THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING: CAPITALISM VS. THE CLIMATE

By Naomi Klein* Reviewed by Darrell Blakeway**

Naomi Klein is a public intellectual with a passion for investigating issues affecting the public interest. She is an astute observer of how political and economic power are exercised in fashioning public policy. Klein devoted five years to research, reflection, and writing on climate change and the fossil fuel industry—to understand these phenomena, those who downplay their adverse effects (or doubt that climate change is "man-made"), and those struggling to avoid their adverse effects on their local environs and the future of humanity. Klein concludes that what is required to avoid or mitigate the worst effects of climate change directly clashes with our prevailing capitalist, globalized, freetrade paradigms—ironically agreeing with many "climate deniers." Her most startling conclusion is that if humanity acts effectively to address climate change and establish a sustainable "steady-state" economy—which it must to survive the oil and gas industry is doomed. The unanswered question is whether the end of that industry will leave us in a dystopian or utopian future. That question will be answered, Klein believes, and the future unalterably determined, in the next two or three years.¹

^{*} In 2000, Klein published the book *No Logo*, which for many became a manifesto of the anti-corporate globalization movement. NAOMI KLEIN, NO LOGO (1st ed. 1999). In it, she attacks brand-oriented consumer culture and the operations of large corporations. In her 2007 book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Klein argued that many of the free market policies of Milton Friedman and the Chicago School of Economics were rushed to implementation while the countries were in shock from disasters, upheavals, or invasion. Many unpopular free market policies (for example, the privatization of the New Orleans Public Schools after Hurricane Katrina, and large parts of Iraq's economy under the Coalition Provisional Authority) were implemented by taking advantage of the chaotic aftermath of major disasters, whether economic, political, military, or natural. The desire for a rapid and decisive response to catastrophes allows ideologues to implement policies that go far beyond the legitimate responses to the disaster, when the response will go un-scrutinized. The book suggests that the shocks themselves are sometimes intentionally encouraged or even manufactured. The New Yorker has called her "the most visible and influential figure on the American left—what Howard Zinn and Noam Chomsky were thirty years ago." Larissa Macfarquhar, *Outside Agitator*, The New Yorker (Dec. 8, 2008).

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^{1.} A 2012 report on environmental degradation and climate change by a distinguished panel including James Hansen, former director of NASA's Goddard Institute, and Gro Harlem Brundtland, former chairman of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, concludes: "In the face of an absolutely unprecedented emergency, society has no choice but to take dramatic action to avert a collapse of civilization. Either we will change our ways and build an entirely new kind of global society, or they will be changed for us." GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND ET AL., ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES: THE IMPERATIVE TO ACT 7 (2012).

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I. WHY DAVID MUST FIGHT GOLIATH....

Klein also concludes that the source of environmental degradation, with climate change perhaps its most devastating effect, is not Western Civilization's political and economic structures, but something far deeper: its philosophic worldview. She calls this worldview the "extractive" attitude toward nature, and cites Francis Bacon, 17th-century scientist and philosopher, and Scottish engineer, James Watts, as two of the earliest proponents of this now prevalent view.²

This book does not describe the potential disasters humanity faces from climate change; Klein assumes that most of her readers are familiar with the credible assessments of the outcomes most scientists anticipate. Klein does not assert that the supply of fossil fuels will be depleted in the near term, and force a quick transition to renewable energy and ultra-energy efficiency. Hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling may enable us to continue exploiting fossil fuels for the indefinite future.

But Klein believes we are living in the last decade when the worst effects of global warming might still be averted. A major concern of climate scientists is whether global warming can be held to 2° Celsius (3.6° Fahrenheit), which many believe we could adapt to adequately. However, a 2011 study by the International Energy Agency (IEA) and a 2012 report by PriceWaterhouseCoopers show that existing trends (business as usual) put the world on track for a 4° to 6°C increase, which virtually no one thinks civilization could survive. Fatih Birol, the IEA's chief economist, says, "If there is not a major international agreement on climate change by 2017, the chance of limiting the temperature rise to 2°C will be closed altogether."

