

If way to the better there be, it extracts a full look at the worst.

(Thomas Hardy)

A personal response to Naomi Klein's book on the dangers of Trump and Trumpism

NO

IS NOT ENOUGH

Defeating the New Shock Politics

Naomi Klein certainly shows us the worst. You think Trump is a joke? He provides plenty of opportunity to laugh. He also sets linguistic, ethical and intellectual standards below which it is hard to fall. He is, however, extremely dangerous. This important book details the dangers. It also shows us how to overcome them.

The Constitution of the USA was always an imperfect document. Its framers were keen to confine democracy and the demagoguery that they feared might accompany it, hence the Electoral Collegeⁱ. While politicians and public servants generally adhered to accepted conventions of good behaviour the Constitution mostly worked effectively, albeit too often in the interests of long established elites and oligarchies. Now it has been captured and is in the hands of destructive forces that have the power to use even war as a cynical means of obtaining domestic approval.

Klein's book is not about constitutional history or political science but it is impossible to escape the conclusion that government and politics in the USA requires more than a return to the old two-party game. Politics is about public values and when the public are prevented from well-informed participation in the discussion of and arrival at those values government becomes something that is done *to* them by people whose interests are exclusive and not inclusive. Being comfortable in a state of ill-informed non-participation does not help.

Trump has no concept of a separation of powers. For him the Judiciary and the Legislature are subsidiaries of the Executive. He is not the first President to have had monarchical tendencies but he is the first to have demonstrated them so rapidly by deliberately creating chaos.

It may seem strange to connect the concept of absolute government with social chaos. Naomi Klein's earlier book *THE SHOCK DOCTRINE The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007) demonstrated how it worked.

At one point in *NO* she has this to say about the current Vice President Mike Pence.

When Mike Pence was announced as Donald Trump's running mate, I thought to myself, "I know that name. I've seen it somewhere." He was at the heart of one of the most shocking stories I've ever covered: the disaster capitalism free-for-all that followed Katrina and the drowning of New Orleans. Mike Pence's doings as a profiteer from human suffering are so appalling that they are worth exploring in a little more depth, since they tell us a great deal about what we can expect from this administration during times of heightened crisis. (Page 152).

She details the recent capture by their enemies of almost every government agency dedicated to maintaining and regulating health, safety, education, transport and the environment. Dismantle, under-fund and pervert the purposes of such agencies and the conditions are created for exploitative privatisation: extractive government in the interests of a fewⁱⁱ.

Meanwhile, in the UK

I believe that we have been slow to come to terms with the destructive and anti societal urges of Thatcherism. 1979 was not simply a shift to the political right as then perceived. We were not getting Rab Butler and Harold Macmillan, old Conservatives with a sense of social justice and a belief in cohesion. They belonged with Thatcher's 'wets'. We were getting, in Andy Beckett's phrase, *Pinochet in Piccadilly*ⁱⁱⁱ.

In 1997 we may have thought we were voting to reject a politics of greed and the widening of social gaps but we got Blair for whom frenetic activity equalled progress and who presented his pointless restructuring to us as modernisation^{iv}.

In education Blair gave us more white papers and bills than you could shake a stick at. Just when the profession felt that it was turning the sow's ear of policy into a silk purse of practice INITIATIVE A would be replaced by INITIATIVE B and on and on it would go. Domestically this was de-stabilising but not quite Klein's Shock Doctrine.

For the people of Iraq, however, shock (and awe) was what they got. In her book Naomi Klein has a lot to say about Iraq. I see it as a planned sequence: shock, followed by chaos, followed by absolute, extractive rule^v. The plan for Iraq did not, however, get beyond chaos. Yes, the invaders made huge profits but the chaos that followed the shock has been both continuous and contagious. What did the UK get out of all this? A ruined reputation and a lessened ability to fund programmes that alleviated social suffering. Thank you Mr. Blair.

In 2010 I began to use the term SOCIAL FRACKING^{vi} to describe the intentions of the Coalition Government. In 2008 we had received our shock in the form of a financial crash caused by unrestrained greed. Such was the extent to which greed had become an accepted form of behaviour that the guilty stayed out of prison and went on collecting their bonuses, which by then were state funded. The semi-Keynesian response of the Brown government was thrown into reverse by the new government of Cameron and Osborne.

Michael Gove, a declared follower of Tony Blair, enthusiastically set about fracking education. His former flatmate Nick Boles, having told us that what we needed was chaos, was placed in charge of planning. Not only did the gaps between the rich and the poor become wider but also the blame for those gaps was placed upon the poor.

