

G8: up in smoke

[Climate Change](#) | [Alan Moran](#)
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There was a large dose of whimsy in the G8 leaders getting together in Berlusconi's Italy last week. Not only did it place the host's colourful private life at the centre of the world's stage but it was further enlivened by the world leaders' decision to adopt targets for emission levels 40 years into the future.

As a target date 2050 is ludicrously beyond the life expectancies of all the leaders adopting it, none would be held responsible for its failure.

This aside, the specific numbers adopted make no sense.

What was signed on to at L'Aquila is that the developed countries would reduce their emissions in 2050 by 80 per cent and the developing countries by 50 per cent. Present per capita emission levels of carbon dioxide are 11.5 and 2.4 tonnes for the developed world and the developing world respectively. The former Soviet block stands at 7.9 tonnes.

Using simple arithmetic, by 2050 the 80 per cent cut would leave the developed world with 2.9 tonnes of carbon dioxide per capita and the developing world with less than half of this at 1.2 tonnes per capita. And this is based on the unlikely event of population growth in the developing countries slowing to the level of that in the developed world.

On top of their ethereal time frame, the targets are therefore internally inconsistent. The rich countries are plucking out of the air goals that they know they will never be able to reach and cannot be made accountable for. And in the process they are consigning the developed world to second class status with less than half the per capita emissions they are solemnly pledging to foist on their own constituents.

It is little wonder that China and India rejected the agreement before the ink had dried, as did Russia.

The Asian emerging superpowers are increasingly supplying the goods to the debt-ridden and ever more sclerotic western developed economies. Far from being willing to accept a lower level of emissions than the developed economies, these and other rapidly developing countries are clamouring for additional emission credits to take into consideration previous emissions.

The way they see it, for the best part of a century it is the developed countries that have been emitting gases into the atmosphere that they claim is leading to harmful global warming. Any paring back of such emissions should recognise the "sacrifice" the poorer countries' low income levels have made in the cumulative emission totals.

On top of this the poorer countries, including India and China, want to see one per cent of rich countries' annual GDP transferred to them.

Beleaguered British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has suggested a transfer of \$US122 billion a year. Brown indicated this has the backing of Kevin Rudd who, he buttered up as "a pioneer of both changing policies and changing attitudes on climate change".

Even though \$US122 billion a year is only about a quarter of the sum claimed by the developing countries, such a magnitude of wealth transfers will never take place. That number and those on emission reductions was put in place simply to allow the leaders to declare victory and allow a

platform for next great leadership jamboree in Copenhagen.

But the lack of attention to ensuring some form of internal consistency in the numbers shows that in Italy the eyes of the world's political leaders were focussed on the host's real life soap opera and not on the great events they met to address.

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