Klein notes that the world took unprecedented steps to avert a financial collapse and world-wide depression in 2008 and 2009. And there are no lack of feasible strategies for a rapid transition to non-carbon energy resources. So what, she asks, "is really preventing us from putting out the fire that is threatening to burn down our collective house?"⁵

We have not done the things that are necessary to lower emissions because these things fundamentally conflict with deregulated capitalism, the reigning ideology for the entire period we have been struggling to find a way out of this crisis. "We are stuck because the actions that would give us the best chance of averting catastrophe—and would benefit the vast majority—are extremely threatening to an elite minority that has a stranglehold over our economy, our political process, and most of our major media outlets."

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"The three policy pillars of this new era . . . are privatization of the public sphere, deregulation of the corporate sector, and lower corporate taxation, paid for

^{2.} NAOMI KLEIN, THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING: CAPITALISM VS. THE CLIMATE (Simon & Schuster, Inc. 2014).

^{3.} *Id.* at 14-15.

^{4.} International Energy Agency, Press & Media, (Nov. 9, 2011) JIJI PRESS, JAPAN, http://www.worldenergyoutlook.org/pressmedia/quotes/45/index.html.

^{5.} Id. at 18.

^{6.} *Id*.

with cuts to public spending. . . . This market fundamentalism has . . . systematically sabotaged our collective response to climate change. . . ."⁷

But there is now more at stake, Klein asserts, since we failed to take the steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in these past thirty-five years. The things we need to do to avoid catastrophic warming are now in conflict with the fundamental imperative at the heart of our economic model: growth without limits. Our economic system is now,

[a]t war with many forms of life on earth, including human life. What the climate needs to avoid collapse is a contraction in humanity's use of resources; what our economic model demands to avoid collapse is unfettered expansion. Only one of these sets of rules can be changed, and it's not the laws of nature.

Klein refers to the works of the ecological economists, founded primarily by Herman Daly, who are in sharp disagreement with mainstream conventional economists in their understanding of the limits to economic growth. With the growing population of the Earth, and increasing levels of production, consumption, and waste disposal, these economists understand that the biosphere itself (Earth and all its resources) now limits the potential for continuous economic growth. On the potential for continuous economic growth.

In 1972, the best-selling book *Limits to Growth*, based on the first study to use computer models to predict when various raw materials would be depleted and human consumption would overshoot the planet's carrying capacity, proved wrong on many of its predicted depletion rates, but was right about the most important limit of all: the Earth's ability to absorb pollution. Says Klein, "[t]he Earth's capacity to absorb the filthy byproducts of global capitalism's voracious metabolism is maxing out."

But in order to accept that constant economic growth is neither possible nor desirable, Klein says we need to develop a new worldview for Western Civilization. Her insight on this is inspired by (among others) the writings of Aldo Leopold, co-founder of the Wilderness Society ("The Land Ethic," "Thinking Like a Mountain") and Henry David Thoreau (on his reading of the Vedas in *Walden*), but also by leaders of the Indigenous tribes (First Nations) she met on her research into opposition to oil pipelines and hydraulic fracking. What motivates the opposition of these Indigenous peoples is not so much concern about greenhouse gas emissions, but pollution of their water by hydraulic fracturing operations, and oil spills from pipelines, freight trains, and tanker trucks. Quoting a South African spiritual leader, "Water is so holy. If you don't have water, you don't have

^{7.} Id. at 18-19.

^{8.} *Id.* at 21.

^{9.} See, e.g., Herman Daly, Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development (1997), Tim Jackson, Prosperity without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet (2009), Brian Czech, Supply Shock: Economic Growth at the Crossroads and the Steady State Solution (2013).

^{10. &}quot;Anyone who believes exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist." Kenneth Boulding, United States House of Representative Hearings on the *Energy Reorganization Act of 1973* at 248, 93d Cong. (1973).

^{11.} THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING, supra note 2, at 186.

^{12.} *Id.* at 184.

