

# Author Naomi Klein speech to Labour Party Conference

## **Author**

**Naomi Klein**, speaking  
at Labour Party Conference, said:

**\*\*\*CHECK  
AGAINST DELIVERY\*\*\***

Thank you  
Kate for that lovely introduction and all the work that you do to put social  
justice on the world agenda.

It's been  
such a privilege to be part of this historic convention. To feel its energy  
and  
optimism.

Because  
friends, it's bleak out there. How do I begin to describe a world upside  
down?  
From heads of state tweeting threats of nuclear annihilation, to whole  
regions  
rocked by climate chaos, to thousands of migrants drowning off the coasts of  
Europe, to openly racist parties gaining ground, most recently and alarmingly  
in Germany.

Most days  
there is simply too much to take in. So I want to start with an example that  
might seem small against such a vast backdrop. The Caribbean and Southern  
United States are in the midst of an unprecedented hurricane season: pounded  
by  
storm after record-breaking storm.

As we  
meet, Puerto Rico – hit by Irma, then Maria – is without power and could be  
for  
months. It's water and communication systems are also severely compromised.  
Three and half million US citizens on that island are in desperate need of  
their government's help.

But just like  
during Hurricane Katrina, the cavalry is missing in action. Donald Trump is  
too  
busy trying to get Black athletes fired – smearing them for daring to shine a  
spotlight on racist violence.

Amazingly

a real federal aid package for Puerto Rico has not yet been announced.

By some reports, more money has been spent securing presidential trips to Mar-a-Lago.

As if all this weren't enough, the vultures are now buzzing. The business press is filled with articles about how the only way for Puerto Rico to get the lights back on is to sell off its electricity utility. Maybe its roads and bridges too.

This is a phenomenon I have called The Shock Doctrine – the exploitation of wrenching crises to smuggle through policies that devour the public sphere and further enrich a small elite.

We see this dismal cycle repeat again and again. We saw it after the 2008 financial crash. We are already seeing it in how the Tories are planning to exploit Brexit to push through disastrous pro-corporate trade deals without debate.

The reason I am highlighting Puerto Rico is because the situation is so urgent. But also because it's a microcosm of a much larger global crisis, one that contains many of the same overlapping elements: accelerating climate chaos; militarism; histories of colonialism; a weak and neglected public sphere; a totally dysfunctional democracy.

And overlaying it all: the seemingly bottomless capacity to discount the lives of huge numbers of Black and brown people.

Ours is an age when it is impossible to pry one crisis apart from all the others. They have all merged, reinforcing and deepening each other.... like one shambling, multi-headed beast.

I think it's helpful to think of the current US president in much the same way.

It's tough to know how to adequately sum him up. So let me try a local example.

You know that horrible thing currently clogging up the London sewers. I believe you call it the fatberg?

Well

Trump, he's the political equivalent of that.

A merger

of all that is noxious in the culture, economy and body politic, all kind of  
glommed together in a self-adhesive mass. And we're finding it very, very  
hard  
to dislodge.

It gets

so grim that we have to laugh. But make no mistake: whether it's climate  
change  
or the nuclear threat, Trump represents a crisis that could echo through  
geologic time.

But here

is my message to you today:

Moments

of crisis do not have to go the Shock Doctrine route – they do not need to  
become  
opportunities for the already obscenely wealthy to grab still more.

They can

also go the opposite way.

They can

be moments when we find our best selves.... when we locate reserves of  
strength and focus we never knew we had.

We see it

at the grassroots level every time disaster strikes.

We all

witnessed it in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower catastrophe.

When the

people responsible were MIA..... the community came together..... Held one  
another in their care, organized the donations and advocated for the living –  
and for the dead.

And they

are doing it still, more than 100 days after the fire.

When

there is still no justice and, scandalously, only a handful of survivors have  
been rehoused.

And it's

not only at the grassroots level that we see disaster awaken something  
remarkable in us.

There is

also a long and proud history of crises sparking progressive transformation on a society-wide scale.

Think of the victories won by working people for social housing and old age pensions during the Great Depression.... Or for the NHS after the horrors of the Second World War.

This should remind us that moments of great crisis and peril do not necessarily need to knock us backwards.

