

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article3826>



# How Much Does Climate Change Change?

- Reviews section -

Publication date: Saturday 24 January 2015

---

**Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved**

---

**Naomi Klein's latest book is well on its way to becoming a bestseller. Deeply and meticulously researched, well-written and engaging, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* was timed to come out a week before the September 2014 UN Climate Summit and the People's Climate March in New York City.**

The march of over 400,000 vastly exceeded the attendance expectations of 350.org (of which Klein is a board member) and the other groups that organized and built it. This timing and the author's availability to speak at many of the related climate movement events during that week provided buzz and benefits to both the climate change movement and book sales.

The title echoes that of the small book of essays (*This Changes Everything: Occupy Wall Street and the 99% Movement*), put out by Yes magazine on the heels of the Occupy Wall Street movement, to which Klein also contributed. OWS represented a paradigm shift in the United States and internationally, capturing in its slogan of the 1% versus the 99% the magnitude of inequality that has accompanied globalized capitalism.

This inequality, ignored or under-emphasized by most mainstream environmental movements, stands front-and-center in Klein's new book as well as the [book's website](#), where the project continues and grows under the theme "To Change Everything, It Takes Everyone," which was also the slogan for the People's Climate March.

The book has major flaws and omissions, but it introduces a conversation about capitalism to a mainstream audience. We on the left must intervene in this conversation in a way that exposes capitalist relations and opens the possibility for their destruction.

## Klein Past and Present

Books that name capitalism as the enemy aren't often bestsellers, as all three of Naomi Klein's have become. Her work stands out because she weaves real-life stories together with her analysis in powerful and memorable ways.

Since her first book *No Logo*, Klein has focused on exposing how capitalism in the neoliberal era has found new ways to make profits for a small minority and in the process only increased the system's rampant inequality and injustice. *No Logo* looked at branding: how brands have sometimes become as important as the actual products for some corporations, how marketing associates brands with particular lifestyles and age groups, and how brands have worked their way into more and more venues, including public schools.

*The Shock Doctrine* revealed how natural and unnatural disasters are exploited by corporations and government allies to consolidate control of particular markets and further the privatization of social services.

Another recurring theme in her work is resistance, mainly at a local level, both in confrontation with the oppressors and through the creation of political and economic alternatives. In the film *The Take*, made with Avi Lewis, she describes how Argentine workers successfully took over factories abandoned by their owners.

*This Changes Everything* continues these themes. While the book goes back to the dawn of the Industrial Revolution

and human-induced increase in atmospheric greenhouse gases, its focus (and strength) is on how capitalism is responding in a period characterized by growing awareness of the depletion of fossil fuels accessible by conventional extraction, as well as by globalization and free trade agreements.

These responses include the development of dangerous new extraction methods, elaborate attempts to deny that climate change is taking place or that it is caused by humans, and simultaneously proposals for various legalistic and technological ways of mitigating or adapting to climate change within the current economic system.

Here again Klein also tells inspiring stories of those who are fighting the corporations and their partners in governments around the world.

Klein has been deeply critical of capitalism (at least in its current neoliberal form) in her previous work, holding it to account for a whole range of social ills and suffering on a massive scale. In *This Changes Everything* she goes further, concluding that this economic system must go; nothing short of the entire ecosphere is at stake.

## Towards a People's Shock

In the Introduction, Klein sets up the premises of the book and her own journey from denial to paying attention to the climate crisis, and finally to seeing the potential of the climate justice movement to address the complex of issues presented by capitalist globalization:

