

# This changes everything – Naomi Klein

## *I - p.18*

[...] What is wrong with us? What is really preventing us from putting out the fire that is threatening to burn down our collective house?

I think the answer is far more simple than many have led us to believe: we have not done the things that are necessary to lower emissions because those 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. [...]

## *II - p.124-125*

[...] The financial crisis that began in 2008 "should have been an opportunity to invest in low-carbon infrastructure for the 21st century. Instead, we fostered a lose-lose situation: carbon emissions rocketing to unprecedented levels, alongside increases in joblessness, energy costs, and income disparities."

What stopped Obama from seizing his historical moment to stabilize the economy and the climate at the same time was not lack of resources, or a lack of power. He had plenty of both. What stopped him was the invisible confinement of a powerful ideology that had convinced him — as it has convinced virtually all of his political counterparts — that there is something wrong with telling large corporations how to run their businesses even when they are running them into the ground, and that there is something sinister, indeed vaguely communist, about having a plan to build the kind of economy we need, even in the face of an existential crisis.

[...] Real capitalists don't plan, [...] they unleash the power of the profit motive and let the market, in its infinite wisdom, create the best possible society for all. [...]

## *III - p.12*

[...] "I really thought Obama understood," he kept repeating.

I have come to think of that night as the climate movement's coming of age: it was the moment when the realization truly sank in that no one was coming to save us. The British psychoanalyst and climate specialist Sally Weintrobe describes this as the summit's "fundamental legacy" — the acute and painful realization that our "leaders are not looking after us ... we are not cared for at the level of our very survival." No matter how many times we have been disappointed by the failings of our politicians, this realization still comes as a blow. It really is the case that we are on our own and any credible source of hope in this crisis will have to come from below. [...]

#### *IV - p.149-150*

[...] In Canada, corporations are not required to disclose how much money they spend on lobbying, but the number of times they communicate with public officials is a matter of public record. A 2012 report found that a single industry organization — the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers — spoke with federal government officials 536 times between 2008 and 2012, while TransCanada, the company behind the Keystone XL pipeline, had 279 communications. The Climate Action Network, on the other hand, the country's broadest coalition devoted to emission reductions, only logged six communications in the same period. In the U.K., the energy industry met with the Department of Energy and Climate Change roughly eleven times more frequently than green groups did during David Cameron's first year in office. In fact, it has become increasingly difficult to discern where the oil and gas industry ends and the British government begins. As *The Guardian* reported in 2011, "At least 50 employees of companies including EDF Energy, npower and Centrica have been placed within government to work on energy issues in the past four years. . . . The staff are provided free of charge and work within the departments for secondments or up to two years.

What all this money and access means is that every time the climate crisis rightfully triggers our collective self-preservation instinct, the incredible monetary power of the fossil fuel industry — driven by its own, more immediate self-preservation instinct — gets in the way. Environmentalists often speak about contemporary humanity as the proverbial frog in a pot of boiling water, too accustomed to the gradual increases in heat to jump to safety. But the truth is that humanity has tried to jump quite a few times. In Rio in 1992. In Kyoto in 1997. In 2006 and 2007, when global concern rose yet again after the release of *An Inconvenient Truth* and with the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. In 2009, in the lead up to the United Nations climate summit in Copenhagen. The problem is that the money that perverts the political process acts as a kind of lid, intercepting that survival instinct and keeping us all in the pot.

The influence wielded by the fossil fuel lobby goes a long way toward explaining why the sector is so very unconcerned about the nonbinding commitments made by politicians at U.N. climate summits to keep temperatures below 2 degrees Celsius. Indeed the day the Copenhagen summit concluded — when the target was made official — the share prices of some of the largest fossil fuel companies hardly reacted at all.

Clearly, intelligent investors had determined that the promises governments made in that forum were nothing to worry about — that they were not nearly as important as the actions of their powerful energy departments back home that grant mining and drilling permits. [...]