They can also catapult us forward.

Our progressive ancestors achieved that at key moments in history, in your country and in mine.

And we can do it again – in this moment when everything is on the line.

But what we know from the Great Depression and the post-war period, is that we never win these transformative victories by simply resisting.... by simply saying “no” to the latest outrage.

To win in a moment of true crisis, we also need a bold and forward-looking “yes” – a plan for how to rebuild and respond to the underlying causes.

And that plan needs to be convincing, credible and, most of all, captivating.

We have to help a weary and wary public to imagine itself into that better world.

And that is why I am so honoured to be standing with you today.

With the transformed Labour Party in 2017.

And with the next Prime Minister of Britain,

Jeremy

Corbyn.

Because  
in the last election, that's exactly what you did.

Theresa  
May ran a cynical campaign based on exploiting fear and shock to grab more  
power for herself – first the fear of a bad Brexit deal, then the fear  
following the horrific terror attacks in Manchester and London.

Your  
party and your leader responded by focusing on root causes: a failed “war on  
terror”... economic inequality and weakened democracy.

But you  
did more than that.

You  
presented voters with a bold and detailed Manifesto.

One that  
laid out a plan for millions of people to have tangibly better lives:

free  
tuition,

fully  
funded health care,

aggressive  
climate action.

After decades  
of lowered expectations and asphyxiated political imagination, finally voters  
had something hopeful and exciting to say “yes” to.

And so  
many of them did just that, upending the projections of the entire expert  
class.

You  
proved that the era of triangulation and tinkering is over.

The  
public is hungry for deep change – they are crying out for it.

The  
trouble is, in far too many countries, it's only the far right that is  
offering  
it, or seeming to, with that toxic combination of fake economic populism and  
very real racism.

You

showed us another way.

One that speaks the language of decency and fairness, that names the true forces most responsible for this mess – no matter how powerful.

And that is unafraid of some of the ideas we were told were gone for good.

Like wealth redistribution.

And nationalising essential public services.

Now, thanks to all of your boldness, we know that this isn't just a moral strategy.

It's a winning strategy.

It fires up the base, and it activates constituencies that long ago stopped voting altogether.

If you can keep doing that between now and the next election, you will be unbeatable.

You showed us something else in the last election too, and it's just as important.

You showed that political parties don't need to fear the creativity and independence of social movements – and social movements, likewise, have a huge amount to gain from engaging with electoral politics.

That's a very big deal.

Because let's be honest: political parties tend to be a bit freakish about control.

And real grassroots movements... we cherish our independence – and we're pretty much impossible to control.

But what we are seeing with the remarkable relationship between Labour and Momentum, and

with other wonderful campaign organizations, is that it is possible to combine the best of both worlds.

If we listen and learn from each other, we can create a force that is both stronger and more nimble than anything either parties or movements can pull off on their own.

I want you to know that what you have done here is reverberating around the world – so many of us are watching your ongoing experiment in this new kind of politics with rapt attention.

And of course what happened here is itself part of a global phenomenon.

It's a wave led by young people who came into adulthood just as the global financial system was collapsing and just as climate disruption was banging down the door.

Many come out of social movements like Occupy Wall Street, and Spain's Indignados.

They began by saying no – to austerity,

to bank bailouts,

to fracking and pipelines.

But they came to understand that the biggest challenge is overcoming the way neoliberalism has waged war on our collective imagination, on our ability to truly believe in anything outside of its bleak borders.

And so these movements started to dream together, laying out bold and different visions of the future... and credible pathways out of crisis.

And most importantly they began engaging with political parties, to try to win power.

We saw it in Bernie Sanders' historic campaign in the US primaries... which was powered

by millennials who know that safe centrist politics offers them no kind of safe future.

By the way... Bernie, is the most popular politician in the United States today.

We see something similar with Spain's still-young Podemos party, which built in the power of mass movements from Day One.

In all of these cases, electoral campaigns caught fire with stunning speed.

And they got close to taking power – closer than any genuinely transformative political program has in either Europe or North America in my lifetime.

But still, in each case, not close enough.

So in this time between elections, it's worth thinking about how to make absolutely sure that next time, all of our movements go all the way.

