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Climate Crisis: We Need Radical Change Now, Not in the Future



Image Source: Cover art from the book *On Fire: The Case for the Green New Deal* by Naomi Klein

Reading Naomi Klein's new book, *On Fire: The (Burning) Case for a Green New Deal*, is similar to watching a mega-disaster movie in a theater. Except, you can leave your fears behind when you exit the theater. Klein's message is that our human induced climate change is devastating our livable earth, we are stuck here, it is not safe, the house is on fire.

Klein does not harvest new horrors in her book, plenty of them are presented chronically in her collection of writings and speeches over the span of a decade, the last entry being April of last year. The introduction and epilogue carry forward the book's urgent advocacy to act now, in order to avoid our eminent extinction.

To shake us out of our slumber, she presents heroes who are sounding the alarm. A prime example is Greta Thunberg, the 15 year old girl from Stockholm Sweden, who in a period of just eight months has sparked the creation of the youth climate movement that culminated in March 2019 with nearly 2,100 youth climate strikes in 125 countries and with 1.6 million young people participating. Thunberg said, "We cannot solve an emergency without treating it like an emergency."

Along that line of reasoning, Klein argues that climate change efforts do not need to



figure out every detail of the proposed solutions in advance, "what matters is that we begin the process right away." The emphasis on action and not planning, may be why Klein recognizes that denialists have gained traction by arguing that efforts to halt climate change "will destroy capitalism... killing jobs and sending prices soaring."

The moderator at the 2018 Heartland Institute's Conference on Climate Change put it bluntly, this issue could be "a green Trojan horse" filled with "Marxist socioeconomic doctrine". A senior fellow at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, sees that there is a push to remove freedoms that would stop government from imposing draconian measures to fight climate change. The conference's keynote speaker, Patrick Michaels, who is a senior fellow in environmental studies at the Cato Institute, called the effort to support locally owned biofuels refineries akin to a "Maoist" scheme.

Although these statements are from a handful of right-wing institutions, Klein shows how public opinion has dramatically shifted. From polls taken in 2007 and 2011, the percentage of those that believe “the continued burning of fossil fuels would cause the climate to change” dropped from 71 percent to 44 percent.

Importantly, she adds that individuals cannot win this struggle but only through a mass united effort. Klein notes that unity accomplished incredible feats among the general population in winning World War II. For instance, in 1943, three-fifths of our nation’s population “had “Victory gardens” in their yards, growing fresh vegetables that accounted for 42 percent of all those consumed that year.” Unfortunately, Klein ignores the power of the presidency to sway public opinion and obstruct such unity. In WWII we had a president who focused the public’s attention on winning a battle, today we have a president who denies that there is even a battle to be fought.

Klein admits that the deniers realize something that many liberal politicians ignore, that to stop the earth from becoming an uninhabitable place there must be a radical reordering of our economic and political systems that are antithetical to the “free-market” belief system. In particular, she calls for a new civilization paradigm that does not dominate nature but respects it by rejecting the “growth imperative”. Her solution is to reduce the amount of material stuff that the wealthiest 20 percent of people on the planet consume.

To accomplish such a sweeping change, she supports publicly funded elections and stripping corporations of their status as “people” in this country. For all countries, she suggests cutting military budgets by twenty-five percent and imposing a transaction tax on the financial sector. However, as she recognizes, that just being a “socialist” country has not proven to be the solution: the Soviet Union had even higher carbon footprints per capita than Britain, Canada and Australia. And a recent report says that Communist China is constructing over a hundred coal-fired power plants in poorer nations as a way of outsourcing a portion of its carbon emissions.

Regardless of a government’s ideology, Klein argues that “we will not get the job done unless we are willing to embrace systemic economic and social change.” The core of that change is adopting the head spinning notion that economic growth is the villain not the savior of mankind. Unfortunately, she does not provide any country that rejects economic growth as a working model.

She concludes that incremental changes have not worked because the climate change battle links all social justice struggles. Working separately on each issue creates artificial boundaries between them. Consequently, the single largest determining factor “to pull us back from the climate cliff” will have to come from “actions taken by social movements in the coming years”.

Klein provides the data and the vision. Her hope is to see a coordinated global movement to successfully reverse carbon consumption within each country; a challenge that will require something more than a book, like a future world-wide radical mass movement that will challenge every nation’s government. Klein’s next book might want to present a plan for how that would happen.

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