



graphic: Matt Wuerker

Cap and Trade Enclosing the Climate Commons

The good news is—the United States government has finally joined the rest of the world and seems ready to do something about climate change. The bad news is—as usual, what to do is being decided by giant corporations.

Let's agree that drastic measures must be taken to reduce carbon emissions by up to 90 percent. Right now the leading idea seems to be "Cap and Trade." Environmental proponents are quick to stress the "Cap" on emissions, but it's the "Trade" that really interests the big polluters. The basic scheme is to turn the "right" to create pollution into a form of property, distribute this newly created property only among the largest polluters for free and then let them sell it to each other. The value of the carbon credits rises with the lowering of caps as the polluters play ecological chairs. Each time the earth circles the sun, another chair is removed, the pollution caps are lowered, and the value of the carbon credit becomes greater. Cap and Trade creates an entirely new market, new types of property, new wealth and increased inequity.

In a recent interview, The News Hour reporter asked a Pew Trust spokeswoman a very good question. Why not give every person an equal amount of carbon credits and let everyone get in on the trading? After all, he said, we all pollute. The Pew answer was that it would be "too complicated." In fact, only the biggest polluters were to be let in on the Cap and Trade. The rest of the "smaller polluters" would be regulated. The term "small polluters" covers every type of manufacturing from cars to computers and even households. So basically, this is regulation for most of us, but not for the biggest polluters. It seems they will escape regulation. Europe has a similar plan. But it has not been successful in reducing emissions, many say, because the credits were given for free to the big polluters.

The Pew Trust reports that Cap and Trade is the preferred choice of the large energy corpora-

tions. I wonder why? Could it be that they will be the recipients of this new government property giveaway; a benefit that they receive because they are the biggest producers of greenhouse emissions? And what is the actual goal here— are we trying to drastically cut greenhouse gasses in a race to save all life on earth, or are we catering to the preferred choices of the energy corporations?

How do you think this will play out in real-world America? Pew also believes that the Congress will act on climate change soon. If not this Congress, then the next one. We have watched this dance long enough to predict the steps. For the Cap and Trade to really work, the caps must be set low enough to deeply cut emissions year after year for the next 50 years.

Do you think Congress, controlled by either party, will take drastic action on climate change? Or do you think they will listen to their benefactors, the big corporations, and move slowly to avoid hurting business and the economy? Do you think regulations for the so-called "small polluters" will have any teeth, or will they remain pretty much as they are now, a slap on the wrist and go on polluting?

The climate, air, atmosphere and ozone layer are common to all life on earth. It would be hard to argue otherwise. The destruction of these commons was led by corporate interests. Now these same players want to privatize and profit from the planet's last gasp.

Schemes like Cap and Trade just put off facing the truth. Humans, and especially Americans, use more than the planet can support. We have to stop now. If that's bad for business, well so is ecological disaster.

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