OMNI

US CAPITALISM NEWSLETTER #22, April 2, 2015.


Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace, Justice, and Ecology.


What's at stake: We seek an economic system for all people and species that enables affirmative government and supports domestic and international peace, economic and social justice, human rights, democracy, and protects and enhances the earth and species.

[For more see What's at stake in Newsletter #18.]

My blog: The War Department and Peace Heroes

http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/

Newsletters:

http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/

Index:

http://www.omnicenter.org/omni-newsletter-general-index/

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Bill D. Moyers

Dec 19, 2014 - Author and historian Steve Fraser has answers. ... Web Extra: The New Robber Barons; Why Have Americans Stopped Resisting Economic ...
international condemnation, from elected officials as well as public interest groups around the world.

Documents leaked by whistleblower Hervé Falciani, who worked for HSBC, show how a Swiss division of the U.K.-headquartered bank routinely allowed clients to withdraw bricks of cash, often in foreign currencies of little use in Switzerland; aggressively marketed schemes likely to enable wealthy clients to avoid European and U.S. taxes; colluded with some clients to conceal undeclared "black" accounts from their domestic tax authorities; and provided accounts to international criminals, corrupt businessmen, and other high-risk individuals.

"These bankers are too big to fail and too big to jail, so they just keep engaging in illegal activity." —James Henry, Tax Justice Network

"This exposes once again the rotten core of banking—it would be shocking if it weren't for the frequency with which we hear of such scandals," said David Hillman, spokesperson for the U.K.-based Robin Hood Tax campaign. "It shows a sector not content with dodging its own obligations, but also conniving to help the richest people shirk their responsibilities to society as well."

"It’s clear our...approach to the banking sector is wholly inadequate," Hillman continued. "It's time we ensured banks were working in the public's interest instead of conspiring against us."

James Henry, former chief economist at the international consultancy firm McKinsey & Co. and now senior adviser with the U.K.'s Tax Justice Network, noted that HSBC got hit with a $1.9 billion fine for sanctions-busting and money-laundering in 2012, "but only a $12 million fine from the SEC related to this tax dodging." Regardless, such fines do little to change systemic corruption, he said.

"These bankers are too big to fail and too big to jail, so they just keep engaging in illegal activity," Henry declared. "There’s a widespread pattern of using fines to penalize the top 20 global big banks—$247 billion since 1998, for 655 separate major infractions of all kinds. But they just pass along the costs and continue with business as usual, with client secrecy preserved. It’s like a criminal syndicate."

In the U.S., Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) called on the federal government to explain "its actions—or lack thereof—upon learning of these allegations in 2010." The Guardian
established that the leaked data was shared with U.S. regulators five years ago.

Meanwhile, Jack Blum, a former tax investigator at the U.S. Senate, said on 60 Minutes Sunday evening that any bank that helped an American citizen to evade taxes was guilty of a felony.

"First of all, for the average American taxpayer it's beyond shocking," he said. "But, perhaps, not that surprising. Swiss banks have been caught protecting tax dodgers before, but never has this much detail been revealed. Under U.S. law, any bank that does that, that assists a U.S. person in evading U.S. tax is guilty of a felony. And it doesn't matter where the bank is located or where the bankers are located."

Matt Taibbi's The Divide: incandescent indictment of the American justice-gap

Matt Taibbi's The Divide: American Injustice in the Age of the Wealth Gap is a scorching, brilliant, incandescent indictment of the widening gap in how American justice treats the rich and the poor. Taibbi's spectacular financial reporting for Rolling Stone set him out as the best running commentator on the financial crisis and its crimes, and The Divide -- beautifully illustrated by Molly Crabapple -- shows that at full length, he's even better. Cory Doctorow reviews The Divide.

BY CORY DOCTOROW

1. Matt Taibbi's The Divide: incandescent indictment of the ... boingboing.net/2014/06/02/matt-taibbi-the-divide-inc.html

Boing Boing

Jun 2, 2014 - Matt Taibbi's The Divide: American Injustice in the Age of the Wealth Gap is a scorching, brilliant, ... Cory Doctorow reviews The Divide. By Cory ...
Matt Taibbi's *The Divide: American Injustice in the Age of the Wealth Gap* is a scorching, brilliant, incandescent indictment of the widening gap in how American justice treats the rich and the poor. Taibbi's spectacular financial reporting for *Rolling Stone* set him out as the best running commentator on the financial crisis and its crimes, and *The Divide* -- beautifully illustrated by Molly Crabapple -- shows that at full length, he's even better.