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anything worth living for. . . . I will fight to the death. I won't allow this water to be destroyed." ¹³

II. ... DESPITE THE POWER OF THE GIANT FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY

Klein describes her participation in a 2011 Heartland Institute Conference on Climate Change, one of the major institutions dedicated to debunking and discrediting belief in, and thwarting efforts to mitigate, global climate change. She credits Heartland, and other similar organizations funded by the oil and gas industry, with effectively stopping any meaningful international treaties or domestic legislation on regulation of carbon emissions, despite a broad consensus on the need for such actions in 2007.

In 2007 and 2008 Edison Electric Institute (the trade association of privately-owned U.S. electric utilities) and many other influential organizations affecting national energy policy accepted the inevitability of carbon emissions regulation in some form of a "cap-and-trade" mechanism. At the time, both Barack Obama and John McCain were committed to supporting such legislation in their presidential campaigns. And many were hopeful that the Copenhagen summit on climate change in December 2009 would reach agreement on an international treaty for binding reductions of greenhouse gas emissions.

Klein concedes that the "climate deniers" won the battle (or at least the first round) to thwart legislative and diplomatic efforts to address global warming. The "climate deniers" focused attention on the issue of how much it will cost to "wean" the world from fossil fuels. Moreover, they heightened fears that underdeveloped countries, which have thus far emitted relatively small amounts of greenhouse gases, would make extravagant demands for financial support to develop their clean energy resources from the industrialized countries that have been emitting greenhouse gases (and prospering thereby) for centuries. Furthermore, they played on the fears that the super-rich would have to pay the major costs of forsaking fossil fuel for clean energy. Finally, they pandered to a "meaner" side of climate denial: the fact that wealthy people in industrialized countries don't have to worry too much about the inconvenience of a few degrees of temperature rise. ¹⁴

She concludes her assessment of the Heartland Institute with an affirmation of her radically compassionate values:

[T]he culture that triumphed in our corporate age pits us against the natural world. This could easily be a cause only for despair. But if there is a reason for social movements to exist, it is not to accept dominant values as fixed and unchangeable but to offer other ways to live—to wage and win, a battle of cultural worldviews. That means laying out a vision of the world that competes directly with the one on harrowing display at the Heartland conference . . . and resonates with the majority of

^{13.} *Id.* at 347. Dr. S.H. Nasr of George Washington University understands that our environmental crisis is ultimately caused by the prevailing worldview of Western Civilization. The root of the problem, according to Nasr, is our secularized humanist perception of nature as an inert object. We have lost our capacity to perceive the phenomena of nature as divinely created and therefore sacred. *See generally Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man* (ABC International Group, 1968), and *Religion and the Order of Nature* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1996).

^{14.} Congressman Joe Barton (R-TX) famously once said at a subcommittee hearing on energy and the environment: "When it rains, we find shelter. When it's hot, we find shade." *Id.* at 47.

people on the planet because it is true: That we are not apart from nature but of it. That acting collectively for a greater good is not suspect, and that common projects of mutual aid are responsible for our species' greatest accomplishments. That greed must be disciplined and tempered by both rule and example. That poverty amidst plenty is unconscionable. ¹⁵

Leftist and "green" political parties and organizations around the world have failed to call for an end to extreme energy extraction, ¹⁶ and a full transition to renewable energy and sustainable economies, Klein asserts, because extreme free-market ideology has been so deeply ingrained into our culture. Even many progressive liberals have accepted the ideals of diminished roles for governments and veneration of the profit motive because these cultural values have infiltrated nearly every government on the planet, every major media organization, every university, and even their very souls. Many have subconsciously accepted the idea that they are nothing but selfish, greedy, self-gratification machines. ¹⁷

"This, without a doubt, is neoliberalism's single most damaging legacy: the realization of its bleak vision has isolated us enough from one another that it became impossible to convince us that we are not just incapable of self-preservation but fundamentally *not worth saving*." ¹⁸

