

“No Is Not Enough”-Naomi Klein

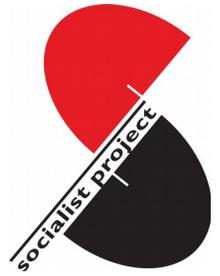
(“Resisting the New Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need”)

George Hewison

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“Trump, as extreme as he is, is less an aberration than a logical conclusion...of pretty much all of the worst trends of the past half century.”¹

This is Naomi Klein’s fundamental thesis and it is simple enough...and well supported in her latest book [No Is Not Enough](#). A great strength of Klein’s work lies in offering an analysis of the Trump phenomenon and helping those in the resistance to neoliberalism overcome a toxic blame game as to who among us is responsible for the election of Trump, i.e. identity politics, the backward white male working class, Russians, Bernie, Hilary, etc. Even more important, Naomi Klein provides a compass for action for those confronting the latest iteration of late stage capitalist politics. For the record, the book is entertaining and a good read.

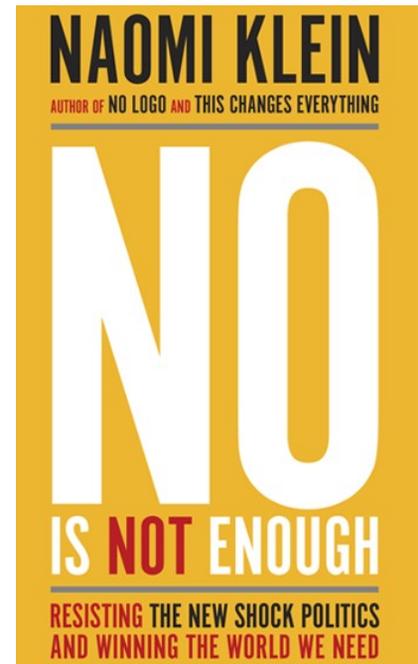
Her latest work convincingly demonstrates various points she has made in her previous classics, *No Logo*, *The Shock Doctrine* and *This Changes Everything: Capitalism versus the Climate*. In two decades, she has emerged as one of the most articulate spokespersons for a new intellectual vanguard emerging from streams of popular movements around the environment, feminism, Indigenous Rights, anti-racism and immigrant rights.

In her latest, she chronicles the birthing process for the **Leap Manifesto**, a product of the most advanced fighters and intellectuals around all of these relatively newer movements.

A few leaders of one particular senior movement were also there at the beginning, namely from the organized labour movement, leaders who signed on to the initial LEAP document. It is to that movement that this P.E.N. is largely directed.

Klein references, in at least two instances in *No Is Not Enough*, a big hurdle facing **LEAP**, namely attracting organized labour. She cites a meeting in the White House on the Monday after Trump’s inauguration between leaders of the Building Trades Unions and the newly-elected U.S. Commander-in Chief:

“Doug McCarron, president of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters...described Trump’s inaugural address...as ‘a great moment for working men and women’.



¹ Klein, Naomi, *No Is Not Enough*, Alfred A. Knopf Canada, Toronto, 2017, p.9

It was hard to watch. Trump was already waging war on the most vulnerable workers in the economy, and there was talk of budget cuts so draconian they would mean mass layoffs for public sector workers like bus drivers. So why were these labour leaders, representing around a quarter of all unionized workers in the United States, breaking the most sacred principle of the union movement-solidarity with other workers?"

Klein offers an explanation. It had to do with Trump's energy plans, and his pledge to spend on infrastructure, but *"the clincher, the union heads were clear, was that here, finally, was a president who had their backs on free trade."* Klein is analytical and not judgmental toward workers.

The second example she described involved a meeting of 60 or so leaders of various movements during the initial LEAP process and an animated exchange between an unnamed Canadian trade union leader and First Nations leader, the late Art Manuel.² They were all allies talking frankly to one another. But at issue is whether or not organized labour can seriously get on board with LEAP and the other movements, addressing central issues facing humanity; or is it too preoccupied with protecting its shrinking turf? It is the most serious test for the existing trade union movement.