*(All illustrations courtesy of Molly Crabapple)*

"**We've put society on bureaucratic autopilot... a steel trap for losers and a greased pipeline to money, power and impunity for the winners.**"

Taibbi's core hypothesis is that, just like the widening wealth-gap, America has a terrible problem with a widening *justice gap*. Since the Clinton years, the American state has treated poverty as a crime, turning the receipt of state aid into a basis for the most invasive intrusions into your personal life, for a never-ending round of barked accusations and cruel threats to your freedom, your family, and your future. Meanwhile, Eric Holder's "Collateral Consequences" doctrine -- conceived under Clinton, revised under GWB, and perfected under Obama -- tells federal prosecutors to punish big companies carefully, even for the worst crimes imaginable, in order to protect the innocents who work for those companies and rely on them.

The net effect is a society where HSBC can be found guilty of laundering billions for brutal Mexican drug-cartels who torture and murder with impunity, pay a fine equal to a few weeks' profit, and partially defer bonuses for a few of its executives. But on the same day, across America, poor and mostly brown people are locked into inhumane prisons for selling a joint or two of the weed those cartels control.

"**The two approaches to justice may individually make a kind of sense, but side by side they're a dystopia, where common courts become factories for turning poor people into prisoners, while federal prosecutors turn into overpriced garbage-men, who behind closed doors quietly dispose of the**"
The key to the financialization of criminal impunity is that it is profoundly boring. Understanding how Barclays stole at least -- at least -- five billion dollars from the pension funds, small towns and individuals who were owed money by Lehman Brothers requires that you get a hold of a myriad of spectacularly dull esoteric financial concepts and long-winded legal wheezes. The actual smoking gun is a paragraph of legalese so stultifying it should come with a Surgeon General's warning and a tissue to soak up the cerebrospinal fluid that leaks out of the ears of anyone who tries to actually read it.

But Taibbi is a fantastic storyteller, and has a gift for making the technical material accessible. His key is to alternate between different kinds of explanation: whodunnit-style recounting of breathtaking financial crimes, personal profiles of sociopathic crooks, and informed speculation about the mentality and calculus that has sapped the spine of America's prosecutors and law enforcement officers.

"Because it's fueled by the irrepresibly rising vapor of our darkest hidden values, it attacks people without money, particularly nonwhite people, with a weirdly venomous kind of hatred, treating them like they're already guilty of something, which of course they are -- namely, being that which we're all afraid of becoming."

Of course, official corruption and impunity for the rich is only half the story. The other half is the increasingly vicious war on the poor. Taibbi's recounting of the unspeakable corruption of stop-and-frisk and other quota-driven, dragnet policing mechanisms have the power of classics like Upton Sinclair's 1906 The Jungle, but unlike Sinclair, Taibbi is telling the true stories of living people.

These are people who are routinely stopped, beaten, humiliated, jailed, and cleaned out by a system that can always find something that you're guilty of. Sometimes, it's the undocumented workers who hide in the shadows as small-town cops bust them for driving
without a license, charge them $1000 (while citizens charged with the same offense pay nothing, so long as they promptly get the missing license), and then rip them from their families and deport them to Mexico, where many are kidnapped and tortured by members of drug cartels who understand that deportees have US relatives with cash.

Other times, it’s people who commit the crime of being brown and/or poor while walking. In the NYC projects, you can be charged with obstructing pedestrian traffic for stopping in front of your own building at 1AM after a shift at work, resting briefly on an empty street after walking the dog. And your public defender will refuse to enter a plea of not guilty, and the judge will not understand why you want such a thing, and if, by some miracle, the cop who arrested you, beat you up, and jailed you admits that he falsified your arrest, you’re let go -- and so is he.

"Increasingly, the people who make decisions about justice and punishment in this country see a meaningful difference between crime and merely breaking the law."

Here, too, Taibbi looks for the systemic causes of these attitudes, a familiar and depressing blend of political expedience (Clinton wooing disaffected Dixiecrats by promising to get tough on welfare fraud, no matter what the human or financial cost), regulatory corruption (private prisons beget lobbying for rules to put people in private prisons, and the poor and nonwhite are the easiest people to put in prison without much fuss), and the financial vacuum left behind by the supernova-scale frauds of the too-big-to-fail banks (your bankrupt town can treat terrorized undocumented migrants as ATMs, hitting them up for giant fines for offenses that the lucky documented among us walk away from, Scot-free).

