling down the pike towards them. Teacher - and drama producers – like you! – have a duty to inform them!

# **COPENHAGEN REPORT:**

*Mark Lynas, Guardian Newspaper, Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2009*

Copenhagen was a disaster. That much is agreed. But the truth about what actually happened is in danger of being lost amid the spin and inevitable mutual recriminations. The truth is this: China wrecked the talks, intentionally humiliated Barack Obama, and insisted on an awful "deal" so western leaders would walk away carrying the blame. How do I know this? Because I was in the room and saw it happen.

China's strategy was simple: block the open negotiations for two weeks, and then ensure that the closed-door deal made it look as if the west had failed the world's poor once again. And sure enough, the aid agencies, civil society movements and environmental groups all took the bait. The failure was "the inevitable result of rich countries refusing adequately and fairly to shoulder their overwhelming responsibility", said Christian Aid. "Rich countries have bullied developing nations," fumed Friends of the Earth International.

All very predictable, but the complete opposite of the truth. Even George Monbiot, writing in yesterday's Guardian, made the mistake of singly blaming Obama. But I saw Obama fighting desperately to salvage a deal, and the Chinese delegate saying "no", over and over again. Monbiot even approvingly quoted the Sudanese delegate Lumumba Di-Aping, who denounced the Copenhagen accord as "a suicide pact, an incineration pact, in order to maintain the economic dominance of a few countries".

Sudan behaves at the talks as a puppet of China; one of a number of countries that relieves the Chinese delegation of having to fight its battles in open sessions. It was a perfect stitch-up. China gutted the deal behind the scenes, and then left its proxies to savage it in public.

Here's what actually went on late last Friday night, as heads of state from two dozen countries met behind closed doors. Obama was at the table for several hours, sitting between Gordon Brown and the Ethiopian prime minister, Meles Zenawi. The Danish prime minister chaired, and on his right sat Ban Ki-moon, secretary-general of the UN. Probably only about 50 or 60 people, including the heads of state, were in the room. I was attached to one of the delegations, whose head of state was also present for most of the time.

What I saw was profoundly shocking. The Chinese premier, Wen Jinbao, did not deign to attend the meetings personally, instead sending a second-tier official in the country's foreign ministry to sit opposite Obama himself. The diplomatic snub was obvious and brutal, as was the practical implication: several times during the session, the world's most powerful heads of state were forced to wait around as the Chinese delegate went off to make telephone calls to his "superiors".

## **Shifting the blame**

To those who would blame Obama and rich countries in general, know this: it was China's representative who insisted that industrialised country targets, previously agreed as an 80% cut by 2050, be taken out of the deal. "Why can't we even mention our own targets?" demanded a furious Angela Merkel. Australia's prime minister, Kevin Rudd, was annoyed enough to bang his microphone. Brazil's representative too pointed out the illogicality of China's position. Why should rich countries not announce even this unilateral cut? The Chinese delegate said no, and I watched, aghast, as Merkel threw up her hands in despair and conceded the point. Now we know why – because China bet, correctly, that Obama would get the blame for the Copenhagen accord's lack of ambition.

China, backed at times by India, then proceeded to take out all the numbers that mattered. A 2020 peaking year in global emissions, essential to restrain temperatures to 2C, was removed and replaced by woolly language suggesting that emissions should peak "as soon as possible". The long-term target, of global 50% cuts by 2050, was also excised. No one else, perhaps with the exceptions of India and Saudi Arabia, wanted this to happen. I am certain that had the Chinese not been in the room, we would have left Copenhagen with a deal that had environmentalists popping champagne corks popping in every corner of the world.

## **Strong position**

So how did China manage to pull off this coup? First, it was in an extremely strong negotiating position. China didn't need a deal. As one developing country foreign minister said to me: "The Athenians had nothing to offer to the Spartans." On the other hand, western leaders in particular – but also presidents Lula of Brazil, Zuma of South Africa, Calderón of Mexico and many others – were desperate for a positive outcome. Obama needed a strong deal perhaps more than anyone. The US had confirmed the offer of \$100bn to developing countries for adaptation, put serious cuts on the table for the first time (17% below 2005 levels by 2020), and was obviously prepared to up its offer.

