

# Who Will Save Us?

## Bookreview on Naomi Kleins – *This Changes Everything. Capitalism vs The Climate*

*Our economic system and our planetary system are now at war.*

Naomi Klein's newest book *This Changes Everything. Capitalism vs The Climate*, nearly 500 painstakingly researched pages thick, takes the reader on an incredible journey through the science, geopolitics, psychology, economics, ethics and activism that shape the climate question.

Considering that there is not much reasonable doubt as to the findings of science on the subject of climate change, Klein asks the question of why we are not stopping the fire and are in fact dousing it with gasoline. "Climate change has never received the crisis treatment from our leaders, despite the fact that it carries the risk of destroying lives on a vastly greater scale than collapsed banks or collapsed buildings". Climate change has so far been a topic that most people are aware of, but even those on the left would just as soon ignore. Klein confesses that she long shared the same desire for denial and until recently she "continued to behave as if there was nothing wrong" with an elite frequent flyer card in her wallet. "It is always easier to deny reality," writes Naomi Klein, "than to allow our world view to be shattered, a fact that was as true of die-hard Stalinists at the height of the purges as of libertarian climate deniers today."

Klein traces our inaction to a structural problem and the belief that the current model of deregulated capitalism is the only game in town. Our economy is built on the promise and premise of endless growth,

regardless of the fact that we only have finite resources. Klein argues that, "we have not done the things that are necessary to lower emissions because those things fundamentally conflict with deregulated capitalism [...] We are stuck because the action that would give us the best chance of averting catastrophe are extremely threatening to an elite minority that has a stranglehold over our economy, our political process, and most of our major media outlets". Klein, however, makes the case that if we take the climate question seriously, it could create unique opportunities and become a galvanising force for positive change. Climate change could not only force action on environmental issues, but could also be a force to fight economic inequality, create more democratic societies and even address historical gender and racial injustices.

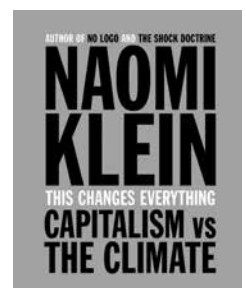
Her previous books, *No Logo* and *The Shock Doctrine*, have earned the Canadian-born Klein a well-deserved reputation as one of the foremost critics of neoliberalism, as promoted by Milton Friedman and the Chicago School of Economics. What is needed in order to avert catastrophic climate change, Klein argues, is 'managed degrowth' and she pleads for systemic change rather than go-green lifestyle choices. Her anti-capitalism, anti-growth analysis is clear throughout the book, and has earned her much criticism from the establishment. The idea that individuals are going to have to consume less and corporate profits are going to have to be drastically reduced of course is anathema to the current mainstream worldview.

### Who will save us?

Klein is not only taking on big business and conservatives who deny climate change, but also

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Naomi Klein (2014) *This changes everything Capitalism vs the Climate*. Simon and Schuster.



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environmental groups. The first of the book's three sections details how the environmental movement has allowed itself to be hijacked by corporate interests. In Klein's telling, environmental organizations have wasted time and political capital by focusing on counterproductive mechanisms like carbon trading, carbon offsets or natural gas as a 'bridge fuel'. Some environmental groups have stocks in the fossil fuel sector, take donations from, and form corporate partnerships with the big emitters. She also describes in detail how one of the richest environmental organizations – the Nature Conservancy – literally drilled for oil and gas on a patch of land set aside for habitat preservation. She slates major green and environmental groups who argue that climate change is a problem that can be tackled with some smart policy changes but without major disruption to the status quo. The fact that major environmental groups continue to argue that systemic change is not needed makes them, in Klein's words, "just as dishonest as the global warming deniers they vilify".

The second section of the book deals with what Klein calls "magical thinking". In our desire to deal with climate change without questioning the logic of growth, we have been eager to look both to technology and the market for saviours. In line with most disaster Hollywood movies, we seem to believe that in the last minute, "our best and brightest are going to save us from disaster". One of the book's most chilling chapters is Klein's analysis of geo-engineering strategies. Pumping sulphate aerosols into the upper atmosphere to imitate the cooling effects of a major volcanic eruption or 'brightening' clouds so they reflect more of the sun's rays back to space offer tantalizing promise of a climate change fix that would allow us to continue our resource-exhausting way of life, indefinitely. Klein points out that geo-engineering strategies unfortunately appeal to a deep-seated desire for techno-fixes of global problems. "The dogged faith in technology's capacity to allow us to leapfrog out of crisis is born of earlier technological breakthroughs - splitting the atom or putting a man on the moon". Yet as Klein notes, such dangerous and unpredictable schemes will surely be attempted if abrupt climate change gets seriously under way.

*This Changes Everything*, however is not all doom and gloom and the third part of the book is more uplifting. Klein notes that a new movement of climate activists has emerged in the last few years in a wide variety of contexts to challenge the neoliberal order. Blockadia, as she calls it, is a shifting, rootless network of activists opposing extraction projects in places like the tar sands of Canada, the Amazon, Greece or the Niger Delta. Despite being largely ig-

nored and often ridiculed, they engage in non-violent direct action by blocking pipelines, opposing new extraction projects, and quite willingly putting their bodies and their lives on the line. "Resistance to high-risk extreme extraction is building a global, grassroots, and broad base network the likes of which the environmental movement has rarely seen". What unites these increasingly interconnected pockets of resistance is the sheer ambition of the mining and fossil fuel companies in the extraction of tar sands, fracking, or offshore Arctic drilling regardless of the impact it has on local communities and on the local ecology.

With more and more people living on the new frontlines of both extreme weather created by climate change and the extraction industries increasingly controversial projects, the number of willing participants offering to join the climate fight is growing. Klein reminds us that real progressive changes – ending slavery, workers rights, fighting discrimination – have always come from mass movements, not from lobbying corporations and politicians. "Slavery wasn't a crisis for British and American elites until abolitionism turned it into one. Racial discrimination wasn't a crisis until the civil rights movement turned it into one. Apartheid wasn't a crisis until the anti-apartheid movement turned it into one." She urges her readers to declare climate change a crisis, now, too. "If enough of us stop looking away and decide that climate change is a crisis worthy of Marshall Plan levels of response, then it will become one, and the political class will have to respond, both by making resources available and by bending the free market rules that have not proven so pliable when elite interests are in peril".

Although it is certainly a positive development that communities are standing up to fight for their rights, I could not help but feel hopeless at the end of the book. The occupy movement, or other non-violent resistance movements opposing corporate interests all over the world, have been crushed, often with brute force in a very short time. If these grassroots movement are the only hope for change on a planetary level, it will be a bloody and long process. The problem is that we do not have much time. I can not help but to feel hopelessness when thinking that in order to avert catastrophic climate change, this will need to be done on a global scale, and within a decade – or two at most. ♦