The Divide is a book that is more enraging than depressing. Part of that is down to Taibbi’s facility with language and plot, but it’s also a function of his brilliant structural trick of rotating between the stories of the afflicted and the comfortable, details of the technical mechanisms of their respective plights, and cutting analysis of the system that created the mess.

"[The government] has never put together a task force to concentrate on corruption... The Financial Crisis Inquiry Committee was given a budget of $9.8m, ‘roughly one-seventh of the budget for Oliver Stone’s Wall Street:"
Money Never Sleeps. ‘...The increase in the national drug enforcement budget for the year of the biggest financial crisis since the Depression was roughly 200 times the size of the sole executive branch effort at formally investigating the causes of financial corruption.’

In some ways, Taibbi’s worst villains are not the financial criminals, but the captured, conflicted milquetoaste prosecutors who let them get away with crimes again and again, using fines instead of jail time, effectively imposing a modest tax on crime that isn’t a deterrent -- it's just a line-item on the budget.

The argument, which originated with Holder, is that banks that are too big to fail are too big to jail. If you brought the full force of the law to bear against the criminals who steal billions and abet the most heinous crimes, rapes, tortures, and murders imaginable, their institutions will fail and everyone who depends on them -- thousands of innocents, and possibly the whole global economy -- will suffer. The prosecutors argue that their "leverage" is best used to extract billions in fines (from companies that are often sitting on hundreds of billions in government handouts and contracts) is a better outcome for "society" than putting a couple of fat-cats in jail.

But Taibbi demolishes this argument. The billions in fines are hardly matched by the hundreds of billions in harm the companies do -- over and over and over. And if the state has leverage over a company that is too big to jail, then let them use that leverage to break up the company so that the next time it commits a crime, the entire C-suite can be thrown in the Hole and the key tossed out.

"As the...wealth divide gets bigger, it becomes less and less possible for law enforcement to imagine the jail-or-garbage option for [bankers from top firms] and more and more possible to imagine it for an ever-expanding population of Everyone Else."

Because, Taibbi argues, there's another systemic risk to allowing this corruption to run unchecked: it rots us. If two people who commit the same crime always face wildly different punishments based on how rich they are, there is no justice in the justice system. A
cherished and fundamental value of democratic societies -- of the rule of law -- is eroded.
MORE: http://boingboing.net/2014/06/02/matt-taibbis-the-divide-inc.html

PUBLISHED 5:03 AM MON, JUN 2, 2014 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I write books. My latest are: a YA graphic novel called In Real Life (with Jen Wang); a nonfiction book about the arts and the Internet called Information Doesn't Want to Be Free: Laws for the Internet Age (with introductions by Neil Gaiman and Amanda Palmer) and a YA science fiction novel called Homeland (it's the sequel to Little Brother). I speak all over the place and I tweet and tumble, too.

CONTINUE THE DISCUSSION AT BBS.BOINGBOING.NET

7 replies

RESISTANCE

THE CHOICE IS OURS
Documentary Series
The Venus Project invites you to watch Part I & II of this three-part documentary series

Part I explores the determinants of behavior to dispel the myth of “human nature” demonstrating that environment shapes behavior.
Part II illustrates how our social structures impose our values and behaviors demonstrating that our global monetary system is obsolete and increasingly insufficient to meet the needs of most people.

Part III, to be released this year, will depict the vision of The Venus Project to build an entirely new world from the ground up, a “redesign of the culture” where all enjoy a high standard of living, free of servitude and debt, while also protecting the environment.

In addition, we have an official website for the film series with further details about the documentary at: thechoiceisoursmovie.com http://www.thechoiceisoursmovie.com/watch-film/?utm_source=newsletter_42&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=the-choice-is-ours-documentary

APPEAL TO PRES. OBAMA TO STOP ONE KIND OF $$CORRUPTION$$ OF OUR LAWMAKERS

From Sharon Killian about a virtual Town Hall Meeting concerning CITIZENS UNITED:
(Information was sent through Dick Bennett from Jonah Minkoff-Zern of Public Citizen.)

This Friday, a coalition of organizations is hosting a virtual town hall meeting featuring Ben Cohen, co-founder of Ben & Jerry’s and superstar activist for reining in corporate power. During this conversation, we’ll discuss an alarming kind of corruption that has emerged because of Citizens United — and how we can call on President Barack Obama to end this corruption.