And now we have the shock of Brexit^{vii}. This was really a struggle for control of the Tory Party that was won by those most dedicated to fracking society for the benefit of the super rich. Our severely diminished capacity to engage in participatory government and politics, even to scrutinise proposed legislation, places power in the hands of those that would rule by decree, if they get away with it.

And here the two countries whose politicians have done so much to make greediness the measure by which people and countries are judged to be successful find themselves in a similar position. Shall the shock-making, extractive absolutists win?

Defeating the New Shock Politics

For her solution Naomi Klein reminds us of earlier attempts to achieve what we now might call 'intersectionality'^{viii}. 9/11 set back the process of bringing together groups with individual agenda in a realisation that they could work in support of each other and that if they did not the capacity of the planet to tolerate human life would soon reach the tipping point. As ever this is a huge concern for Klein who provides us with considerable detail of environmental danger.

For this part of her book the urgency of her writing has a different tone. At first she was furiously collecting and collating the evidence against Trump and Trumpism. It was as though she was finding the words and phrases that people had been using about Trump and, by means of examples and her critical skills, showing us what they all signified; and doing all this at a driven pace. Little fresh research was required.

Now she switches from frowning to smiling, sometimes with tears. Her description of events at Standing Rock^{ix} illustrates a growing awareness of mutual need. It also emphasises the role of education. For many years now we have been subjected to education as instruction: as preparation for measurement. Learners do not have to be commodities. Teachers are

learners and learners are teachers. Learning is so often parcelled up for sale. Trump University?

Perhaps the most astonishing thing to happen at Standing Rock was the arrival of veteran soldiers who volunteered to protect the protesters.

She ends her book with

The Leap Manifesto
A Call for a Canada Based on
Caring for the Earth and One Another^x

Her description of how and why the Manifesto was constructed reminds me of a range of loosely connected educational, community and business initiatives in the UK that were brushed to one side when the Thatcher administrations decided that education, particularly in schools, had to be narrow, subject-based, officially approved, constantly measured and inspected with dire consequences for those judged to have failed. And, yes, that was accompanied by the detachment of further and higher education from local, democratically accountable, authorities. Curricular constraint came with commodification and a competing market. Tony Blair has written that New Labour was all about choice^{xi}. But if you had no power you had no choice. Klein also has much to say about the concept of choice.

Just one example of what we once tried

As a schoolteacher I taught for eleven years in an area of very high unemployment. Some of us formed a group to look at how we, as guardians of the curriculum, should respond. This was before the introduction of the National Curriculum and when we could be creative. Another response was to form links with national organisations that shared our concerns. Here the Schools Curriculum Industry Partnership (SCIP) was hugely helpful. It was dissolved years ago but for a while it mingled educators and business people in a supportive network. This was nothing like the official concept of schools preparing young people to meet the needs of industry.

Near my school was Commercial Road. It was full of factories employing thousands of people. One by one they closed like a series of candles being snuffed out in sequence and eventually possibly the most iconic of them all closed down, Tate and Lyle's. Founded in Liverpool, sustained there by working class people and in the West Indies by the descendents of slaves its closure meant more than an increase in the unemployed: it had a social psychological impact.

In response local people, with help, established what was then the largest housing co-operative in Western Europe. Attempts were also made to establish co-operative businesses. At that time the new public examination for

sixteen year olds was being introduced, the General Certificate for Secondary Education (GCSE). With help from a colleague in an examinations board I designed a GCSE to support the work being done in the community. It meant that young people could step out of the classroom and take part in various committees examining demographic trends and characteristics; and, alongside architects, priests and parents, make decisions on, for example, the number of bedrooms houses would need in the foreseeable future. The GCSE was designed so that coursework and written examinations related closely to this kind of community activity. And in the school itself I persuaded senior management and staff to change to a largely self-managed institution with specific links to the community.

The failure was not to convince those with their hands on the levers of power that all this was worth encouraging. As an advisor in the Liverpool Education Authority working on alternative curriculum and assessment strategies I experienced a strong sense that what we were doing was only ever going to be considered peripheral: not orthodox and not mainstream.

That GCSE was closed down by Central Government and the school was closed down by the Catholic Church that preferred much more conventional and single-sex approaches to education. Although a Catholic school it served an area in which the community was almost entirely Catholic and so was not divisive.