“As part of the project of getting our emissions down to the levels many scientists recommend, we once again have the chance to advance policies that dramatically improve lives, close the gap between rich and poor, create huge numbers of good jobs, and reinvigorate democracy from the ground up. Rather than the ultimate expression of the shock doctrine — a frenzy of new resource grabs and repression — climate change can be a People's Shock, a blow from below. It can disperse power into the hands of the many rather than consolidating it in the hands of the few, and radically expand the commons, rather than auctioning it off in pieces. And where right-wing shock doctors exploit emergencies (both real and manufactured) in order to push through policies that make us even more crisis prone, the kinds of transformations discussed in these pages would do the exact opposite: they would get to the root of why we are facing serial crises in the first place, and would leave us with both a more habitable climate than the one we are headed for and a far more just economy than the one we have right now.” (10)

A “people's shock” can only come about if large numbers can move past the various forms of rational denial that characterize people's common response today — the kind of denial present when confronting overwhelming odds, or forces that look too powerful and embedded to confront, or events that appear inevitable.

A variant of “the overwhelming odds” denial plays out in political calculations when groups put out and fight for a compromise rather than their actual position, finding themselves fighting for a position they don't really hold and either having to accept a compromise of their compromise, or lose.

It is Klein's hope (expressed many times) that this book will open the way for people to see how it is possible and necessary to fight for our real interests and values, and to see through solutions that compromise those in advance.

## What Rightwingers Understand

In the section called “Bad Timing,” Klein takes us through the antecedents of the crisis. Not surprisingly, as a journalist she’s at her best discussing ongoing or recent events and weaker when she tries to add a longer-term historical perspective.

The first chapter in this section, “The Right is Right,” is one of the book’s strongest. Here Klein details the financing (big oil predominantly) behind the institutes and think tanks that are the warriors in the climate change denial movement. These are largely the same institutions that developed in the 1960s and 1970s “when U.S. business elites feared that public opinion was turning dangerously against capitalism and toward, if not socialism, then an aggressive Keynesianism.”

In response, they launched a counterrevolution, a richly funded intellectual movement that argued that greed and the limitless pursuit of profit were nothing to apologize for and offered the greatest hope for human emancipation that the world had ever known. Under this liberationist banner, they fought for such policies as tax cuts, free trade deals, for the auctioning off of core state assets from phones to energy to water — the package known in most of the world as “neoliberalism.” (38-39)

She starts the chapter with her own experience of the Heartland Institute’s Sixth International Conference on Climate Change in 2011. The lessons, in her words:

“If the dire projections coming out of the IPCC are left unchallenged, and business as usual is indeed driving us straight toward civilization-threatening tipping points, then the implications are obvious: the ideological crusade incubated in think tanks like Heartland, Cato, and Heritage will have to come to a screeching halt. Nor have the various attempts to soft-pedal climate action as compatible with market logic (carbon trading, carbon offsets, monetizing nature’s “services”) fooled these true believers one bit. They know very well that ours is a global economy created by, and fully reliant upon, the burning of fossil fuels and that a dependency that foundational cannot be changed with a few gentle market mechanisms. It requires heavy-duty interventions: sweeping bans on polluting activities, deep subsidies for green alternatives, pricey penalties for violations, new taxes, new public works programs, reversals of privatizations.” (38-39)

In this sense the right is right; climate change indeed presents a potential revolutionary moment.

There are other lessons here on not coddling the denialist movement (as the Big Greens have tried to do with their “neither left nor right, but green” slogans). The climate change denial forces, which will become more fringe-like as reality becomes more real and imminent, need to be swept aside, not coddled — they can no longer make change, only noise, as Klein rightly and repeatedly points out.

## Wrong Time for Neoliberalism

Klein begins her chapter “Hot Money” with how she noticed that national green energy programs were coming into conflict with international trade agreements, one of which was a solar panel producer in her home province of Ontario, Canada.

She found nations suing each other before the World Trade Court on protectionist grounds: “rather than compete for the best, most effective supports for green energy, the biggest emitters in the world are rushing to the WTO to knock down each other’s windmills.” (65)

## How Much Does Climate Change Change?

---

She goes on to detail the myriad trade agreements (big and small) that allow the free movement of capital and goods around the world, but present enormous barriers for governments (even if they are willing) to limit extreme extraction activity or subsidize alternatives to fossil fuels in energy development.