Join the virtual town hall meeting on Friday, March 6, at 4 p.m. Eastern:

Sign up to let us know you want to join Friday’s conversation and to make sure you get an email with all the details.

Corporations that receive government contracts can secretly funnel untold sums to help elect (and re-elect) the very same lawmakers who are responsible for awarding those government contracts.

It’s a cycle of corruption enabled by inadequate election laws. Thankfully, fixing this corruption doesn’t require an act of Congress.
President Obama has the authority to fix the problem with the stroke of a pen. This is a unique opportunity, not only to learn what’s happening, but also to join the nationwide response in a way that puts your outrage about the destruction of our democracy front and center in the public eye.

Sign up to be a part of the conversation on Friday, March 6, at 4 p.m. Eastern.

Jonah Minkoff-Zern
Public Citizen’s Democracy Is For People Campaign on behalf of the Get Money Out Collaborative

P.S. Unable to attend, but want to help plan a rally against corruption in the coming weeks? Sign up here, and we’ll follow up with you about plans for upcoming opportunities to organize a local demonstration or event.

This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate By Naomi Klein


http://books.simonandschuster.com/This-Changes-Everything/Naomi-Klein/9781451697384

The most important book yet from the author of the international bestseller The Shock Doctrine, a brilliant explanation of why the climate crisis challenges us to abandon the core “free market” ideology of our time, restructure the global economy, and remake our political systems.

In short, either we embrace radical change ourselves or radical changes will be visited upon our physical world. The status quo is no longer an option.

In This Changes Everything Naomi Klein argues that climate change isn’t just another issue to be neatly filed between taxes and health care. It’s an alarm that calls us to fix an economic system that is already failing us in many ways. Klein meticulously builds the case for how massively reducing our greenhouse emissions is our best chance to simultaneously reduce gaping inequalities, re-imagine our broken democracies, and rebuild our gutted local economies. She exposes the ideological desperation of the climate-change deniers, the messianic delusions of the would-be geoengineers, and the tragic defeatism of too many mainstream green initiatives. And she demonstrates precisely why the market has not—and
cannot—fix the climate crisis but will instead make things worse, with ever more extreme and ecologically damaging extraction methods, accompanied by rampant disaster capitalism.

Klein argues that the changes to our relationship with nature and one another that are required to respond to the climate crisis humanely should not be viewed as grim penance, but rather as a kind of gift—a catalyst to transform broken economic and cultural priorities and to heal long-festering historical wounds. And she documents the inspiring movements that have already begun this process: communities that are not just refusing to be sites of further fossil fuel extraction but are building the next, regeneration-based economies right now.

Can we pull off these changes in time? Nothing is certain. Nothing except that climate change changes everything. And for a very brief time, the nature of that change is still up to us.

- See more at: http://books.simonandschuster.com/This-Changes-Everything/Naomi-Klein/9781451697384#sthash.mils8ecs.dpuf

MONTHLY REVIEW

http://monthlyreview.org/2015/02/01/crossing-the-river-of-fire/

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Tuesday February 17th, 2015, 5:57 pm (EST)

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REVIEW OF THE MONTH

“Crossing the River of Fire”: 
The Liberal Attack on Naomi Klein and *This Changes Everything*
by John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark

John Bellamy Foster is editor of Monthly Review and professor of sociology at the University of Oregon. Brett Clark is associate professor of sociology at the University of Utah and co-author of *The Tragedy of the Commodity* (Rutgers University Press, forthcoming).

The front cover of Naomi Klein's new book, *This Changes Everything*, is designed to look like a protest sign. It consists of the title alone in big block letters, with the emphasis on Changes. Both the author's name and the subtitle are absent. It is only when we look at the spine of the book, turn it over, or open it to the title page that we see it is written by North America's leading left climate intellectual-activist and that the subtitle is *Capitalism vs. the Climate*. All of which is clearly meant to convey in no uncertain terms that climate change literally changes everything for today's society. It threatens to turn the mythical human conquest of nature on its head, endangering present-day civilization and throwing doubt on the long-term survival of Homo sapiens.

The source of this closing circle is not the planet, which operates according to natural laws, but rather the economic and social system in which we live, which treats natural limits as mere barriers to surmount. It is now doing so on a planetary scale, destroying in the process the earth as a place of human habitation. Hence, the change that Klein is most concerned with, and to which her book points, is not climate change itself, but the radical social transformation that must be carried out in order to combat it. We as a species will either radically change the material conditions of our existence or they will be changed far more drastically for us. Klein argues in effect for System Change Not Climate Change—the name adopted by the current ecosocialist movement in the United States.