Above all, Obama needed to be able to demonstrate to the Senate that he could deliver China in any global climate regulation framework, so conservative senators could not argue that US carbon cuts would further advantage Chinese industry. With midterm elections looming, Obama and his staff also knew that Copenhagen would be probably their only opportunity to go to climate change talks with a strong mandate. This further strengthened China's negotiating hand, as did the complete lack of civil society political pressure on either China or India. Campaign groups never blame developing countries for failure; this is an iron rule that is never broken. The Indians, in particular, have become past masters at co-opting the language of equity ("equal rights to the atmosphere") in the service of planetary suicide – and leftist campaigners and commentators are hoist with their own petard.

With the deal gutted, the heads of state session concluded with a final battle as the Chinese delegate insisted on removing the 1.5C target so beloved of the small island states and low-lying nations who have most to lose from rising seas. President Nasheed of the Maldives, supported by Brown, fought valiantly to save this crucial number. "How can you ask my country to go extinct?" demanded Nasheed. The Chinese delegate feigned great offence – and the number stayed, but surrounded by language which makes it all but meaningless. The deed was done.

## **China's game**

All this raises the question: what is China's game? Why did China, in the words of a UK-based analyst who also spent hours in heads of state meetings, "not only reject targets for itself, but also refuse to allow any other country to take on binding targets?" The analyst, who has attended climate conferences for more than 15 years, concludes that China wants to weaken the climate regulation regime now "in order to avoid the risk that it might be called on to be more ambitious in a few years' time".

This does not mean China is not serious about global warming. It is strong in both the wind and solar industries. But China's

growth, and growing global political and economic dominance, is based largely on cheap coal. China knows it is becoming an uncontested superpower; indeed its newfound muscular confidence was on striking display in Copenhagen. Its coal-based economy doubles every decade, and its power increases commensurately. Its leadership will not alter this magic formula unless they absolutely have to.

Copenhagen was much worse than just another bad deal, because it illustrated a profound shift in global geopolitics. This is fast becoming China's century, yet its leadership has displayed that multilateral environmental governance is not only not a priority, but is viewed as a hindrance to the new superpower's freedom of action. I left Copenhagen more despondent than I have felt in a long time. After all the hope and all the hype, the mobilisation of thousands, a wave of optimism crashed against the rock of global power politics, fell back, and drained away.

## **RIO+20 REPORT:**

*George Monbiot's columns on the Rio+20 Summit in the Guardian (UK) Newspaper, June 2012*

Worn down by hope. That's the predicament of those who have sought to defend the earth's living systems. Every time governments meet to discuss the environmental crisis, we are told that this is the "make or break summit", upon which the future of the world depends. The talks might have failed before, but this time the light of reason will descend upon the world.

We know it's rubbish, but we allow our hopes to be raised, only to witness 190 nations arguing through the night over the use of the subjunctive in paragraph 286. We know that at the end of this process the UN secretary-general, whose job obliges him to talk nonsense in an impressive number of languages, will explain that the unresolved issues (namely all of them) will be settled at next year's summit. Yet still we hope for something better.

This week's earth summit in Rio de Janeiro is a ghost of the glad, confident meeting 20 years ago. By now, the leaders who gathered in the same city in 1992 told us, the world's environmental problems were to have been solved. But all they have generated is more meetings, which will continue until the delegates, surrounded by rising waters, have eaten the last rare dove, exquisitely presented with an olive leaf roulade. The biosphere, that world leaders promised to protect, is in a far worse state than it was 20 years ago(1). Is it not time to recognise that they have failed?

These summits have failed for the same reason that the banks have failed. Political systems which were supposed to represent everyone now return governments of millionaires, financed by and acting on behalf of billionaires. The past 20 years have been a billionaires' banquet. At the behest of corporations and the ultra-rich, governments have removed the constraining decencies – the laws and regulations – which prevent one person from destroying another. To expect governments funded and appointed by this class to protect the biosphere and defend the poor is like expecting a lion to live on gazpacho.

You have only to see the way the United States has savaged the earth summit's draft declaration to grasp the scale of this problem(2). The word "equitable", the US insists, must be cleansed from the text. So must any mention of the right to food, water, health, the rule of law, gender equality and women's empowerment. So must a clear target of preventing two degrees of global warming. So must a commitment to change "unsustainable consumption and production patterns" and to decouple economic growth from the use of natural resources.

Most significantly, the US delegation demands the removal of many of the foundations agreed by a Republican president in Rio in 1992. In particular, it has set out to purge all mention of the core principle of that earth summit: common but differentiated responsibilities(3). This means that while all countries should strive to protect the world's resources, those with the most money and who have done the most damage should play a greater part.