Now, following the frenetic expansion during the last three decades, we're faced with a planet barreling rapidly towards climate disaster on many fronts. Many scientists argue, and Klein agrees, that limiting CO2 emissions for steady-state economies is no longer possible, and what's required is rapid de-growth in industrialized countries accompanied by equitable and sustainable renewable energy development in developing countries.

The last section of the chapter, "Growing the Caring Economy, Shrinking the Careless One" (93), briefly lays out such a vision.

The chapter "Planning and Banning" starts with a vision of what might have been in 2009 at the peak of the world financial crisis and the first year of the Obama presidency.

All told, three huge economic engines — the banks, the auto companies, and the stimulus bill — were in a state of play, placing more economic power in the hands of Obama and his party than any U.S. government since the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Imagine, for a moment, if his administration had been willing to invoke its newly minted democratic mandate to build the new economy promised on the campaign trail — to treat the stimulus bill, the broken banks, and the shattered car companies as the building blocks of that green future. Imagine if there had been a powerful social movement — a robust coalition of trade unions, immigrants, students, environmentalists, and everyone else whose dreams were getting crushed by the crashing economic model — demanding that Obama do no less. The stimulus package could have been used to build the best public transit systems and smart grids in the world. The auto industry could have been dramatically reengineered so that its factories built the machinery to power that transition — not just a few token electric cars (though those too) but also vast streetcar and high-speed rail systems across an underserved nation. (121)

In short, a real and vibrant social movement for serious climate action and equitable and just recovery from the financial crisis could potentially have drowned out the administration's panicked advisors from the financial industry and set us on a different course.

We still have time to build such a movement and demand such action, but not much time. One of this movement's demands would certainly be a radical reduction of the U.S. military, particularly its ability to wage endless war around the world.

As noted by various people on the left, including Craig Collins in his review of the book in *Counterpunch*, Klein has almost nothing to say about the U.S. military's energy use and its role in securing control of Middle East oil resources and other world fossil fuel resources for the capitalist classes.

Klein uses the word military 16 times in her book, but mentions the military's role as a major polluter and consumer of resources only once:

"But the extractive industries shouldn't be the only targets of the "polluter pays" principle. The U.S. military is by some accounts the largest single consumer of petroleum in the world. In 2011, the Department of Defense released, at minimum, 56.6 million metric tons of CO2 equivalent into the atmosphere, more than the U.S.-based operations of ExxonMobil and Shell combined." (113)

For someone who closely follows international negotiations on climate change, it is strange that Klein neglects the exclusion of the U.S. military's carbon emissions from the Kyoto protocol of 1997 and all subsequent international

agreements on climate [\[1\]](#).

The U.S. military budget currently consumes 45% of the 2015 Federal Budget (tax dollars) and 320,000 barrels of oil a day. Imagine what a movement on climate change could do if it confronted this “invisible hand” squarely.

## “Extractivism” the Real Culprit?

After providing the context for what is happening now, the chapter “Beyond Extractivism” goes back hundreds of years to search for the origins of the crisis. Here she is on shakier ground, reducing much of the last 250 years of human history to a simple principle, extractivism.

Klein groups much under this rubric (tracing the extractivist philosophy all the way back to Francis Bacon, and the technology to Watt’s development of the steam engine fueled by coal) with many examples, but it’s still a flawed equation. We don’t really need a new term or story for capitalism.

Klein’s descriptive labels (extractivism, disaster capitalism, etc.) are useful to emphasize a point or trend but if taken too far, as in this chapter, tend to obscure the central dynamics of capitalism, how it operates, and where it’s driving society.