In this way Klein, who in *No Logo* ushered in a new generational critique of commodity culture, and who in *The Shock Doctrine* established herself as perhaps the most prominent North American critic of neoliberal disaster capitalism, signals that she has now, in William Morris's famous metaphor, crossed "the river of fire" to become a critic of capital as a system. The reason is climate change, including the fact that we have waited too long to address it, and the reality that nothing short of an ecological revolution will now do the job.

In the age of climate change, Klein argues, a system based on ever-expanding capital accumulation and exponential economic growth is no longer compatible with human well-being and progress—or even with human survival over the long run. We need therefore to
reconstruct society along lines that go against the endless amassing of wealth as the primary goal. Society must be rebuilt on the basis of other principles, including the “regeneration” of life itself and what she calls “ferocious love.” This reversal in the existing social relations of production must begin immediately with a war on the fossil-fuel industry and the economic growth imperative—when such growth means more carbon emissions, more inequality, and more alienation of our humanity.

Klein’s crossing of the river of fire has led to a host of liberal attacks on This Changes Everything, often couched as criticisms emanating from the left. These establishment criticisms of her work, we will demonstrate, are disingenuous, having little to do with serious confrontation with her analysis. Rather, their primary purpose is to rein in her ideas, bringing them into conformity with received opinion. If that should prove impossible, the next step is to exclude her ideas from the conversation. However, her message represents the growing consciousness of the need for epochal change, and as such is not easily suppressed.

The Global Climateric

The core argument of This Changes Everything is a historical one. If climate change had been addressed seriously in the 1960s, when scientists first raised the issue in a major way, or even in the late 1980s and early '90s, when James Hansen gave his famous testimony in Congress on global warming, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was first established, and the Kyoto Protocol introduced, the problem could conceivably have been addressed without a complete shakeup of the system. At that historical moment, Klein suggests, it would still have been possible to cut emissions by at most 2 percent a year.

Today such incremental solutions are no longer conceivable even in theory. The numbers are clear. Over 586 billion metric tons of carbon have been emitted into the atmosphere. To avoid a 2°C (3.6°F) increase in global average temperature—the edge of the cliff for the climate—it is necessary to stay below a trillion metric tons in cumulative carbon emissions. At the present rate of carbon emissions it is estimated that we will arrive at the one trillionth metric ton—equivalent to the 2°C mark—in less than a quarter century, around 2039. Once this point is reached, scientists fear that there is a high probability that feedback mechanisms will come into play with reverberations so great that we will no longer be able to control where the thermometer stops in the end. If the world as it exists today is still to avoid the 2°C increase—and the more dangerous 4°C, the point at which disruption to life on the planet will be so great that civilization may no longer be possible—real revolutionary ecological change, unleashing the full power of an organized and rebellious humanity, is required.
What is necessary first and foremost is the cessation of fossil-fuel combustion, bringing to a rapid end the energy regime that has dominated since the Industrial Revolution. Simple arithmetic tells us that there is no way to get down to the necessary zero emissions level, i.e., the complete cessation of fossil-fuel combustion, in the next few decades without implementing some kind of planned moratorium on economic growth, requiring shrinking capital formation and reduced consumption in the richest countries of the world system. We have no choice but to slam on the brakes and come to a dead stop with respect to carbon emissions before we go over the climate cliff. Never before in human history has civilization faced so daunting a challenge.

Klein draws here on the argument of Kevin Anderson, of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change in Britain, who indicates that rich countries will need to cut carbon emissions by 8–10 percent a year. “Our ongoing and collective carbon profligacy,” Anderson writes, “has squandered any opportunity for ‘evolutionary change’ afforded by our earlier (and larger) 2°C budget. Today, after two decades of bluff and lies, the remaining 2°C budget demands revolutionary change to the political and economic hegemony.”7

Instead of addressing climate change when it first became critical in the 1990s, the world turned to the intensification of neoliberal globalization, notably through the creation of the World Trade Organization. It was the very success of the neoliberal campaign to remove most constraints on the operations of capitalism, and the negative effect that this had on all attempts to address the climate problem, Klein contends, that has made “revolutionary levels of transformation” of the system the only real hope in avoiding “climate chaos.”8 “As a result,” she explains,

we now find ourselves in a very difficult and slightly ironic position. Because of those decades of hardcore emitting exactly when we were supposed to be cutting back, the things that we must do to avoid catastrophic warming are no longer just in conflict with the particular strain of deregulated capitalism that triumphed in the 1980s. They are now in conflict with the fundamental imperative at the heart of our economic model: grow or die….