Now I would say that while the need for a creative community approach to education^{xii} is greater than ever there are twin forces at work opposing it. One is that the system has been well and truly fracked and fragmented. It is disconnected from communities. The other is that the urge to measure and label has enforced a less creative approach to learning. Nudging an increasingly dysfunctional system is not enough. As Naomi Klein says, we need to LEAP.

The book: taste and judgment

I began with a poet so I shall end with another. WH Auden gave us a number of classifications to use when commenting on a book. He said that it was best to combine taste and judgment. I find Naomi Klein's book to be a very good read. I believe that it is also very important. It should be read, responded to and discussed. Above is my response. Others will have theirs. I suggest that one of the strengths of her book is that it prompts us to reflect upon our own experiences and to make critical sense of them.

This is a good book and I like it

(WH Auden)

Cliff Jones 5th August 2017

End Notes

i

In my view the framers of the Constitution of the USA were influenced far too much by Montesquieu who was influenced by John Locke and, being keen to discern and disseminate reason, assumed that what was called The English Constitution demonstrated three powers, Executive, Legislature and Judiciary. They do exist in Britain but they are fused. In the USA they are separated. That creates tensions with the potential to become destructive if one of the three should misbehave.

While the framers were happy to accept the rhetoric of Thomas Paine his opposition to monarchy and encouragement of equality were not to their taste.

John Keane writes extensively about how concerned the framers were to hold democracy at bay. The Electoral College means that no President has ever been elected directly by the un-trusted voters of the USA. His book is long and by no means limited to the USA. Here is a review.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/jun/07/life-death-democracy-john-keane>

ii

In 2010 David Cameron's great idea was The Big Society. It was accompanied by the notion of Small Government. It is a dangerous nonsense that merely contributes to the loss of democracy and the encouragement of dysfunctional greed. Here is my review of a useful book by Brown and Jacobs.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/SEARReviewBrownJacobs.pdf>

iii

Written in 2003 Andy Beckett's book *Pinochet in Piccadilly* tells us how much the regime change in Chile brought about by the USA also began the experiments with economics and public life carried out by Thatcher, starting in 1979, and Reagan in 1980. It was deliberate.

www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk

iv

Here is my review of Tony Blair's own book. I called it *From illusion to Delusion* and it has been pointed out to me that I did not need to write any more. Placing Blair in the context of Klein's work highlights his destructiveness.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/bookReviewBlair.pdf>

v

Extractive government is a handy phrase. I am not sure that I am using it in quite the sense proposed in *Why Nations Fail, the origins of power, prosperity and poverty* (2012) by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson. I pinched it from them. Their book irritates me on three counts. First, the notion of a failing state demands agreed criteria. For that they use an Anglo-Saxon prism. Second they are unaware of the differences between colonisation and imperial subjugation. Yes, they can overlap but it is important to understand that Britain did not, for example, colonise India: Britain subjugated India. Very often the USA, now by far the world's biggest coloniser and subjugator, has done both at the same time. Third is their insulting and extremely ignorant assertion that the Romans invaded and occupied England. They did no such thing. They invaded and occupied Britain. Ever since, the British have had to answer to the Anglo-Saxon name for foreigners: Welsh. Their prism was not designed to see things from the point of view of indigenous people.

vi

Here is a link to a relatively short explanation of what I mean by Social Fracking.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/SocialFrackingShortPolemic.pdf>

vii

David Cameron's spin-doctor kept a diary throughout the EU Referendum campaign. The link below is my reaction to his subsequent book.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/UnleashingDemons.pdf>

viii

'Intersectional' is a useful word. It helps us realise that although subjects and themes such as 'class', 'gender' and 'race' may be treated separately they also connect and when we see them like this our understanding is enhanced.

ix

This link can speak for itself.

<https://www.standingrock.org/>

x

It says Canada here but others should listen.

<https://leapmanifesto.org/en/the-leap-manifesto/#manifesto-content>

xi

Philip Gould was Tony Blair's Focusgroupmeister and just before he died he revised his book on New Labour. Here is my review followed by an extract. Blair thinks that what he did should be classified as 'progress'.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/ErsatzPolitics.pdf>

In his foreword to Gould's book Tony Blair gives readers fifteen pages of his governance credo, thereby making explicit the links between the work of Gould and the New Labour approach to government, politics and society. Blair believes that politics is about choice.

'That', he says, 'is the true story behind *The Unfinished Revolution*. We made the choices to obtain power, we made the choices in power. In doing so we contributed, in ways large and small, to progress.'

xii

This link is a story but I hope it helps to make the point that schools are not preparation factories but part of society.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/At50.pdf>