

November 6, 2015

Featuring fresh takes and real-time analysis from  
HuffPost's signature lineup of contributors

## HOT ON THE BLOG

[Marian Wright Edelman](#)[Kirk Douglas](#)[Jim Wallis](#)[Ayaan Hirsi Ali](#)**John J. Berger**[Become a fan](#)

Energy and environmental policy expert

# Naomi Klein, Climate, and Capitalism (Pt. 2): Creating a Broad Social Movement

Posted: 01/13/2015 1:44 pm EST | Updated: 03/15/2015 5:59 am EDT

A Broad Movement Committed to Climate Protection Is the Magic Elixir and Prime Mover in Naomi Klein's Magnum Opus: This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate

The key to breaking the climate and energy policy logjam in Washington, D.C., Naomi Klein contends in *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (Simon & Schuster, 2014), is the building of a powerful social movement.

Citizens can then put leaders into office who are willing to take decisive action to protect the climate. The movement can also pressure government "from below" to say no to pipelines, new coal mines, and to all frontier carbon development, including offshore oil drilling and tar sands development. An aroused public can demand renewable energy, public infrastructure, public services, and green jobs.

Once you postulate this broad social movement in the service of climate protection, then the rest of Klein's long-term agenda begins to seem more feasible, although it ultimately requires a major economic restructuring, lifestyle changes, and a political transformation, as well as policies aimed at reducing consumption, a politically taboo subject.

Klein's scenario calls for long-term energy and economic planning with an emphasis on the kind of decentralized renewable energy production that has proven so successful for many farmers and ranchers in Western Europe and the U.S., plus investments in energy efficiency and electric vehicles.

But no subsidies for fossil fuels. No geoengineering to dim the sun. Frowning on carbon trading and carbon offsets, she favors substantial carbon taxes -- the "polluter pays" principle -- and subsidies for green energy programs.

## Building a Mass Movement

*This Changes Everything* is itself an effort to catalyze the creation of the mass movement needed to implement Klein's agenda. It includes more regulation of the corporate sector, an expansion of the public safety net, and greater support for infrastructure, including mass transit with electric trains powered by renewable energy.

Advocacy of this sort of job-creating public investment could indeed serve as a nucleus around which a broadly based social movement could begin to coalesce.

This movement would likely first be dominated by "bread-and-butter" issues, but smart leadership should be capable of weaving climate concerns into core demands for jobs, higher wages, less inequality, and a better environment.

The broad movement could then grow through the implementation of a "Marshall Plan for the Earth," to which Klein makes a couple of references.

Klein correctly believes that economic fairness and inequality should be addressed jointly with environmental affronts. Thus she urges the climate movement and the environmental community to stand with labor and low-income communities in support of green jobs, living wages, local hiring, and reducing excessive consumption by the wealthy.

This solidarity could serve as the foundation for building a broad social movement. Klein's Populist advocacy of "higher taxes on the wealthy," "public power, so people can take control of energy supply and environmental quality," and "a basic annual income" are all right in line with the creation of this grand coalition.

Some of Klein's other notions are not exactly popular mainstream ideas, although a powerful case can be made for them. She espouses "de-growth," "de-consumption," "de-globalization," and changes in human settlement patterns."

By "de-consumption," she means that some who have a lot need to consume less, and those with less need to be able to consume more. "Consume less" policies, however, would be relatively unprecedented, and are generally neglected, she concedes.

Presumably the mechanism for discouraging overconsumption would be a more progressive income tax system. She does not explain how much consumption would have to be foregone.

As to de-globalization, Klein wants to rewrite international trade rules that were made with little public scrutiny. They impede production of green energy and the reduction of GHG emissions, she says. Instead, she advocates buying local goods and restricting trade in goods that have a large carbon dioxide "footprint."

### **Where Power Ultimately Resides**

Klein has great faith in the activism of indigenous people to block fossil fuel development and inspire broader public opposition, coining the term, "Blockadia." She strongly supports Native American treaty rights, recognizing that in protecting their aboriginal land and traditional lifestyles, they are also protecting the environment and climate.

She evidently sees these and other local "pockets of resistance" to fossil fuel encroachment as the yeast from which the broad social movement will arise. Here her argument may be more a leap of faith.

These local battles are often, though not always, in geographically remote rural areas. They are frequently conducted by low-income, Native American, or other marginalized groups with whom Middle America does not readily identify.

Moreover, these local communities trying to block resource extraction projects don't have the power to change the U.S. tax code or alter national spending priorities or ram big, New Deal-like social programs through a recalcitrant Congress, all of which must eventually be done to protect the climate.

Yet these isolated pitched battles may be like sparks awakening the conscience of a nation, particularly youth and those who live in the urban population centers where political power is concentrated and middle class movements are likely to arise.

In any case, *This Changes Everything* never fully explains the process by which the seeds of resistance are transformed into that vitally necessary broad social movement so key to Klein's vision.

Other than through the recurrence of ever-more serious climate-related disasters, the actual mechanisms by which climate change triggers the requisite mass movement are left vague. Those disasters have not yet ignited that vast movement, though they have already clobbered tens of millions of people. If a truly colossal disaster on an even larger scale is required to finally empower such a movement, it may by then be too late.

Nonetheless, Klein's book is a brilliant critique of climate problems, a solid discussion of the principles and policies required to build a sustainable society, an admonition to demolish the old paradigm now sustaining an extractive, exploitative economy, and the brilliant outline of a new paradigm.

What she has done is to point the way forward, but without providing a detailed roadmap or a plan. She merely alludes to the work of energy technology specialists like Professor Mark Jacobson at Stanford who has demonstrated the technological feasibility of running our economy on 100 percent renewable energy without nuclear power.

Klein herself doesn't attempt to offer energy supply scenarios, wisely leaving that to technology experts. What she has undertaken, however, is more than any reader could realistically expect.

Based on what Klein and the more optimistic climate scientists are saying, it is still possible to avoid a worst case climate scenario. With the world's greenhouse gas emissions soaring, however, the odds of dodging a civilization-altering climate catastrophe are shrinking daily. The clock has in fact almost run out. So we have got to try taking whatever shots are left, even very long ones -- like some that Naomi Klein recommends.

End of Part 2

*John J. Berger, PhD. (www.johnjberger.com) is an energy and environmental policy specialist who has produced ten books on climate, energy, and natural resource topics. He is the author of **Climate Peril: The Intelligent Reader's Guide to Understanding the Climate Crisis** and **Climate Myths: The Campaign Against Climate Science**.*

*Follow John J. Berger on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/johnjberger](http://www.twitter.com/johnjberger)*

*Acknowledgement: The author is grateful for valuable discussions on topics in this series with independent environmental consultant and geographer Benson Lee*

*The first part of this series is called, "Naomi Klein, Climate, and Capitalism--Part 1, The Turbulent Lima Climate Talks."*

**Follow John J. Berger on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/johnjberger](http://www.twitter.com/johnjberger)**

**MORE: [Climate Change](#) [Climate Change Solutions](#) [Free Market](#) [Green Faith](#) [Privatization](#) [Deregulation](#) [Trade](#) [Naomi Klein](#) [Globalization](#) [Capitalism](#) [This Changes Everything](#)**