

The G-8 joke

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The G-8 leaders from the U.S., Canada, Japan, Russia, France, Italy and Germany shamed themselves by trying to brand their meeting last week as a turning point in the fight against global warming. The joint statement they issued at the end of the meeting is anachronistic, a carbon copy of the statement from the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. It recognizes global warming as a central problem and mutters something about halving carbon emissions by 2050. Of course, that proves that if you give heads of state 20 years, even they will manage to read and understand important, urgent scientific reports. In practice, however, the statement does not hint at immediate or short-term goals, and has no practical value.

The G-8 nations represent less than 15 percent of the world's population, but they emit 60 percent of the world's carbon emissions. That data, and their self-congratulatory announcement, only worsens their image of indifference. Soon, desertification, water shortages, rising sea levels, the increasing number of tropical storms and diseases will have grave consequences.

There is nothing new about the industrial powers' inaction. At the 2007 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Bali, the U.S., Russia, Canada, Japan, Saudi Arabia and other oil and coal producers put up a stiff front of resistance. Together, they stifled every effort to draw up a new and ambitious world treaty to replace the Kyoto Protocol in 2013. They knew what they were doing: In order to halve carbon emissions by 2050, they need to start an energy revolution today. Using existing technologies and new energy conservation methods, one can make progress within 20 years in two key areas: increasing worldwide energy conservation by tens of percent, and generating most energy from renewable resources. The problem is that such a tumult will not benefit the G-8 nations' economies. Advertisement It will mean coal and oil fields worth billions remain untapped, and resources will not be sold or burned, causing pollution and global warming. If that happens, massive corporations from industrial nations that have invested fortunes buying rights, and setting up infrastructure and transportation facilities, will forgo huge profits. Also, the car industry, energy giants whose power plants use fossil fuels, airlines and many other companies whose profits depend on the global addiction to carbon economics will have to change their business plans for the 21st century. Their owners don't want that, and are using all their political might to fend it off.

That's why the song and dance by G-8 leaders at the Japan summit is so unsurprising. They dumped responsibility for reducing carbon emissions on their successors to power, the following generations and, of course, countries like China, India and Brazil. Countries that have produced a great deal less carbon emissions per capita than North America or Western Europe.

Even if the most severe scenarios regarding global warming take place, the human race will not face extinction. The question is not whether we will survive, but who will survive and where. Our efforts today will save lives in the future and the window of opportunity will

remain open for a very short time. Sadly, the three days the eight leaders spent in Japan were an utter waster of time. Luckily, it was U.S. President George W. Bush's last such summit. If only we could be sure that his successor will behave more responsibly.