

# A false dilemma: Trump and the Paris deal

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LAST YEAR the American electorate threw a flaming orange-haired Molotov cocktail at the US political establishment.

On June 1, 2017 that mixture of petrol, glass and ego bounced off Washington and landed on the Paris Agreement on global warming. Woosh and there goes the climate.

Reactions, both locally and internationally, to the Americans withdrawing from the Paris Agreement have been fairly predictable.

US President Donald Trump is the spawn of the devil and we must save the only global treaty on climate change.

But there's a catch. Neither Trump's denialism nor the Paris Agreement are going to solve climate change, which is an unprecedented global problem.

The World Bank says that 4°C of warming is when civilisation collapses.

Climate scientist Professor Kevin Anderson puts it best: at 4°C people stop talking and reach for the Kalashnikov.

We are on course for somewhere between 4°C to 5°C of warming by the end of the century.

The 32-page Paris Agreement is entirely inadequate to avoid a dystopian future. It will not reduce greenhouse gas emissions to the level required to avoid 2°C of warming.

To do that, the entire globe would have to stop burning coal, oil and natural gas by about 2050 and then somehow use technologies, as

of yet not developed, to suck carbon out of the air.

Even if it is implemented by all parties, the Paris Agreement will get us to somewhere around 3°C, which is catastrophic. The problem with 3°C or even 2°C of warming is that at some point the Earth's natural processes will take over in positive feedback loops.

The current melting of the Arctic ice cap is one such positive feedback loop. As the ice melts, less sunlight reflects back into space. Instead, sunlight is absorbed by the ocean and melts more ice.

The cycle repeats itself over and over again. Ditto for the Antarctic and Greenland.

The melting of the permafrost (frozen tundra covering Russia and Canada) is another such positive feedback loop.

As the permafrost melts, it releases greenhouse gases that cause even more warming.

And these positive feedbacks don't just occur in the polar regions. As the globe heats up, the Amazon will dry out and the rainforest will die off, releasing additional greenhouse gases.

Professor James Hansen, one of the world's top climate scientists, predicts that we will pass the point of no return at 1.5°C.

When will all of this occur if we don't drastically reduce carbon emissions?

Scientists disagree on the exact dates but, as a guide, we will lock in a 1.5°C temperature rise around 2021. Two degrees around 2036. Three degrees around 2071.



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This isn't news or sudden revelation. We've known about it for at least 25 years.

The Paris Agreement even indicates that limiting warming to 1.5°C is possible. Insanity. A big fat lie. Turning off all the world's coal plants by 2021?

Dismantling oil and gas rigs? No way. Less of a chance than Helen Zille doing the right thing and resigning.

Nope, she's going to fight to the very last Tweet.

The choice between the Paris Agreement and Trump's madness isn't much of a choice.

Philosophers call this a false dilemma: the world's governments,

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**Simply blaming the coal industry obscures deeper issues**  
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including our own, have told us we must choose between two options that won't deal with climate change.

I was at the 2015 UN conference in Paris on climate change and watched governments, businesses and non-governmental organisations set up this false dilemma.

All those delegates... my government... comrades in the environmental movement... they sold us out for a comforting fairy tale.

I felt like grabbing those smart people by their jackets and beating them.

Crushing bone and spraying blood across the conference space until sanity prevailed.

But I didn't. I got drunk.

I've been writing about the climate for years, occasionally in this newspaper, and I've followed the widely-held format for articles on global warming.

Start with the problem, discuss some of the potential consequences if we don't act, and then give some

hope with a couple of technical solutions.

Renewable energy, stop cutting down rainforests, fly less, more public transport and other such dreams of an ideal world.

According to the informal rules of climate activism, giving hope prevents the reader from lapsing into despair.

The reader needs something positive to latch onto so that she will support the cause, get involved, do something besides taking in a Parisian sunrise while hammering back red wine got from who knows where.

But simply arguing for more windmills and blaming the coal industry obscures deeper issues.

The world has had a quarter of a century to come up with an effective agreement on climate change and the best that they've managed is the inadequate Paris Agreement.

The world's liberal institutions, set up after WWII, have all failed to deal with climate change and, for that matter, global poverty.

The UN, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Department of Environmental Affairs have proven to be empty shells.

And this is what politicians and NGO hacks don't want to either admit or speak about: that we have a horrendous failure of the underlying political framework.

Better to PR the living daylights out of the Paris Agreement than have to question the foundations of our broken politics.

South Africa is a microcosm of the global situation. We vote in free and fair elections, allow the occasional punch-up in Parliament and, for the most part, obey the rulings of an independent judiciary.

We even have a constitutional right to a safe and clean environment.

And our government signed on to the Paris Agreement.

The best that all institutions have managed to do for the climate is buy overpriced Gupta coal and praise Shell's plan to frack a million sheep in the Karoo.

I'm not sure what the solution is how we can fix our political structures so that we can do something meaningful about the climate.

Facing up to the problem is a vital start.

And Trump isn't the problem. The false dilemma between Trump and the Paris Agreement is.

The only way out of a false dilemma is not to accept

it. So I'm not going to accept it. I'm going to stop writing climate change articles designed to provide hope for hope's sake.

Tell it how I see it, no matter how bleak or grim or depressing Stuff Trump. Stuff the Paris Agreement.

A plague on both their houses. Cheers. *Oogy wawa. Gesondheid. Santé.*

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