Our economy is at 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….
Because of our lost decades, it is time to turn this around now. Is it possible? Absolutely. Is it possible without challenging the fundamental logic of deregulated capitalism? Not a chance.9

Of course, “the fundamental logic of deregulated capitalism” is simply a roundabout way of pointing to the fundamental logic of capitalism itself, its underlying drive toward capital accumulation, which is hardly constrained at all in its accumulation function even in the case of a strong regulatory environment. Instead, the state in a capitalist society generally seeks to free up opportunities for capital accumulation on behalf of the system as a whole, rationalizing market relations so as to achieve greater overall, long-run expansion. As Paul Sweezy noted nearly three-quarters of a century ago in The Theory of Capitalist Development, “Speaking historically, control over capitalist accumulation has never for a moment been regarded as a concern of the state; economic legislation has rather had the aim of blunting class antagonisms, so that accumulation, the normal aim of capitalist behavior, could go forward smoothly and uninterruptedly.”10

To be sure, Klein herself occasionally seems to lose sight of this basic fact, defining capitalism at one point as “consumption for consumption’s sake,” thus failing to perceive the Galbraith dependence effect, whereby the conditions under which we consume are structurally determined by the conditions under which we produce.11 Nevertheless, the recognition that capital accumulation or the drive for economic growth is the defining property, not a mere attribute, of the system underlies her entire argument. Recognition of this systemic property led the great conservative economist Joseph Schumpeter to declare: “Stationary capitalism would be a contradictio in adjecto.”12

It follows that no mere technological wizardry—of the kind ideologically promoted, for example, by the Breakthrough Institute—will prevent us from breaking the carbon budget within several decades, as long as the driving force of the reigning socioeconomic system is its own self-expansion. Mere improvements in carbon efficiency are too small as long as the scale of production is increasing, which has the effect of expanding the absolute level of carbon dioxide emitted. The inevitable conclusion is that we must rapidly reorganize society on other principles than that of stoking the engine of capital with fossil fuels.

None of this, Klein assures us, is cause for despair. Rather, confronting this harsh reality head on allows us to define the strategic context in which the struggle to prevent climate change must be fought. It is not primarily a technological problem unless one is trying to square the circle: seeking to reconcile expanding capital accumulation with the preservation of the
climate. In fact, all sorts of practical solutions to climate change exist at present and are consistent with the enhancement of individual well-being and growth of human community. We can begin immediately to implement the necessary changes such as: democratic planning at all levels of society; introduction of sustainable energy technology; heightened public transportation; reductions in economic and ecological waste; a slowdown in the treadmill of production; redistribution of wealth and power; and above all an emphasis on sustainable human development.13

There are ample historical precedents. We could have a crash program, as in wartime, where populations sacrificed for the common good. In England during the Second World War, Klein observes, driving automobiles virtually ceased. In the United States, the automobile industry was converted in the space of a half a year from producing cars to manufacturing trucks, tanks, and planes for the war machine. The necessary rationing—since the price system recognizes nothing but money—can be carried out in an egalitarian manner. Indeed, the purpose of rationing is always to share the sacrifices that have to be made when resources are constrained, and thus it can create a sense of real community, of all being in this together, in responding to a genuine emergency. Although Klein does not refer to it, one of the most inspiring historical examples of this was the slogan “Everyone Eats the Same” introduced in the initial phases of the Cuban Revolution and followed to an extraordinary extent throughout the society. Further, wartime mobilization and rationing are not the only historical examples on which we can draw. The New Deal in the United States, she indicates, focused on public investment and direct promotion of the public good, aimed at the enhancement of use values rather than exchange values.14

Mainstream critics of This Changes Everything often willfully confuse its emphasis on degrowth with the austerity policies associated with neoliberalism. However, Klein’s perspective, as we have seen, could not be more different, since it is about the rational use of resources under conditions of absolute necessity and the promotion of equality and community. Nevertheless, she could strengthen her case in this respect by drawing on monopoly-capital theory and its critique of the prodigious waste in our economy, whereby only a miniscule proportion of production and human labor is now devoted to actual human needs as opposed to market-generated wants. As the author of No Logo, Klein is well aware of the marketing madness that characterizes the contemporary commodity economy, causing the United States alone to spend more than a trillion dollars a year on the sales effort.15