For example, she says, “Ever since the French Revolution, there have been pitched ideological battles within the confines of this story: communists, socialists, and trade unions have fought for more equal distribution of the spoils of extraction, winning major victories for the poor and working classes.” (177)

Capitalism has had many phases, none of them benign. All its phases have entailed substantial amounts of force by the capitalist class, through military or other means, to expropriate the necessary resources and labor to perpetuate itself. To reduce these struggles to an ideological battle over the spoils of extraction is just wrong, and belittles the efforts of all who have fought for the liberation of humanity from this cancerous and all-consuming system.

Klein asks us to examine not our class relation to capitalism but our extractivist mindset and “the climate denier within.” But capitalism is not all about ideology, it’s about class and class power — which we need to abolish in order to get rid of capitalism. Social ownership and cooperative management of our productive systems is what we have to fight and build for.

## Magical Thinking

The next section of the book discusses what various players see as solutions. In the process Klein dispels any illusions we might have of easy answers.

For those who accept that there’s a climate crisis, or more broadly an ecological crisis, there are several possibilities for what (or whom) to blame. How the causes are understood leads to particular options, including what the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change calls mitigation (preventing climate change) and adaptation (living with climate change).

## How Much Does Climate Change Change?

---

The problem might be posed as cultural: we in the developed countries have become so obsessed with consumption and waste that we are destroying the planet and dooming ourselves and our descendants. A variant of this position is that it's our addiction to technology that is the problem.

For adherents of these consumption-centered theories, appropriate mitigation strategies involve lifestyle changes, up to and including returning to pre-agricultural tribal societies. (Klein doesn't directly address these claims, but they have been effectively dismissed by other authors such as Joel Kovel and Greg Sharzer.)

Others attribute the crisis to the bad decisions made by a small group of bad corporations and/or bad capitalists, and the influence those bad actors have over politicians. For those who hold this view, probably the majority of the members of mainstream environmental organizations, mitigation strategies tend toward market-based schemes by which greenhouse gases are traded and speculated upon, political reforms that restrict these corporations in various ways, or activity to confront them through demonstrations, divestment campaigns or direct actions. We will refer to this camp as "reform environmentalism."

Another camp sees the crisis as the result of a series of mistakes, for which no one is really to blame. Mitigation is to be achieved through geo-engineering, the application of technology to "fix" the atmosphere so that climate change is avoided. We will refer to this camp as "technological environmentalism."

Finally there are those, including ecosocialists, who see the entire political-economic system as the source of the problem and other supposed solutions as only short-term fixes, unable to get us out of the crisis. They may agree with environmental reformists on some tactics — such as the need for confronting fossil-fuel corporations — but not on lobbying strategies or campaigning for Democratic candidates.

More importantly, this viewpoint sees the ultimate goal as the elimination of an undemocratic system based on profit and the creation of democratic system based on equality, justice and sustainability.

To challenge the dominant reformist and technological paradigms, it is necessary to demonstrate that (1) the system of capitalist production and the necessity of accumulation is fundamentally incompatible with a sustainable relationship between humanity and the ecosphere, and (2) engineering solutions are at best a desperate and potentially disastrous measure of last resort.

Klein is certainly clear on the second point. She hedges the first in a number of ways, making it seem as if savage neoliberal capitalism might be tamed through a big enough movement demanding democratic decentralized control of key energy sectors, and policy incentives and disincentives to overcome many of the more wasteful or planet-threatening enterprises. (131-132)

## Big Green: Solution or Problem?

In Klein's words, both green capitalism and geo-engineering represent "magical thinking," and in this section she proceeds to take apart and reject these popular options and more controversially, the role that some environmental organizations have played in supporting them.

If there is one thing we can count on, it is the capacity of capitalism to co-opt those who are (or should be) challenging it. It should come as no surprise that some of the most powerful environmental organizations have jumped on the green capitalist bandwagon. In the chapter "Fruits, not Roots," Klein describes how this took place and what effect it has had on the mainstream environmental movement.