This is the government, remember, not of George W Bush but of Barack Obama. The paranoid, petty, unilateralist sabotage of international agreements continues uninterrupted. To see Obama backtracking on the commitments made by Bush the elder 20 years ago is to see the extent to which a tiny group of plutocrats has asserted its grip on policy.

While the destructive impact of the US in Rio is greater than that of any other nation, this does not excuse our own failures. The UK government prepared for the earth summit by wrecking both our own climate change act(4,5) and the European energy efficiency directive(6). David Cameron will not be attending the earth summit. Nor will the energy and climate change secretary Ed Davey (which is probably a blessing, as he's totally useless). Needless to say Cameron, with other absentees such as Obama and Merkel, are attending the G20 summit in Mexico, which takes place immediately before Rio. Another tenet of the 1992 summit – that economic and environmental issues should not be treated in isolation(7) – goes up in smoke.

The environmental crisis cannot be addressed by the emissaries of billionaires. It is the system that needs to be challenged, not the individual decisions it makes. The struggle to protect the biosphere is in this respect the same as the struggle for redistribution, for the protection of workers' rights, for an enabling state, for equality before the law.

So this is the great question of our age: where is everyone? The monster social movements of the 19th century and first 80 years of the 20th have gone, and nothing has replaced them. Those of us who still contest unwarranted power find our footsteps echoing through cavernous halls once thronged by multitudes. When a few hundred people do make a stand – as the Occupy campers have done – the rest of the nation just waits for them to achieve the kind of change that requires the sustained work of millions.

Without mass movements, without the kind of confrontation required to revitalise democracy, everything of value is deleted from the political text. But we do not mobilise, perhaps because we are endlessly seduced by hope. Hope is the rope on which we hang.

In 1992 world leaders signed up to something called "sustainability". Few of them were clear about what it meant; I suspect that many of them had no idea. Perhaps as a result, it did not take long for this concept to mutate into something subtly different: "sustainable development". Then it made a short jump to another term: "sustainable growth". And now, in the **2012 Earth Summit text** that world leaders are about to adopt, it has subtly mutated once more: into "sustained growth".

This term crops up 16 times in the document, where it is used interchangeably with sustainability and sustainable

development. But if sustainability means anything, it is surely the opposite of sustained growth. Sustained growth on a finite planet is the essence of unsustainability.

As Robert Skidelsky, who comes at this issue from a different angle, [observes in the Guardian today](#):

“Aristotle knew of insatiability only as a personal vice; he had no inkling of the collective, politically orchestrated insatiability that we call economic growth. The civilization of “always more” would have struck him as moral and political madness. And, beyond a certain point, it is also economic madness. This is not just or mainly because we will soon enough run up against the natural limits to growth. It is because we cannot go on for much longer economising on labour faster than we can find new uses for it.”

Several of the more outrageous deletions proposed by the United States – such as any mention of rights or equity or of common but differentiated responsibilities – have been rebuffed. In other respects the Obama government’s purge has succeeded, striking out such concepts as “unsustainable consumption and production patterns” and the proposed decoupling of economic growth from the use of natural resources.

At least the states due to sign this document haven’t ripped up the declarations from the last Earth Summit, 20 years ago. But in terms of progress since then, that’s as far as it goes. Reaffirming the Rio 1992 commitments is perhaps the most radical principle in the entire declaration.

As a result, the draft document, which seems set to become the final document, takes us precisely nowhere. 190 governments have spent 20 years bracing themselves to “acknowledge”, “recognise” and express “deep concern” about the world’s environmental crises, but not to do anything about them.

This paragraph from the declaration sums up the problem for me:

*“We recognize that the planet Earth and its ecosystems are our home and that Mother Earth is a common expression in a number of countries and regions and we note that some countries recognize the rights of nature in the context of the promotion of sustainable development. We are convinced that in order to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environment needs of present and future generations, it is necessary to promote harmony with nature.”*

It sounds lovely, doesn’t it? It could be illustrated with rainbows and psychedelic unicorns and stuck on the door of your toilet. But without any proposed means of implementation, it might just as well be deployed for a different function in the same room.

The declaration is remarkable for its absence of figures, dates and targets. It is as stuffed with meaningless platitudes as an advertisement for payday loans, but without the necessary menace. There is nothing to work with here, no programme, no sense of urgency or call for concrete action beyond the inadequate measures already agreed in previous flaccid declarations. Its tone and contents would be better suited to a retirement homily than a response to a complex of escalating global crises.

The draft and probably final declaration is 283 paragraphs of fluff. It suggests that the 190 governments due to approve it have, in effect, given up on multilateralism, given up on the world and given up on us.