What is required in a rich country such as the United States at present, as detailed in This Changes Everything, is not an abandonment of all the comforts of civilization but a reversion to the standard of living of the 1970s—two decades into what Galbraith dubbed “the affluent
society." A return to a lower per capita output (in GDP terms) could be made feasible with redistribution of income and wealth, social planning, decreases in working time, and universal satisfaction of genuine human needs (a sustainable environment; clean air and water; ample food, clothing, and shelter; and high-quality health care, education, public transportation, and community-cultural life) such that most people would experience a substantial improvement in their daily lives.16 What Klein envisions here would truly be an ecological-cultural revolution. All that is really required, since the necessary technological means already exist, is people power: the democratic mass mobilization of the population.

Such people power, Klein is convinced, is already emerging in the context of the present planetary emergency. It can be seen in the massive but diffuse social-environmental movement, stretching across the globe, representing the struggles of tens of millions of activists worldwide, to which she gives (or rather takes from the movement itself) the name Blockadia. Numberless individuals are putting themselves on the line, confronting power, and frequently facing arrest, in their opposition to the fossil-fuel industry and capitalism itself. Indigenous peoples are organizing worldwide and taking a leading role in the environmental revolt, as in the Idle No More movement in Canada. Anti-systemic, ecologically motivated struggles are on the rise on every continent.

The primary burden for mitigating climate change necessarily resides with the rich countries, which are historically responsible for the great bulk of the carbon added to the atmosphere since the Industrial Revolution and still emit the most carbon per capita today. The disproportionate responsibility of these nations for climate change is even greater once the final consumption of goods is factored into the accounting. Poor countries are heavily dependent on producing export goods for multinational corporations to be sold to consumers at the center of the world capitalist economy. Hence, the carbon emissions associated with such exports are rightly assigned to the rich nations importing these goods rather than the poor ones exporting them. Moreover, the rich countries have ample resources available to address the problem and carry out the necessary process of social regeneration without seriously compromising the basic welfare of their populations. In these societies, the problem is no longer one of increasing per capita wealth, but rather one of the rational, sustainable, and just organization of society. Klein evokes the spirit of Seattle in 1999 and Occupy Wall Street in 2011 to argue that sparks igniting radical ecological change exist even in North America, where growing numbers of people are prepared to join a global peoples' alliance. Essential to the overall struggle, she insists, is the explicit recognition of ecological or climate debt owed by the global North to the global South.17

The left is not spared critical scrutiny in Klein's work. She acknowledges the existence of a
powerful ecological critique within Marxism, and quotes Marx on “capitalism’s ‘irreparable rift’ with ‘the natural laws of life itself.’” Nevertheless, she points to the high carbon emissions of Soviet-type societies, and the heavy dependence of the economies of Bolivia and Venezuela on natural resource extraction, notwithstanding the many social justice initiatives they have introduced. She questions the support given by Greece’s SYRIZA Party to offshore oil exploration in the Aegean. Many of those on the left, and particularly the so-called liberal-left, with their Keynesian predilections, continue to see an expansion of the treadmill of production, even in the rich countries, as the sole means of social advance. Klein’s criticisms here are important, but could have benefited, with respect to the periphery, from a consideration of the structure of the imperialist world economy, which is designed specifically to close off options to the poorer countries and force them to meet the needs of the richer ones. This creates a trap that even a Movement Toward Socialism with deep ecological and indigenous values like that of present-day Bolivia cannot seek to overcome without deep contradictions.

“The unfinished business of liberation,” Klein counsels, requires “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.” To accomplish this, it is necessary to build the greatest mass movement of humanity for revolutionary change that the world has ever seen: a challenge that is captured in the title to her conclusion: “The Leap Years: Just Enough Time for Impossible.” If this seems utopian, her answer would be that the world is heading towards something worse than mere dystopia: unending, cumulative, climate catastrophe, threatening civilization and countless species, including our own.

Liberal Critics as Gatekeepers

Confronted with Klein’s powerful argument in This Changes Everything, liberal pundits have rushed to rein in her arguments so that her ideas are less in conflict with the system. Even where the issue is planetary ecological catastrophe, imperiling hundreds of millions of people, future generations, civilization, and the human species itself, the inviolable rule remains the same: the permanency of capitalism is not to be questioned.