On a purely political level, Klein asserts, the reason we are failing to rise to the challenge of climate change is because the actions required would result in "extinction for the richest and most powerful industry the world has ever known—the oil and gas industry, which cannot survive in anything like its current form if humans are to avoid extinction." Environmentalists have not invested the time and energy required to stop extraction of oil and gas because they know they are hopelessly outmatched by the political, economic, and cultural power of the oil and gas industry. ²⁰

III. ... AND HOW DAVID MIGHT WIN

Nevertheless, Klein sees hope in a growing network of organizations and movements around the world that are protesting energy projects because of their interference with people's enjoyment of the peace, quiet, and comfort of their homes, and the beauty of their surrounding environs, areas where "extreme" energy is being extracted (or prepared for extraction) for the first time. Many of the people who live near coal mining and oil and gas drilling operations for decades, often areas of sparse population populated by poor people without political power, are resigned to the depredations wreaked on the land.

However, the new extraction techniques have opened up gas and oil resources in formations that were previously inaccessible or un-producible—gas from the Barnett Formation in Texas and the Marcellus Shale in the Northeast, and oil from

^{15.} Id. at 60-61.

^{16. &}quot;Extreme energy" includes natural gas and oil extracted with modern hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling, as well as wells drilled in extremely deep water and previously inaccessible regions, such as Arctic areas. Moreover, it includes mountain-top removal to extract coal, and dredging tar sands pits to extract bitumen and refining it into a form of crude oil.

^{17.} Id. at 62.

^{18.} Id. (emphasis in original).

^{19.} Id. at 63.

^{20.} Id

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the Bakken in the Dakotas, Montana, and Saskatchewan. Farmers in Pennsylvania, whose residents never imagined their property would be subject to unwanted drilling operations; Rex Tillerson, CEO of Exxon-Mobil whose \$5 million home in Texas was threatened by nearby "fracking" operations;²¹ and Indigenous peoples in the Amazon Basin whose tribal homelands have been undisturbed for thousands of years, are rising up in fury and forming unanticipated alliances to combat these encroachments.

Canadian courts have issued a significant series of decisions protecting the rights of First Nations to hunt and fish, not only on their reservations but also on their historic hunting and fishing grounds. The First Nations have argued successfully that their treaty rights protect these lands and water resources from oil pipeline projects, such as the Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipelines (to move Alberta tar sands oil to the Pacific coast), tar sands excavation, and coal mining projects—all of which threaten the habitat of the fish and animals that their fishing and hunting treaty rights protect. Indigenous tribes are uniting in many regions to protect various waterways that are critical to the salmon migrations. Oil spills from pipeline crossings of such waterways or in the estuaries where oil is loaded into tanker ships for shipment to China or Japan could destroy untold numbers of migrating salmon, depriving these tribes of sustenance they have relied on for thousands of years. Moreover, the documented pollution of underground water supplies by hydraulic fracturing production threatens the livelihood of Indigenous and immigrant Canadians alike. ²²

Klein also describes many chilling events giving rise to mass resistance in Greece (Eldorado Gold mining project in the Skouries forest), Pungesti, Romania (Chevron's shale gas exploration), and New Brunswick (seismic testing for fracking operations on land claimed by the Elsipogtog Nation). Klein tells of her own efforts to make documentary films (with her husband) at the sites of many such protest movements and describes them as parts of world-wide "war zones," denoted by some as "Blockadia." Time and again, such protestors have been attacked by local law enforcement SWAT teams and private security forces—armed with sniper rifles, attack dogs, rubber bullets, tear gas, pepper spray, and hoses. And some protesters have been killed or severely wounded in these war zones.²³

In the years Klein researched and wrote this book, strong resistance movements in the vicinity of the new regions now being explored for development (or being developed) by the new technologies of the oil and gas industry, and other "extractive" industries, either came into being, or grew significantly. And they are interacting on a global scale, never before possible, by means of "smart phones" and the internet.²⁴ In the beginning, she says, only a few isolated

^{21.} Chris Woodyard, Exxon Mobil CEO: No fracking near my backyard, USA TODAY (Feb. 22, 2014, 3:46 PM).

^{22.} THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING, supra note 2, Chapter 10 (Love Will Save This Place).

