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# NAOMI KLEIN

## SYSTEM SHOCK

Instead of the shock which most of the world experienced last November, when it transpired that Donald Trump had upset the odds to become the 45th President of the United States of America, Naomi Klein saw only the logical culmination of everything she had studied throughout her career becoming personified in a single individual. **Chris Fitch** reports

**A**rguably, Naomi Klein spent two decades preparing for a Donald Trump presidency. His uniquely arcane and aggressive approach to taking the reins of the Oval Office is in many ways a walking, talking, shouting, pouting, bleating, tweeting embodiment of much that she has spent her career campaigning against, be it the repression of civil and indigenous rights, the growing gulf in social and economic inequality, the immense foot-dragging on taking meaningful action on climate change, and the embedded economic infrastructure which makes it so difficult to change.

With that in mind, her latest book, *No is Not Enough: Defeating the New Shock Politics*, is largely the culmination of all that she learnt from her previous best-sellers - namely *No Logo* (2000), *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007), and *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs The Climate* (2014). Collectively, they can help understand the process by which the planets aligned to let the man whose campaign was repeatedly written off win the election that made him leader of the free world.

## ON BRAND

It all started back in the early 1990s, when, in only her twenties, she began researching her first book, *No Logo*. 'It was a long time ago,' she laughs. 'It was primarily because I was starting to see this growing resistance among the generation a few years younger than me, taking on corporate power in a way that was very different from my generation, who thought all the political power rested in government.'

As she describes, there was a trend unfolding where large transnational companies were increasingly seeing themselves less as producers of actual manufactured items, but instead as manufacturers of ideas, values, and lifestyles (the products themselves being largely outsourced to external manufacturers).

It was an acute observation. One particular corporation extremely fond of this business model was led by a owner who knew all about using provocative messages to sell otherwise uninspiring products, a strategy which appears to have stuck with him ever since. The Trump Organisation always revolved around the controversial, yet undeniably entertaining figure of Donald Trump. More often or not, the product it sold was the wealthy lifestyle which Trump lived, regardless of whether the final product was a golf membership, a hotel room, a television show or a rump steak.

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'His company is this hollow brand,' insists Klein. 'When Trump got into real estate he was in the business of building buildings, buying buildings, making real estate deals. But that ceased to be true a couple of decades ago, when he really got into the primary business of building the Trump brand, and then selling that brand to other people who build buildings, taking minimal financial risk himself. He is in the business of building that brand. So, given that the meaning of that is absolute power through wealth, then what better brand extension than the US presidency? There is no better way to express the meaning of your brand than to occupy the Oval Office.'

Klein's later work expanded this subject to

investigate what she termed *The Shock Doctrine*; the way in which unexpected 'shocks' - everything from wars to terrorist attacks, natural disasters to economic crises - have, she argues, been used historically to justify a drastic expansion of government powers. From the Pinochet coup d'état of 1973, to America's own Hurricane Katrina, such shocks have seen the enforcement of various radical policies without the normal democratic debate and discussion, all justified in the interest of safety and security.

'In terms of *No is Not Enough*, one of the things that motivated me to try to get it out quickly,' continues Klein, a stern expression crossing her face, 'is that I am really worried about how Trump and the people he has surrounded himself with would take advantage of a major external shock; a terrorist attack, or a major financial meltdown. There are items on their agenda that are very clear, but which they can't get through [Congress] without some kind of crisis.'

## SHOCK VALUE

Certainly, few people would have believed that President Trump would ever become a reality, so could his entire administration be described as such a shock? 'I think that what we're seeing with Trump so far is not what I described in *The Shock Doctrine*; it's an evolution,' she explains. 'It's this constant distraction, this stream of outrageousness, what Trump has called 'the Trump Show'. He's always understood the value of being outrageous and distracting attention, he's always believed that no press is bad press. These little mini-shocks, that he's issuing through his Twitter feed or through his outrageous actions on the world stage, has provided a fantastic cover to advance his very radical economic agenda that is getting really very little attention.'

Once of Trump's few actual policy decisions which did gain significant public scrutiny was his grand gesture of pulling out of the historic Paris Agreement on combating climate change, which arguably runs counter to everything Trump espouses. 'The centrality of the fossil fuel sector to the Trump agenda reinforces how threatening climate change is to powerful economic interests,' argues Klein, whose study into the economic levers behind climate change became her hit *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs The Climate*. As she points out, the key promise Trump made on the campaign trail - to create new jobs in America - leans heavily on reviving a flagging US coal industry, regardless of the booming jobs market in the renewable sector.

'It's our duty wherever we live to do what we can to ratchet up the ambition [of the Paris Agreement],' she continues. 'In the United States I think it's been really inspiring to see hundreds of city mayors come together after Trump pulled out of the Paris accord and say "Well, we're doing it anyway".'



JOSEPH SOHM

## ENOUGH SAID

Which brings us to her latest book, which loudly asserts that *No is Not Enough* - that mere resistance and protest to the flow of policies which the Trump administration is introducing is insufficient. 'There's this perception that he's not getting anything done,' she continues. 'That's not true. They are attacking environmental regulations systematically, and they're getting it through. We're seeing the most rapid attack and rollback on environmental standards since the creation of the EPA [Environment Protection Agency] 47 years ago. That's what [EPA Administrator] Scott Pruitt is doing while the spotlight is on the Trump Show.'

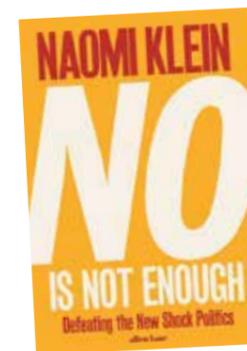
This new book argues for radical change, and for bold, ambitious policies, to provide a credible alternative to the world vision of the Trump White House, and avert the worst effects of climate change. 'We need those sorts of solutions where we're creating local jobs, we're fighting austerity and we're lowering emissions at the same time,' she stresses. 'We live in this time of overlapping crises, so we need real multiple wins.'

At a high profile speech at the South Bank Centre's Royal Festival Hall in London recently, Klein highlights a key point from the conclusion of her new book, that we should have been getting ready for the day that Trump - or a

**ABOVE: Klein argues that the world should have been ready for a Trump-like figure to rise to a position of global power**

Trump-like personality - would take the oath of office. 'We should have been expecting him,' she announces to the audience.

Thankfully, she was. With the collective knowledge gained from her previous investigations and subsequent books, she points to a document drawn up in May 2015 with the First Nations of her native Canada known as 'The Leap Manifesto: A Call for a Canada Based on Caring for the Earth and one Another' which emphasises the need for a rapid escalation in renewable energy, public services, and local democracy. This, the many hundreds of authors and signatories argue, would simultaneously address the systematic injustices which Canada's indigenous communities have faced over the past centuries, help ensure a healthy economy capable of funding the various public sector jobs the society needs, and enable the country's pledge to fight climate change to be far more ambitious. Potentially, Klein believes, it could do the same for the whole world.



**NO IS NOT ENOUGH: Defeating the New Shock Politics, is reviewed on page 62.**

**The book is out now from Allen Lane, RRP £12.99 in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats. Order via <http://amzn.to/2t5ZuDg>**