## How Much Does Climate Change Change?

---

The organizations that we think of as Big Green are “big” for various reasons: their budgets, their membership, their influence. The Sierra Club has a staff of 600, Friends of the Earth a staff of 28. The Environmental Defense Fund has a budget of \$120.5 million, 350.org a budget of \$3 million. (Inside Climate News, April, 2014)

They differ in their priorities. For some, such as the Sierra Club and the World Wildlife Federation, habitat conservation plays the largest role; for others such as 350.org, climate change and fossil fuels are the focus. Some like the Sierra Club have been around since the 19th century; others including 350.org were founded in the 21st.

Klein is careful not to lump all of these organizations together in her critique. She is, after all, on the Board of Directors of 350.org. But it is not easy being big and untainted in 21st century North America. Klein reminds us that practically all foundation money is connected directly or indirectly to fossil fuels, including the funding that she herself receives for projects.

She describes three ways in which at least some of the big environmental NGOs have been compromised by their links to the fossil-fuel corporations that are at the heart of the ecological crisis. They may receive corporate donations; they may have executives of the corporations on their boards of directors; they may invest in the corporations.

These relationships correlate with certain tendencies of these NGOs’ policies. Although none of them deny anthropogenic climate change, the mitigation measures they promote tend toward the most conservative end of the reform environmentalist camp, especially carbon trading schemes.

They have sometimes pushed for the replacement of coal with natural gas and nuclear power, both very risky alternatives. Support for natural gas extraction and fracking has even taken the form of partnering with fossil-fuel corporations in research designed to dispel fears of the dangers of these techniques.

Klein reserves her harshest criticism for the Nature Conservancy and the Environmental Defense Fund, based on a litany of offenses over the years including, in the case of the Nature Conservancy, drilling for oil on one of their own preserves.

In what must be the highlight of this chapter, she chronicles how these two organizations and others partnered with some of the biggest corporate polluters to form the United States Climate Action Partnership, one of whose ostensible goals was to shepherd through climate legislation in Congress that would represent a “historic compromise between greens and industry.”

Not surprisingly, the resulting legislation, which would have gone easy on the polluters in any case, never did pass. USCAP turns out to have been a massive boondoggle: Big Green got suckered into a collaboration with Big Oil/Coal, etc. that ended up changing nothing.

Many of these same Big Green groups were successful in their role in the passage of NAFTA, a huge betrayal of people and environmental interests in the United States, Canada and Mexico. We’re all still paying the price for this betrayal today.

Naming names again, Klein lists the National Wildlife Federation, Environmental Defense Fund, Conservation International, National Audubon Society, Natural Resources Defense Council and the World Wildlife Fund.

Not everyone in the green movement hopped on the pro-trade bandwagon: Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, and



the Sierra Club, as well as many small organizations, continued to oppose NAFTA. But that didn't matter to the Clinton administration, which had what it wanted — the ability to tell a skeptical public that “groups representing 80 percent of national [environmental] group membership have endorsed NAFTA.” ... John Adams, then director of the Natural Resources Defense Council, succinctly described the extraordinarily helpful role played by groups like his: “We broke the back of the environmental opposition to NAFTA. After we established our position Clinton only had labor to fight. We did him a big favor.” (84)

## Technology to the Rescue?

For a variety of reasons — ranging from desperation to careerist opportunism — there is an influential set of players within the climate debate who argue that humans can counteract the disastrous effects they have had on the atmosphere by altering the atmosphere directly, that is, by using some forms of technology to undo by geoengineering what other forms of technology have caused.

Geoengineering would address global warming in one of two ways: by directly cooling the earth (“solar radiation management,” SRM) or by removing greenhouse gases, the immediate cause of global warming, from the atmosphere (“carbon dioxide removal”). Klein introduces us to these proposals from the vantage point of the “experts,” in this case those assembled at an international gathering in the UK to discuss options for geoengineering governance.