That the building trades unions, or some of the rest of organized labour, act the way they do should come as no surprise to anyone who follows the history of organized labour in North America.

Gomperism is alive and well

Gomperism, or business unionism, as most labour historians know, is named after the American Federation of Labour's first President, Samuel Gompers. His belief in labour political action extended to working with, or punishing, the two existing capitalist parties. That usually meant focusing on the immediate needs in the workplace, and purposefully ignoring larger societal needs, or worse, acting as an advocate for employers and their political representatives.

Gomperism ignored the plight of vast numbers of unorganized industrial workers in the mass production industries at the beginnings of the 20th Century. Gomperism helped sabotage the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919. Eventually, industrial unionists succeeded, taking organizing matters into their own hands. With the help of a few already organized unions, the CIO (Committee of Industrial Organizations) in the U.S. and the CCL (Canadian Congress of Labour) in Canada were created. What followed was a period of intense labour rivalry between the two groups, i.e. raiding, etc. until the rivalry was largely put to bed through merger and the creation of the AFL-CIO and the Canadian Labour Congress in 1956 in Canada.

The political prelude to this coming together of the two labour centrals was a virulent Cold War that sapped militant class-based and socialist-led unionism, and consigned

² Ibid. p.231

organized labour to largely looking after the concerns of the existing one third of the work force that were organized. While organizing continued, extending a helping hand beyond the organized was often seen as acts of liberal charity rather than class solidarity.

Internationally, as in the case of Latin America, South Africa and elsewhere, the “aid” offered by North American organized labour to workers in other countries was often the opposite of solidarity, especially as it was propped up with funds from the federal Canadian government and the American CIA.

The rank and file was disempowered by a system limiting participation in the affairs of their unions where the exchange of dues payments led to the expectation that “THE UNION was somebody else”, existing to only take care of its current dues-paying members.

But these were relatively-speaking good times for North American unionized workers. We know that during this period of expansion of U.S.-based capitalism, including in Canada, the new (or is it a very old?) approach by organized labour seemed to work. The U.S. and Canadian state made concessions to working class demands in the form of the social contract, i.e. healthcare, education, pensions and labour relations, etc.

There was one major departure from Gompersism in Canada, i.e. reliance on the two-party system. The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) was founded as a coalition of early socialists and reformers to challenge the private profit system. That challenge was muted after capital waged its successful Cold War, and the merger of the TLC and the CCL was followed by a political merger of the new CLC with the CCF to form the New Democratic Party (NDP). That later merger had an impact on the Canadian political and social landscape not seen south of the border. For example, as the U.S. currently goes through its agony over healthcare, the obvious question for Canadians emerges: “why not single payer health care?” This question arises despite current Canadian experience where people are scrambling to preserve their single payer system. That indicates the game has changed. Now, no one’s healthcare is safe.

Gompersism has always been a trend in the Canadian labour movement, sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker. When many U.S.-based building trades unions, with the help of the federal government, left the CLC to form the Canadian Federation of Labour (CFL), a few years back, they were attempting to apply the brakes on the drive toward Canadian trade union autonomy in favour of closer relations with employers and the Canadian state.

By the mid-1970s, the shine had started to come off the so-called “golden age” for organized labour as Keynesian economic policy started to fail. The ‘Chicago School’, that Klein so eloquently describes in her *Shock Doctrine*, stepped into the political economy breach, and neoliberalism arrived in time to let society know that “we were living beyond our means,” which (roughly translated) meant that capital needed to

find new methods to expand its profit base. Privatization, deregulation and tightening the screws on unions had arrived as the panacea, preceded by the ideological Trojan horses of the corporate-funded Fraser and CATO Institutes, Koch Brothers, and others, ad nauseum. We really didn't know what hit us.