#### *V - p.151*

[...] After all, climate action has failed on Capitol Hill for the same reasons that serious financial sector reform didn't pass after the 2008 meltdown and the same reasons gun reform didn't pass after the horrific 2012 school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut. Which in turn are the same reasons why Obama's health reform failed to take on the perverting influence of the medical insurance and pharmaceutical companies. All these attempts to fix glaring and fundamental flaws in the system

have failed because large corporations wield far too much political power — a power exerted through corporate campaign contributions, many of them secret; through almost unfettered access to regulators via their lobbyists; through the notorious revolving door between business and government. [...]

### *VI - p.119*

[...] To state the obvious: it would be incredibly difficult to persuade governments in almost every country in the world to implement the kinds of redistributive climate mechanisms I have outlined. But we should be clear about the nature of the challenge: it is not that "we" are broke or that we lack options. It is that our political class is utterly unwilling to go where the money is (unless it's for a campaign contribution), and the corporate class is dead set against paying its fair share.

Seen in this light, it's hardly surprising that our leaders have so far failed to act to avert climate chaos. Indeed even if aggressive "polluter pays" measures were introduced, it isn't at all clear that the current political class would know what to do with the money. After all, changing the building blocks of our societies — the energy that powers our economies, how we move around, the designs of our major cities — is not about writing a few checks. It requires bold long-term planning at every level of government, and a willingness to stand up to polluters whose actions put us all in danger. And that won't happen until the corporate liberation project that has shaped our political culture for three and a half decades is buried for good.

Just as the climate change deniers I met at the Heartland Institute fear, there is a direct relationship between breaking fossilized free market rules and making swift progress on climate change. Which is why, if we are to collectively meet the enormous challenges of this crisis, a robust social movement will need to demand (and create) political leadership that is not only committed to making polluters pay for a climate-ready public sphere, but willing to revive two lost arts: long-term public planning, and saying no to powerful corporations. [...]

### *VII - p.130*

[...] The bottom line is simple. No private company in the world wants to put itself out of business; its goal is to expand its market. Which is why, if natural gas is to serve as a short-term transition fuel, that transition must be tightly managed by — and for — the public, so that the profits from current sales are reinvested in renewable technologies for the future, and the sector is constrained from indulging in the kind of exponential growth it is currently enjoying amidst the shale gas boom.

The solution is most emphatically not energy nationalization on existing models. The big publicly owned oil companies — from Brazil's Petrobras to Norway's Statoil to PetroChina — are just as voracious in pursuing high-risk pools of carbon as their private sector counterparts. And in the absence of a credible transition plan to harness the profits for a switch to renewable energy, having the state as the major shareholder in these companies has profoundly corrupting effects, creating an addiction to easy petrodollars that makes it even less likely that policymakers will introduce measures that hurt fossil fuel profits in any way. In short, these centralized monsters are fossils in every sense of the word, and need to be broken up and phased out whether they are held in public or private hands. [...]

### *VIII - p.63*

[...] The real reason we are failing to rise to the climate moment is because the actions required directly challenge our reigning economic paradigm (deregulated capitalism combined with public austerity), the stories on which Western cultures are founded (that we stand apart from nature and can outsmart its limits), as well as many of the activities that form our identities and define our communities (shopping, living virtually, shopping some more). They also spell 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 we humans are to avoid our own extinction. In short, we have not responded to this challenge because we are locked in — politically, physically, and culturally. Only when we identify these chains do we have a chance of breaking free. [...]

### *IX - p.465*

[...] The world also doesn't look much like it did in the late 1980s. Climate change, as we have seen, landed on the public agenda at the peak of free market, end-of-history triumphalism, which was very bad timing indeed. Its do-or-die moment, however, comes to us at a very different historical juncture. Many of the barriers that paralyzed a serious response to the crisis are today significantly eroded. Free market ideology has been discredited by decades of deepening inequality and corruption, stripping it of much of its persuasive power (if not yet its political and economic power). And the various forms of magical thinking that have diverted precious energy — from blind faith in technological miracles to the worship of benevolent billionaires — are also fast losing their grip. It is slowly dawning on a great many of us that no one is going to step in and fix this crisis; that if change is to take place it will only be because leadership bubbled up from below. [...]