Surrounded by geoengineering enthusiasts, she learns what the most “promising” of the methods currently proposed is: SRM through the spraying of sulfate aerosols in the stratosphere, causing more sunlight to be reflected. This procedure was inspired by the effects that extreme volcanic eruptions have on the atmosphere and the climate: global cooling that can last for several years.

Geoengineering opens up all sorts of cans of worms, and again we have Klein's insightful take to guide us. First is its unpredictability. The ecosphere is an elaborate complex system that almost defies scientific investigation, so the idea that we could undertake to change one aspect of this system — the extent to which the stratosphere reflects sunlight — with no unintended consequences elsewhere in the system is frankly loony.

As Klein makes clear, there is no way to do the experiment to test such a plan, no other planet where we can see what might go wrong. Because of the way the climate system works, the consequences of these techniques are likely to be distributed very unevenly: drought in one continent, flooding in another, relative calm in a third.

To the extent that such effects are predictable, we can imagine powerful countries or corporations using the techniques to benefit some to others' detriment — an issue discussed but not resolved at the meeting Klein attended. Although neutral in and of itself, like all science, geoengineering in the context of the grossly unequal distribution of power that characterizes the early 21st century world opens all sorts of possibilities for abuse on an unprecedented scale.

## Blockadia: Some Cause to Celebrate

After shattering any illusions the reader might have had about a hero emerging from the capitalist class to rescue us, or about the possibility of some engineering scheme that would somehow lower the temperature of the atmosphere without leading to any other unforeseen, large-scale consequences.

Klein does not stop there. She goes on to show how, in local contexts, ordinary people are taking on the fossil-fuel companies and their associates in other industries and sometimes winning. She calls these movements Blockadia because they involve people standing in the way of the business-as-usual creation of mines, dumping of toxic wastes, building of pipelines to carry dangerous fossil-fuel byproducts, and rail and highway transport of more dangerous substances.

She cites examples in China, the UK, Australia, Greece, Romania, France, Nigeria, Ecuador, Turkey and India, as well as numerous examples in North America, emphasizing in particular the crucial part played by indigenous people. Many of these struggles are concerned with water, air or soil pollution, caused by the same fossil fuels that are implicated in climate change.

A very significant additional element is the extent to which these new activists see the relationship between environmental justice and social justice. People are “driven by a desire for a deeper form of democracy.”

Klein takes up the growing divestment movement, another front in the fight to stop fossil fuel extraction. Because so many big investors are universities, students have become the major players in this movement. Although Klein admits that even if divestment campaigns succeed they will not bankrupt the fossil-fuel companies, they importantly “chip away at the social license with which these companies operate.” They have the additional advantage of bringing students into alliances with those on the front lines of the Blockadia campaigns.

The strength of this section is that it highlights the power of grassroots organizing, giving hope to activists who have rightly given up on the Democratic Party and on “good” capitalists. These stories really are cause to celebrate. “Only mass social movements can save us now,” she says, and no eco-socialist would argue with her.

## What Sort of Revolution?

In her final chapter Klein’s goal is to take the next step, to show how small, local actions and the beginnings of coordinated national, even international, actions could result in the kind of changes that are required.

Earlier, Klein has chronicled how the plans of the “greenest” of capitalists proved to be at best confused and at worst fraudulent, how the range of solutions proposed within capitalism is not working (or is working far too slowly). What kind of world does she hope will replace the one that has gotten us where we are?

It’s not a socialist one, apparently. What little Klein has to say about socialism, it is more or less dismissed in Chapter 5 because of the failures of the USSR and China to address ecological damage during their industrialization drives and the failures of the South American “pink tide” to overcome their countries’ dependence on fossil fuel extraction and destructive mining practices.

While she is right to be critical of these systems, an eco-socialist would argue that she is throwing out the socialist baby with the polluted bathwater. She is apparently unaware of the growing eco-socialist movement in North America and Europe and the growing literature that provides a theoretical framework for it.

