

Those Who Despise America – Part 6: Climate Change

by

Phil Rasmussen

Every year in the Northern Hemisphere, we experience a series of seasonal changes: spring, summer, fall, and winter. In the Southern Hemisphere, these seasons occur in the opposite order. While we take these seasonal changes for granted, on a larger scale, concern about climate change has gradually developed over more than two centuries.

Throughout Earth's history, factors such as volcanic eruptions, changes in Earth's orbit, and variations in solar activity have naturally influenced the climate. However, these natural factors cannot account for the Earth's current global warming trend. As a result, climate change has become the subject of scientific, political, and social controversy.

What began as scientific research into Earth's atmosphere in the 1820s had, by the 1970s, started becoming a growing concern for governments because of the potential impact of environmental problems on economic interests.

Society's concern about climate change became a significant mainstream public and political issue in the late 1980s. During this period, climate change moved beyond the scientific community and into political debate. Environmentalists and left-wing political movements played an important role in promoting climate action, while political leaders across the ideological spectrum also began responding to a growing public concern.

Since the 1990s, climate change has remained a major political issue among socialist and left-leaning political movements. However, over time, disagreements about the causes, consequences, and appropriate responses to climate change have contributed to increasing political polarization.

Considering all the debate on climate change, one thing is clear. Human activity has a significant impact on the environment. Scientists have determined that greenhouse gases are a major cause of global warming. These gases are essentially the result of human activity and include:

- Carbon dioxide (CO₂) — released mainly by burning coal, oil, and natural gas, and some industrial processes.
- Methane (CH₄) — released by livestock, landfills, natural gas and oil production, rice agriculture, and other sources.

- Nitrous oxide (N₂O) — associated largely with agricultural fertilizers, manure management, and some industrial processes.
- Water vapor (H₂O) — the most abundant naturally occurring greenhouse gas.
- Ozone (O₃) — ozone in the lower atmosphere is a greenhouse gas.
- Fluorinated gases — human-made gases used in refrigeration, air conditioning, electronics, and industry.

The physical effects of these gases include:

- Rising global temperatures
- Melting glaciers and ice sheets
- Rising sea levels
- More frequent or intense heat waves and some types of extreme weather
- Changes in growing conditions for agriculture
- Stress on ecosystems and wildlife

While the sage advice is that we need to reduce these gases, the practicality of doing so is open to much debate. People disagree about:

- How quickly we should reduce greenhouse-gas emissions
- Whether to use carbon taxes, regulations, subsidies, or other policies
- How much climate policies should cost
- How much governments should prioritize economic growth versus emissions reductions
- How to distribute the costs between wealthy and developing countries
- How much adaptation versus prevention should be emphasized

Addressing climate change requires substantial, worldwide public and government support.

Such support, however, will not happen for a variety of reasons. There are political, economic, social, and cultural differences not only between developed and developing countries but also between the countries within each category.

Additionally, people inherently resist change because they:

- fear losing jobs or security
- have to change daily habits or work habits
- do not know whether the change will actually work
- feel that someone else is forcing the change
- feel they are losing control over their choices/lives

The socialists' view of climate change is that it is not an individual problem but rather a consequence of economic structure (e.g. capitalism). Their approach is to change the economic system and use collective resources to solve it. This would involve transitioning away from fossil fuels, creating public ownership of energy systems and resources, reducing consumer product availability and lifestyle choices, and investing in green infrastructure.

The climate change problem goes much deeper than what the socialist approach would address. Their agenda does not take into consideration the impact of migration and the need for constructing new or expanding infrastructures. Their agenda also does not consider the impact of climate change on microclimates.

While socialists have aimed their agenda at automobiles and household appliances, they have not addressed other conditions that affect climate change. For example, the push to produce electric vehicles (EVs) as a response to climate change in the 2010s and 2020s produced increased greenhouse gases indirectly through mining, manufacturing and energy use to produce various electric automotive components.

Additionally, there are many socialists advocating for policies that impose restrictions or costs on ordinary people while they themselves use carbon-intensive transportation. Two notable socialists who do this are Bernie Sanders and AOC.

As we summarize the issue of climate change, it is important to note that the world's major religions, along with many Indigenous traditions, emphasize stewardship, responsibility, and care for the Earth.

It should also be noted that according to a 2021 Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) survey, roughly 60% of its members identify as atheist or agnostic. From this perspective, it becomes conceivable that the socialist agenda on climate change is centered on political, economic, and social power rather than on solving climate change issues.

While the Earth's climate has always been changing, human activity, rather than nature, has dramatically and significantly accelerated recent changes in the climate and has had profound effects on the planet's ecosystems.

The common perception is that climate change simply means that everything is getting hotter. Yet other signs of climate change include changes in rainfall, storms, drought patterns, ocean conditions, and other parts of a fragile, interconnected ecosystem.

Climate change is symptomatic of the consequences of how humans interact with and care for the natural systems that sustain life on Earth. It is more than an environmental issue; it is also a question of stewardship and our responsibility to care for the systems that sustain life on this planet.