^{23.} Id. Chapter 9 (Blockadia).

^{24.} In his 2007 book, *Blessed Unrest*, Paul Hawken identified an amorphous consortium of local protest organizations, similar to the anti-extractivist groups Klein describes, and concluded that an unnamed, leaderless movement in the world has quietly developed, dedicated to sustainability of the environment and the economy, social justice, and the preservation of the traditional culture and lands of indigenous peoples. Many of these disparate groups are now linked by social media, enabling them to interact effectively to an extent never before

economists dared to question the logic of unlimited economic growth, and only a few climate scientists were willing to speak bluntly about the political implications of their work. But year after year, the evidence of the impending environmental collapse and resource depletion mounts steadily.

The only historical precedent for a movement of the intensity that Klein thinks is required to abate climate change was the abolition movement of the 1800's, when slave owners were deprived of millions of dollars' worth of slave labor. Abolishing slavery, after thousands of years of its acceptance, constituted a shift in cultural values and laws of major moral and economic consequences. Klein believes that what is now required to break the grip of the fossil fuel industry with its concentration of wealth and political power is a Marshall Plan for the Earth, comparable to that undertaken to restore the economic vitality of Europe after World War II. But she faces the challenge with an understanding of how daunting it will be:

[L]owering global emissions in line with climate scientists' urgent warnings demands changes of a truly daunting speed and scale. Meeting science-based targets will mean forcing some of the most profitable companies on the planet to forfeit trillions of dollars of future earnings by leaving the vast majority of proven fossil fuel reserves in the ground. It will also require coming up with trillions more to pay for zero-carbon, disaster-ready societal transformations.

While eschewing violent revolutionary action, she nevertheless recognizes that:

[t]he economic costs to our elites will be real—not only because of the carbon left in the ground but also because of the regulations, taxes, and social programs needed to make the required transformation. Indeed, these new demands on the ultra-rich could effectively bring the era of . . . oligarch[y] to a close. 28

IV. HOW CLIMATE CHANGE MAY BE THE SLINGSHOT THAT CAN CHANGE EVERYTHING

Klein sees, in effect, an opportunity for an ultimately unavoidable response to climate change as the "shock" that could be a catalyst for restoring a more equitable distribution of wealth as a prerequisite to saving the world from the hot, stormy, and dystopian future it is now racing toward. The social justice movements of the last two centuries have made great strides, she believes, with the major exception of the economic front; but until economic justice is attained, these achievements are incomplete.

The firm and unyielding deadlines of climate change can force an economic restructuring of immense magnitude, Klein believes, by shattering the prevailing capitalist mythology that robs us of our communitarian heritage. The efforts

possible. In 2010, the Prince of Wales (Prince Charles) published *Harmony: A New Way of Looking at our World*, in which he identified almost exactly the same sets of causes and concerns as Hawken and concluded, as Klein does, that the root problem causing our environmental crisis is how we perceive nature. Prince Charles also identifies Sir Francis Bacon, along with Rene Descartes, as the thinkers who first steered the West down this trail to an ecological-economic catastrophe.

^{25.} THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING, supra note 2, at 455-57.

^{26.} Id. at 5-7.

^{27.} Id. at 452.

^{28.} Id. at 457.

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required to address climate change, she predicts, will be (or can be) the force that brings about an era when we can restore our self-image as decent and caring human beings, in lieu of the false ideal of self-interested, "economic man" fostered by unfettered free-market capitalist ideology.