As Noam Chomsky explains, liberal opinion plays a vital gatekeeping role for the system, defining itself as the rational left of center, and constituting the outer boundaries of received opinion. Since most of the populace in the United States and the world as a whole is objectively at odds with the regime of capital, it is crucial to the central propaganda function of the media to declare as “off limits” any position that questions the foundations of the system.
itself. The media effectively says: “Thus far and no further.” To venture farther left beyond the narrow confines of what is permitted within liberal discourse is deemed equivalent to taking “off from the planet.”22

MORE http://monthlyreview.org/2015/02/01/crossing-the-river-of-fire/

Klein’s Plea for a Cooperative World

Klein’s book, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, is a vital addition to the critiques of capitalism. Here she is, as chaos is foreseen by the consensus of scientists if the rising global temperature is not stopped and reversed soon, calling for faith in human beings and the rejection of the US corporate state. Here she is, tracing the awful history of the rise of the self-regarding right wing mainly in the Republican Party, and yet in 2014 expressing hope in a cooperative future at a moment of possible, terrible climate chaos. Hers is a lucid plea for sanity and compassion at a moment when the irrationalism of misology and misoneism have gained power over the government.

Related reading: Harvey Kaye’s *The Fight for the Four Freedoms*, 2014 (a history of the rise of FDR’s New Deal and belief in affirmative government and their decline under the new, reactionary Republican onslaught) and Rudolf Rocker’s *Nationalism and Culture*, 1933/1937 (written in Berlin while Hitler’s Brown Shirts were marching outside his window, a denunciation of the corrosive effects of nationalism). Dick Alnoor Ladha and Martin Kirk of The Rules, "Capitalism is Just a Story and Other Dangerous Thoughts"

Video “Capitalism Is Just a Story”
Dear friends,

We’ve grown up listening to a story that tells us we are inadequate, and the only way to be happy is to consume more and more, faster and faster.

Capitalism is just a story – let’s tell a better one.

On Tuesday, March 24, 2015 9:04 AM, Alnoor at The Rules <contact@therules.org> wrote:

WATCH NOW!
Tell #ADifferentStory
View this email in your browser

Will you help us spread this message of possibility and alternatives through your communities?

Capitalism is just a story - let's tell a better story.

Our inequality video has over half a million views counting, and this is because you have been helping us spread these important counter-narratives. This means that our efforts have made more people aware of how inequality is actually being created in the world.

http://therules.org/campaign/capitalism-just-story/

Onwards!

Alnoor and /The Rules team
Acts of violence assume many forms: they may travel by the arc of a guided missile or in the language of an economic policy, and they may leave behind a smoldering village or a starved child. The all-pervasive occurrence of violence makes it seem like an unavoidable, and ultimately incomprehensible, aspect of the human world, particularly in a modern era. But, in this detailed and expansive book, Marc Pilisuk and Jen Rountree demonstrate otherwise. Widespread violence, they argue, is in fact an expression of the underlying social order, and whether it is carried out by military forces or by patterns of investment, the aim is to strengthen that order for the benefit of the powerful.

The Hidden Structure of Violence marshals vast amounts of evidence to examine the costs of direct violence, including military preparedness and the social reverberations of war, alongside the costs of structural violence, expressed as poverty and chronic illness. It also documents the relatively small number of people and corporations responsible for facilitating the violent status quo, whether by setting the range of permissible discussion or benefiting directly as financiers and manufacturers. The result is a stunning indictment of our violent world and a powerful critique of the ways through which violence is reproduced on a daily basis, whether at the highest levels of the state or in the deepest recesses of the mind.

Because of its inter-disciplinary approach, The Hidden Structure of Violence will be valuable for scholars and students in a range of fields, but especially psychology, macro-economics, sociology, international relations, history, journalism, peace studies, military science, community development, and social change.

An encyclopedic and yet highly focused analysis of the causes and consequences of violence and wars … This is a sober book that nonetheless leaves us with hope for future generations.

—G. William Domhoff, author, Who Rules America?

One of the most comprehensive—and programmatic—discussions of the sources and nature of global violence in years.
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Dick Bennett

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jbennet@uark.edu
Facebook: www.facebook.com/OMNIPeaceDept
j.dick.bennett@gmail.com
(479) 442-4600
2582 Jimmie Ave.
Fayetteville, AR 72703