So now what do we do to defend life on Earth?

It is, perhaps, the greatest failure of collective leadership since the first world war. The Earth’s living systems are collapsing, and the leaders of some of the most powerful nations – the US, the UK, Germany, Russia – could not even be bothered to turn up and discuss it. Those who did attend the Earth summit last week solemnly agreed to keep stoking the destructive fires: sixteen times in their text they pledged to pursue “sustained growth”, the primary cause of the biosphere’s losses(1).

The efforts of governments are concentrated not on defending the living Earth from destruction, but on defending the machine that is destroying it. Whenever consumer capitalism becomes snarled up by its own contradictions, governments scramble to mend the machine, to ensure – though it consumes the conditions that sustain our lives – that it runs faster than ever before.

The thought that it might be the wrong machine, pursuing the wrong task, cannot even be voiced in mainstream politics. The machine greatly enriches the economic elite, while insulating the political elite from the mass movements it might otherwise confront. We have our bread; now we are wandering, in spellbound reverie, among the circuses.

We have used our unprecedented freedoms, secured at such cost by our forebears, not to agitate for justice, for redistribution, for the defence of our common interests, but to pursue the dopamine hits triggered by the purchase of products we do not need. The world’s most inventive minds are deployed not to improve the lot of humankind but to devise ever more effective means of stimulation, to counteract the diminishing satisfactions of consumption. The mutual dependencies of consumer capitalism ensure that we all unwittingly conspire in the trashing of what may be the only living planet. The failure at Rio de Janeiro belongs to us all.

It marks, more or less, the end of the multilateral effort to protect the biosphere. The only successful global instrument – the Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer – was agreed and implemented years before the first Earth Summit in 1992(2). It was one of the last fruits of a different political era, in which intervention in the market for the sake of the greater good was not considered anathema, even by the Thatcher and Reagan governments. Everything of value discussed since then has led to weak, unenforceable agreements, or to no agreements at all.

This is not to suggest that the global system and its increasingly pointless annual meetings will disappear or even change. The governments which allowed the Earth Summit and all such meetings to fail evince no sense of responsibility for this outcome, and appear untroubled by the thought that if a system hasn’t worked for 20 years there’s something wrong with the system. They walk away, aware that there are no political penalties; that the media is as absorbed in consumerist trivia as the rest of us; that, when future generations have to struggle with the mess they have left behind, their contribution will have been forgotten. (And then they lecture the rest of us on responsibility).

Nor is it to suggest that multilateralism should be abandoned. Agreements on biodiversity, the oceans and the trade in endangered species may achieve some marginal mitigation of the full-spectrum assault on the biosphere that the consumption

machine has unleashed. But that's about it.

The action – if action there is – will mostly be elsewhere. Those governments which retain an interest in planet Earth will have to work alone, or in agreement with likeminded nations. There will be no means of restraining free riders, no means of persuading voters that their actions will be matched by those of other countries.

That we have missed the chance of preventing two degrees of global warming now seems obvious. That most of the other planetary boundaries will be crossed, equally so. So what do we do now?

Some people will respond by giving up, or at least withdrawing from political action. Why, they will ask, should we bother, if the inevitable destination is the loss of so much of what we hold dear: the forests, the brooks, the wetlands, the coral reefs, the sea ice, the glaciers, the birdsong and the night chorus, the soft and steady climate which has treated us kindly for so long? It seems to me that there are at least three reasons.

The first is to draw out the losses over as long a period as possible, in order to allow our children and grandchildren to experience something of the wonder and delight in the natural world and of the peaceful, unharried lives with which we have been blessed. Is that not a worthy aim, even if there were no other?

The second is to preserve what we can in the hope that conditions might change. I do not believe that the planet-eating machine, maintained by an army of mechanics, oiled by constant injections of public money, will collapse before the living systems on which it feeds. But I might be wrong. Would it not be a terrible waste to allow the tiger, the rhinoceros, the bluefin tuna, the queen's executioner beetle and the scabious cuckoo bee, the hotlips fungus and the fountain anemone(3) to disappear without a fight if this period of intense exploitation turns out to be a brief one?

The third is that, while we may possess no influence over decisions made elsewhere, there is plenty that can be done within our own borders. *Rewilding* – the mass restoration of ecosystems – offers the best hope we have of creating refuges for the natural world, which is why I've decided to spend much of the next few years promoting it here and abroad.