A big part of the answer is: Keeping it up.

Keep building that yes.

But take it even further.

Outside the heat of a campaign, there is more time to deepen the relationships between issues and movements, so that our solutions address multiple crises at once.

In all of our countries, we can and must do more to connect the dots between economic injustice, racial injustice and gender injustice.

We need to understand and explain how all of those ugly systems that place one group in a position of dominance over another – based on skin colour, religious faith, gender and sexual orientation – consistently serve the interests of power and money and always have.

They do it by keeping us divided.

And  
keeping themselves protected.

And we  
have to do more to keep it front of mind... that we are in a state of climate  
emergency... the roots of which are found  
in the same system of bottomless greed that underlies our economic emergency.

But  
states of emergency, let's recall, can be catalysts for deep progressive  
victories.

So let's  
draw out the connections between the gig economy – that treats human beings  
like a raw resource from which to extract wealth and then discard – and the  
dig  
economy, in which the extractive companies treats the Earth in precisely the  
same careless way.

And let's  
show exactly how we can move from that gig and dig economy to a society based  
on principles of care – caring for the planet and for one another. Where the  
work of our caregivers and of our land and water protectors, is respected and  
valued. A world where no one and nowhere is thrown away – whether in fire-  
trap  
housing estates or on hurricane-ravaged islands.

I applaud  
the clear stand Labour has taken against fracking and for clean energy. Now  
we  
need to up our ambition and show exactly how battling climate change is a  
once-in-a-century chance to build a fairer and more democratic economy.

Because  
as we rapidly transition off fossil fuels, we cannot replicate the wealth  
concentration and the injustices of the oil and coal economy, in which  
hundreds  
of billions in profits have been privatized and the tremendous risks are  
socialized.

We can  
and must design a system in which the polluters pay a very large share of the  
cost of transitioning off fossil fuels. And where we keep green energy in  
public and community hands. That way revenues stay in your communities, to  
pay  
for childcare and firefighters and other crucial services. And it's the only  
way to make sure that the green jobs that are created are union jobs that pay  
a  
living wage.

The motto  
needs to be: leave the oil and gas in the ground, but leave no worker behind.

And the best part, you don't need to wait until you get to Westminster to start this great transition. You can use the levers you have right now.

You can take a page from Barcelona and turn your Labour-controlled cities into beacons for the world transformed.

A good start would be divesting your pensions from fossil fuels and investing that money in low carbon social housing and green energy cooperatives.

That way people can begin to experience the benefits of the next economy before the next election – and know in their bones that yes, there is, and always has been, an alternative.

In closing....

I want to stress, as your international speaker, that none of this can be about turning any one nation into a progressive museum.

In wealthy countries like yours and mine, we need migration policies and levels of international financing that reflect what we owe to the global south – our historic role in destabilizing the economies and ecologies of poorer nations for a great many years.

For instance, during this epic hurricane season, we've heard a lot of talk of "the British Virgin Islands," the "French Virgin Islands" and so on.

Rarely was it seen as relevant to observe that these are not reflections of where Europeans like to holiday.

They are reflections of the fact that so much of the vast wealth of empire was extracted from these Islands in bonded human flesh.

Wealth that supercharged Europe's and North America's industrial revolution, positioning us as the super-polluters we are today.

And that is intimately connected to the fact that the future and security of island

nations are now at grave risk from superstorms storms, sea level rise, and dying coral reefs.

What should this painful history mean to us today?

It means welcoming migrants and refugees.

And it means paying our fair share to help many more countries ramp up justice-based green transitions of their own.

Trump going rogue is no excuse to demand less of ourselves in the UK and Canada or anywhere else for that matter.

It means the opposite -that we have to demand more of ourselves.

To pick up the slack until the United States manages to get its sewer system unclogged.

I firmly believe that all of this work, challenging as it is, is a crucial part of the path to victory.

That the more ambitious, consistent and holistic you can be in painting a picture of the world transformed, the more credible a Labour government will become.

Because you went and showed us all that you can win.

Now you have to win.

We all do.

Winning is a moral imperative.

The stakes are too high, and time is too short, to settle for anything less.

Thank you