Klein doesn’t offer a clear picture of the world we are fighting for. We’re left to assume that capitalism in some form will survive. One might argue it is the neoliberal version of capitalism that Klein is taking on, rather than capitalism itself.

## How Much Does Climate Change Change?

---

This interpretation is favored by Rob Nixon in his review of the book in *The New York Times*. It's for this reason he finds Klein's subtitle, "Capitalism vs. the Climate," inappropriate. Not surprisingly, Nixon prefers the call that neoliberal capitalism be replaced to "the never-never land of capitalism's global overthrow."

This chapter is taken up mostly by a consideration of the likelihood that we can expect the necessary changes to happen. Klein examines various possible precedents: the abolition of slavery, the Civil Rights movement, the New Deal, the restructuring of industry to support the U.S. war effort in World Wars I and II.

These took place within capitalism; some can even be seen as strengthening capitalism. As Klein admits, none fundamentally altered the economic system that is the problem.

All were the result of top-down policy decisions or legislation, though motivated in part by pressure from grassroots movements or perceived threats from anti-capitalist organizations. It's clear that what Klein is looking for are not thorough-going revolutions but reforms that can return us to a (mythical) kinder and gentler form of capitalism than the cut-throat neoliberal form we are living with in the 21st century.

For really revolutionary precedents, she would have to go back to the "bourgeois democratic" revolutions that brought us capitalism in the first place, or the socialist revolutions that were later betrayed or defeated. But since she is not really talking about a far-reaching revolution like the French or the Russian, and each of these is in any case contaminated, for her by the violence that ensued, we should not be surprised that she does not go there.

In his *Counterpunch* review, Craig Collins faults Klein's book for putting climate change "on a pedestal." "Climate chaos is just one devastating symptom of our dysfunctional society," he says. One way or another, economic collapse seems in the cards in the next few decades.

Although we don't agree with Collins that this will be a result of "peak oil," we do agree that at the point of collapse, although climate change will almost certainly be far advanced, stopping it may not be the main thing on people's minds.

We can imagine a world in which ordinary people are struggling to survive and in which the sort of disaster capitalism Klein describes in her second book is doing all it can to reap profits from the wreckage.

In these circumstances an environmental movement that has put all its eggs in the climate-change basket will have little to offer. As we have argued, Klein's major achievement in *This Changes Everything* is to link climate change and its effects on vulnerable people everywhere with other disastrous outcomes of 300 years of capitalism. But she never really follows through on what this would mean for the environmental organizations that she views favorably, like [350.org](http://350.org).

Though we can't expect an environmental organization to directly address police brutality, immigration or minimum wage campaigns, it is reasonable to expect them to take stands on these issues and to ally themselves with those who are directly involved. It's one thing to say that capitalism is guilty on multiple fronts, that the ecological catastrophe we face is just one of its outcomes. It's another to tie these together in a coherent strategy for change.

From our eco-socialist perspective, this is the book's weakest chapter. But it is unfair to criticize Klein for this gap. She is an activist journalist and a fine analyst, but not a theoretician, historian or political scientist. She is at her best when reporting on what is happening today behind the scenes, showing how the climate deniers are more prescient than many of the liberal environmentalists, how desperate technophiles are playing with fire, how green capitalists

## How Much Does Climate Change Change?

---

are deceiving us (and possibly themselves).

Once people recognize the seriousness of the ecological crisis, the most important ideological move they can make is to see the causal role of capitalism, to understand that only revolutionary system changes can save us and our planet now.

Klein masterfully lays out the case for anti-capitalism in the environmental movement. Given her research, her engaging and accessible style, and her obvious commitment to the cause, she has written what could well become the most influential book since the climate crisis became a mainstream concern.

By itself, *This Changes Everything* will not change anything, but the crucial discussions needed to affect change will never be the same.

[ATC](#)

---

[1] <http://www.state.gov/1997-2001-NOPD...>