Thus we are now witnessing, after four decades of the merging of the Friedman/Keynes manipulation of the economy and ideological brainwashing, the bankruptcy of both political economy doctrines. The debate is now parked between the panicked spokespersons for differing approaches of capital offering the 'least worse' plans to extricate capitalism from a compendium of crises, i.e. climate change, the attack on democracy, wealth inequality, the stubborn economic crisis and so on.

Add to that, the architecture of world capitalism since World War II (with the U.S. state having the preeminent position on the globe) now facing centrifugal forces not faced before, the corporate world system has arrived at the vortex of a perfect systemic storm.

Enter Donald Trump

As we all know, the LEAP MANIFESTO arrived to mixed reviews (to put it kindly) when it hit the news cycle during the last Canadian federal election. The corporate press either gave it little coverage, or expressed outrage. The organized labour movement appeared to split over its arrival, while the New Democratic Party, half parented by the organized labour movement, also deadlocked at its Edmonton Convention over support for LEAP. In the end, that Convention compromised and referred the Leap Manifesto for study to the Party's constituency level.

Thus far, none of the federal NDP leadership candidates have openly embraced LEAP, and beyond a handful of trade union leaders, LEAP has not yet produced a profound impact on the rank and file of organized labour. Rank and file (and many leaders reflecting their rank and file) attitudes, combined with NDP immediate aspirations for parliamentary power, indicates there remains a mountain to climb for LEAP supporters.

Anyone who has read or studied the LEAP Manifesto knows that it nails the interconnectedness of the problems facing us all. How to make it a mass conversation in Canada (and the world) remains the trick; and engaging the organized labour movement and its members is a matter of supreme importance in that endeavour.

Either the labour movement will be on board with LEAP and what it stands for, or it will be a powerful weapon of opposition in the hands of forces operating to deny climate change, wealth redistribution, democracy, social advance... and ultimately unionism.

Gomperism's fertile soil lies mainly in resignation by working people when they face the power of capital. It is the opposite of solidarity. If one worker refuses to join a

union out of the belief that unionism can't really change his or her circumstance for the better and consequently looks for individual, rather than collective, solutions to their plight, it is not a stretch for whole groups of unionized workers fighting the effects of global restructuring to realize that class solidarity may also be unreachable. Inter-union squabbles and more serious raiding can result as unions struggle to adapt to the brave new world of deepening crisis.

Retreating into individual silos constitutes a long distance from "workers of the world unite." Today, if the Gomperist voices appear louder than normal, it is for the lack of practical solutions on offer for workers who have enjoyed the benefits of union organization but appear to be on the edge of losing.

There is a need for the non-labour activist to appreciate the difficulties and history facing the activists within the organized labour movement (you come to it for precious resources, often unaware of internal difficulties and debates); and there is an even greater need for activists within the organized labour movement to come together to not only interface with their comrades in the non-labour movements, but also, equally important, to do the tough gut-slugging work to advance practical programs that can seize the imagination of rank and file workers and move them out of their workplace and trade union silos and link them in unity with other growing movements for fundamental change in our society. Labour Councils play a crucial role here.

Gomperism, as demonstrated during the Bernie Sanders campaign and at Standing Rock, is still a potent force. In today's world, it holds no future for workers, but its intellectual grip on us is as deep as a system and cannot be underestimated. Ultimately, however, we are left with but one choice. NO IS NOT ENOUGH!

Workers and social movements of the world, UNITE! We have a world to win! ●

George Hewison is a lifelong union organizer and former officer of his union, the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union on Canada's west coast. He embraces political and social activism in the interests of social justice and fundamental social change. He believes in the power of working people, who, if given the proper tools, can change the world. One of those tools is a deepening understanding of how our society is put together. He has been the recipient of many important lessons, both positive and negative, from veterans of Labour's struggles stretching back decades. He has spent most of his adult life sharing those lessons with others. For a number of years, he has also engaged in a study of the political economy of capitalism, including its current iteration, and conducts discussion groups with interested folks who share his desire to understand and explain the complexities of the social, economic and political world around us. He continues a tradition of combining working class activism with the power of song and continues to tour and perform extensively. He may be reached at georgehewison@gmail.com