



No Is Not Enough: Defeating the New Shock Politics

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The essence of capitalism is the movement from commodity-money-commodity (CMC) exchanges that characterize pre-capitalist systems to money-commodity-money (MCM⁺) exchanges that now dominate the global economy. The purpose of exchanges is to maximize ownership of capital – money in circulation – so all resources must be converted into commodities which may then be converted to capital. At first, this is not very difficult to do: land is brought into agricultural production; animals yield their children, their skins and their flesh and humans are sold as slaves. Some portion of profits can be used to enforce the claim to property rights on which the system depends and represents the biggest intersection with politics. However, as the resources of the world become occupied by capitalist exchanges, logic dictates that more

means of commodification be found. One aspect of this is the spread of globalisation, by which capitalism is rescued from falling profits by the spatial fix of exporting production and consumption functions and the other is the expansion of the type of resources that can become part of capitalist exchanges. These are difficult to manage because commodification contradicts taboos that have been created and reinforced by the intellectual state apparatus that enforces obedience or at least acquiescence to the political settlement of capitalism. This stage involves depriving people of the fresh water their communities have relied upon for generations and selling them contaminated water instead, converting prisons and colleges into profit-seeking enterprises extracting surplus value from the people they are meant to serve and the use of natural disasters to dismantle social relations for profit. The ongoing scandal of the destruction of Puerto Rico by unscrupulous American corporations and their hired hands in congress is one of the more obvious examples of this new stage of commodification.

Naomi Klein previously labelled this process Shock Capitalism, in which the imposition of a shock (which could be a natural disaster like a hurricane or a manmade one such as the invasion of Iraq) is used to dissolve existing societal bonds and replace them with profit-maximising capitalist exchanges. It was a powerfully expressed realization of the way much of the world now works and was influential in the Occupy movement and, subsequently, the resistance to the Trump administration.

She begins this book in the same way: shock. In particular, the shock that so many people felt when it appeared that (somehow) Trump was going to win, despite his obvious inadequacy and corruption and the fact that he had lost the popular vote by so many millions of votes. How could this have happened, she wonders, before enumerating the various scandals likely to follow (and failing to predict the utter monstrosity of kidnapping babies and leaving them in unknown locations, among the many other abuses). Eventually comes the realization that the appropriate response is not shock at how something has happened which should not have happened but horror that this is exactly the result that contemporary western society would provide – and has done elsewhere as in the disastrous Brexit fiasco. We have not exercised sufficient pessimism of the will to see things as they truly are and so the victory of the far right once again became possible. In these circumstances, it is no longer acceptable to be shocked and respond accordingly but to go beyond the evanescence of Occupy and find a proper means of effective resistance: no, in other words, is no longer enough.

Klein writes perceptively and lucidly about these issues and it is not surprising that she has reached the level of respect and popularity that she has done in the popular and highbrow media. Her basic premise is certainly true: we cannot simply tut tut on the sidelines while the democracy for which so many died is destroyed by a gang of corporatist thugs. However, the final step is the crucial one on which the book will eventually be judged: what is the alternative? Her answer is the Leap, which is a policy platform produced by a combination of thinkers and activists across Canada. She is of

course Canadian and writes well about the problems and contradictions of that country but it remains a disappointment, nevertheless, that she is not part of a truly internationalist movement. The ideas behind the Leap (because incremental change is no longer plausible under current circumstances) is to acknowledge the intersectionality of pressing issues:

“There were a few ground rules in that initial meeting, some unspoken, some not. The first was that no one was allowed to play ‘my crisis is bigger than your crisis,’ nor argue that, because of the urgency and scope of the climate crisis, it should take precedence over fighting poverty or racism or other major concerns. Instead of ranking issues, we started from the premise that we live in a time of multiple, intersecting crises, and since all of them are urgent, we cannot afford to fix them sequentially (p.238).”

Lessons are drawn from indigenous communities resisting the commodification of their land – notably including the Standing Rock protest which, of course, ended in defeat. These lessons are necessary, she observes, because there are so few extant examples of how non-capitalist societies organize resistance.

The manifesto is available online in 14 languages (leapmanifesto.org/en/the-leap-manifesto/) and readers can judge for themselves whether they believe it is adequate for the tasks at hand. There are, after all, many other options available. The book is, at least, an inspiration for those thinking how to organize an effective resistance that would be “... a multi-generational movement that spanned dozens of

countries and sectors, bringing together nonprofit organizations, radical anarchists, Indigenous communities, churches, trade unions, and more. It was messy, ideologically inchoate, imperfect (p.108)” but it might be viable.

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