

Capitalist climate crisis: Fossil fuel industries seizes helm of COP28

written by Scott Scheffer
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Ahead of COP28, the Women's March for Climate took place in Dakar, Senegal, on Nov. 25. The protesters aimed to amplify the voices of African women, especially from rural areas, who are heavily impacted by the effects of climate change.

Delegates from around the world are gathered in Dubai preparing for the opening of the 28th annual Conference Of the Parties (COP28), to be held from Nov. 30 to Dec.

12. The leadership is in the hands of Sultan Ahmed Al-Jaber, the head of United Arab Emirates' state-owned oil company, Adnoc.

Al-Jaber's rise to leadership is a handover of power to the fossil fuel industry in the global effort to fight climate change. Now, leaked documents reveal that Al-Jaber's team planned to use COP28 to obtain oil and gas deals in meetings with at least 27 countries.

Al-Jaber's reputation had to be transformed in order to gain support to take over the presidency. The process was carried out by the largest public relations firms in the world – all of them PR mercenaries with a boatload of resources at their disposal. And they are all U.S. corporations.

According to a June 2023 article in Politico, “During the past decade, the UAE has spent more than \$1 million on direct climate-focused advocacy and paid millions more to advisory firms and think tanks helping to polish its green credentials...”

Activists called Al-Jaber's presidency of COP28 “asking arms dealers to lead peace talks.” However, initially, the White House seemed okay with the choice.

Last January, John Kerry, Biden's Presidential Envoy for Climate, signaled that the U.S. was comfortable with an oil company executive being pushed for the job when he said, “I think that Dr. Sultan Al-Jaber is a terrific choice because he is the head of the company.” That is not likely the level of comfort now, but it isn't just this new scandal that may cause the U.S. to sour on Al-Jaber.

A careful look at the agenda that Al-Jaber will push reveals intentions for a crafty strategic shift in favor of energy profits. Until now, the push at the series of international conferences has been to “phase out” fossil fuels. Part of his plan is to shift that language to “limit emissions from the production of fossil fuels” during the transition to renewables. This doesn't include emissions from the use of fossil fuels –

only the production at refineries.

Limiting emissions means using carbon capture technology. Energy companies favor carbon capture not only because it will be profitable but also because they can make the claim that fossil fuels can be exploited with lower emissions during the transition to other forms of energy. Scientists and engineers know that to scale it up enough to be effective is impossible.

Fossil fuel subsidies

Al-Jaber's role is full of contradictions. He plays up the idea that he and his team (he has appointed dozens of staff from the oil company to positions in the leadership of COP28) are in the vanguard of clean energy. He pledges to raise \$20 billion for renewable energy for the Global South. But the UAE also plans to spend \$100 billion to boost its oil production from 4 billion to 7.5 billion barrels per year.

There is also no intention to enter any opposition to fossil fuel subsidies as there has been in all previous COP gatherings. The U.S. hands over up to \$50 billion per year to oil companies. Globally, energy giants raked in \$4 trillion in 2022.

Presumably, all of this would be okay with the energy companies and the banks that finance fossil fuel extraction, as well as with the White House. But another part of Al-Jaber's agenda is more likely to run afoul of powerful U.S. interests.

U.S. delegates have fought against proposals to fund the Global South to help with adapting to the extreme weather. Those countries that have been robbed of their resources during the colonial era and during the stage of imperialism are underdeveloped industrially. As a consequence, they've added little to global CO2 emissions. It was the U.S. and Britain that emitted the lion's share of carbon in the atmosphere today.

The idea of a fund to help the Global South adapt to and recover from extreme

weather disasters has gained ground throughout the history of these international conferences. In previous COP conferences, an agreement was struck that the U.S. and Europe would pay \$100 billion per year into a fund for adaptation. The payments never happened.

At COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, the anger of Global South delegates finally forced a formal agreement to set up the Loss and Damage Fund. But the U.S. is reportedly refusing to concede on how the fund will be structured. They want it to be run through the World Bank, and that would give the donors the opportunity to claim that aid packages that were already pledged could be considered part of the Loss and Damage Fund.

On Al-Jaber's agenda is a way to exploit this divide between the interests of the rich capitalist countries and those of the Global South. Many countries don't have enough fuel of any kind to heat homes adequately or can barely run factories. In other words, in order to develop, they need energy of some kind, and transitioning to renewables is out of reach for them. While the U.S. is throwing up obstacles to the Loss and Damage Fund, Al-Jaber is talking up paying for fuel to aid in their development and, in some cases offering to aid their transition to a renewables-based power grid. This is a way for him to try to get past opposition to the fossil fuel industry's power grab.

Delegates have to approve the new president of the conference each year at its opening. Until now, it's been a formality. That could change. So much is uncertain as this conference is set to begin. It's entirely possible that Al-Jaber won't survive the leaked documents scandal. The only certainty is that the climate change movement has to stay in the streets.