Klein fears that our political class is incapable of seizing the opportunities that the climate change "shock" will present, because doing so would require them to unlearn the core tenets of the free-market ideology that has facilitated their rise to power. The middle class is a problem too, she believes, because they have been taught this ideology so relentlessly that they tend to focus on promoting their self-advantage, without regard to the needs and satisfaction of serving their friends, neighbors, and broader communities.²⁹

[A]ny attempt to rise to the climate challenge will be fruitless unless it is understood as part of a much broader battle of worldviews, a process of rebuilding and reinventing the very idea of the collective, the communal, the commons, the civil, and the civic after so many decades of attack and neglect.³⁰

To change a worldview, Klein says, you must choose the right battles—game changing policies that aim to change laws and patterns of thought. She suggests that advocating guaranteed employment with an adequate minimum wage rather than a carbon tax should be the first step.³¹ While freeing many workers from dirty energy jobs, it opens up a much-needed discussion of the social utility of a universal safety net and a full-throated debate about values, such as what we owe to one another based on our shared humanity. And it calls on us to think deeply about what we, as a society, collectively value more than economic growth and corporate profits.³²

Leadership in facing the challenge of climate change can only "bubble up" from the bottom, Klein believes; but she has a vision of the quality of leadership she is hoping for:

[T]he task is to articulate not just an alternative set of policy proposals but an alternative worldview to rival the one at the heart of the ecological crisis—embedded in interdependence rather than hyper-individualism, reciprocity rather than dominance, and cooperation rather than hierarchy.... Because in the hot and stormy future we have already made inevitable through our past emissions, an unshakeable belief in the equal rights of all people and a capacity for deep compassion will be the only things standing between civilization and barbarism. ³³

Such effective leaders must also understand that the process of shifting cultural values is central to their work. They will dream in public, show humanity a better version of itself, model different values in their own behavior, and liberate the political imagination about what is possible. They will not be afraid of the

^{29.} Id. at 460.

^{30.} Id

^{31.} In fact, a guaranteed job at a minimum living wage for all Americans could be easily afforded, according to economists who understand Modern Monetary Theory (MMT), such as L. Randall Wray, Cullen Roche, and James K. Galbraith. See generally Warren Mosler, The 7 Deadly Innocent Frauds of Economic Policy (2010), available at http://moslereconomics.com (last visited Mar. 25, 2015).

^{32.} THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING, supra note 2, at 461.

^{33.} Id. at 462.

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language of morality—and not be afraid to speak of right and wrong, of love and indignation.³⁴

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Effective leaders of the movement in response to climate change will recognize that there are solid arguments for moving beyond fossil fuels, which many patient investors in renewable energy already understand. But they will win the argument by asserting that such economic calculations alone are morally monstrous, because there are no economic justifications for allowing entire countries to be devastated by rising seas, or leaving millions to die on parched land.

"The climate movement has yet to find its full moral voice on the world stage, but it is most certainly clearing its throat—beginning to put the very thefts and torments that ineluctably flow from the decision to mock international climate commitments alongside history's most damned crimes." ³⁵

V. THE END OF THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY?

I do not agree with Naomi Klein's extreme skepticism about the ability of capitalism and free-enterprise entrepreneurship to contribute to surviving the challenge to humanity of global warming. Numerous decent and caring businessmen are as frightened as any about what our children and grandchildren have to face—not to mention the suffering already endured by the people of New Orleans, the island of Vanuatu, and even Lower Manhattan. Many of these innovative and morally sensitive entrepreneurs are contributing significantly to fostering the deployment of renewable energy and energy efficiency that any solution will require.

I have watched the ever mounting and almost irrefutable evidence that greenhouse gases and other waste products of our Industrial Revolution are the cause of the extreme weather events of recent years. Many books and articles have been written to sound the alarm and propose solutions. Among these many authors, I think this brilliant and articulate young mother has identified some *fundamental* truths about the problem, which only a few others recognize, and identifies a plausible path to an effective, perhaps irresistible, solution—one that will mitigate some of the worst effects of the destruction and human suffering humanity is facing.

To the readers of this Journal who work in the field of regulation of the energy industry and public utilities, I urge you to read this book with an open mind. And think about Klein's conclusion, and many others, that the *only* way to save humanity from the devastation of climate change requires the *end* of the oil and gas industry. And she shows how it could happen, despite the well-funded efforts of the Heartland Institute, and those with similar agendas. There is no such thing as "clean" coal or oil or natural gas. However much oil and gas that remains in the ground, capable of being extracted and burned, must be left where it is—*or else*.

^{34.} *Id*.

^{35.} Id. at 464.