Giving up on global agreements or, more accurately, on the prospect that they will substantially alter our relationship with the natural world, is almost a relief. It means walking away from decades of anger and frustration. It means turning away from a place in which we have no agency to one in which we have, at least, a chance of being heard. But it also invokes a great sadness, as it means giving up on so much else.

Was it too much to have asked of the world's governments, which performed such miracles in developing stealth bombers and drone warfare, global markets and trillion dollar bail-outs, that they might spend a tenth of the energy and resources they devoted to these projects on defending our living planet? It seems, sadly, that it was.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

Clearly, there is much to discuss in all this Recent History. But – it really all comes down to a single discussion point: 'WHAT CAN WE DO?'

### What can we do?!

Set up a homework assignment to explore this Recent History: there is a ton of material to enrich the summary and articles I have provided above – some from the websites that I have offered above.

The Discussion I urge you to have is an in-depth discussion about: "What we can do!" - in preparation for the Improvisation below. In particular, you might wish to discuss the following key points:

- What should youth do when governments embrace the concept of 'Sustainable Development – which they define as *'meeting the needs of today's generation while not compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs....'* – when, self-evidently, such governments don't care a fig for the needs of future generations who neither vote for them, pay them taxes, nor – in many cases – even exist yet!?
- What would you have done when faced with the appalling betrayals meted out by governments on young people at both Rio+20 and Copenhagen?
- Lynas is pretty severe in his criticism of China at Copenhagen: he is probably right – but how does a young person – or a diplomat – avoid demonising, and driving into a corner, intransigent governments which, for reasons of self-interest, and perhaps self-preservation, do things that are not in the best interests of their people or the planet?
- Faced with the immense challenge of real-politik, super-power economies, and clever governments who manage to do terrible things and ensure others get the blame for them, do you feel that turning the taps off while you are brushing your teeth, recycling bottles and cans, or cycling to school – are adequate responses to the generational challenge youth face? What more can YOU do?!!

## IMPROVISATIONS

- A. **The Post-Copenhagen TV Chat Show**: at the end of Scene FOUR, Cobra Winfrey invites the team to come back and talk to her after Copenhagen. I have written this scene several times – and love almost every version of it – BUT: it has never been performed because –
  - 1) we have always done 1-act versions of the show - *and* -

2) it seems to take the action backwards, not forwards.

But – the scene is an excellent way of enabling your cast to explore the issues that came up in Copenhagen and Rio+20. Set it up – with the same girl playing Cobra! And she asks three, relatively simple, questions:

1. What happened in Copenhagen? (*Answer with the recent history*)
2. What are you going to do now? (*Answer with the results of your discussion points*)
3. What's next for the UN? (*Talk about why you are enthusiastic about Rio+20*)

B. “**Not in Our Name!**” At the end of Scene THIRTEEN – ‘Reality Sucks!’ – scene, the youth do the chant and repeat session – on the theme of ‘Not in our Name!’ This is summarised from a session that went on for about two hours at the Rio UN Summit Centre. It happened ahead of the mass youth walk-out when youth delegates cut up their plastic ground passes and left the building. You could – of course! – make a much more dramatic scene out of this: find out more about what happened and improvise new lines for the scene. Sit the cast in a circle, and demand that each cast member come up with a line, that the rest of the cast then repeat. Get them to be really, really angry! It was that anger that was most impressive about the scene I remember at Rio Centro!

### DROP-IN IDEAS

1. **The New Cobra Scene:** Once you have done an improvisation, and you have decided on the length of your show – and whether or not you want to have an intermission, - you can agree whether or not to include such a scene in the show. And – note – we usually include Pavel Sydor’s song: “We want this world to survive for ever!” – another song available on the Peace Child Website: additional songs;
2. **A new Copenhagen Scene:** The scene we use is a straight lift from what Mark Lynas describes. But you could imagine a million different scenes: the international gang from Stanford could be involved in a ‘Dinosaur of the Day’ scene. Or they could be frozen out of the Copenhagen Conference Centre (as all the youth and civil society delegates were in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Week) – learning of the betrayal of the last night from disgruntled diplomats leaving the building.
3. **A New Rio+20 Scene:** Imagine a scene in which young people try to defend the right of “*future generations to meet their needs...*” There was a contest run by one NGO to enable a young person to speak first at the Summit session. A New Zealand girl won – and you can see her speech at: For me, a much better speech was the one delivered by Severin Suzuki at the original Rio Earth Summit in 1992. See it at: Think about it - one young person has the chance to address World Leaders at a major UN Summit: what would you say? Write the speech – and use it somewhere in the UN scene!