

Few will support Naomi Klein's revolution, thankfully sparing us from national suicide

The Leap Manifesto unveiled by Naomi Klein and a coalition of somewhat kindred spirits this week in Toronto illustrates the phenomenon of regrouping in which the shattered Old Left, heavily buffeted eco-zealots, imperishable agitators for the native people, and the detritus of organized labour, together with an endearing rag-tail of old do-gooders, posturers and hemophiliac bleeding hearts have stood on each other's shoulders and proclaimed once more that they are the wave of the future.

The inspiring tocsin for this bedraggled resurrection, which if any of it actually occurs will be the greatest comeback since Lazarus, seems to have been Naomi Klein's book last year, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. Her organizing principle is that ecological necessities have made much of commerce, and especially the carbon-based economy, obsolete and unsustainable.

The bone-crushing defeat of international communism – the metamorphosis of China into a pure-capitalist/command-economy hybrid and of the Russian core of the old Soviet Union into a gangster state run by avaricious and cynical friends of the regime – has forced the traditional Marxists of the West to engage in frenetic networking and consensus-building. They have made their big move toward the environment zealots.



These, too, have taken their lumps, as Dr. Michael Mann's renowned hockey stick has been exposed as an infamous fraud,

and the whole marching juggernaut of global warming alarmists has been reduced to tired knots of dissidents, like hung-over New Year revellers, still blowing the odd noise-maker about the much-diluted concept of climate change. From the butterfly collectors and bird-watchers through all the shadings of the environmental movement to the anti-carbon militants, a joint command structure seems to have been rallied by Klein's fervent improvisation that the evils of carbon-sourced energy will drive a revulsion against capitalism, and the left, guided by her essentially Marxist roadmap, will snatch victory from the obese stomach of the bovine capitalist monster.

It is a plucky effort: the Marxist army that was practically annihilated and the Global Warming Force that has been very roughly handled, linking arms with aboriginal groups and the Luddite remnants of organized labour, carry Klein's book about like a Talmudic scroll, and incant the dawn of their new day. It is the predictable hodge-podge of anti-materialism, Marxist materialism, localism, social deconstruction and primitivism, all hitched to the one engine that could be imagined capable of implementing what amounts to the Manifestants' mad belief in the pastoralized, post-materialist perfection of man: the omnipotent state.

This new state, of course, would operate with impeccable efficiency and fairness, unlike any state we have seen before, in executing the entire Manifesto, and would avoid the sort of chaos and misery that attended similar experiments such as Stalin's collectivization of agriculture or Mao's Great Leap Forward. Those bold strokes took the lives of probably 40- or 50-million people, but Russia and China have much greater populations than Canada and have never been gentle places. I doubt that Leapers like Maude Barlow, Roy McMurtry, Judy Rebick and John Ralston Saul would shoot me even if they had the authority to do so, any more than I would them.

The Leap Manifesto's 15 demands are a comprehensive assault on the whole concept of economic growth: a radical program for

the abolition of carbon-based energy use (and with it the entire petroleum industry) and the fragmentation of society into small units even as almost all economic activity was collectivized. Specifically, the demands appear to include the virtual deliverance of Canada back to the native people recognizing "the inherent title of the original caretakers of this land." The demands also require that all energy be from renewable sources within 20 years. No energy development could be pursued if it were not something the average family would want in their own back yard.

Non-renewable energy projects would not be permitted to expand. All residential accommodation would have to be retrofitted to renewable energy. High-speed railways powered by renewable energy would roll back the automobile, pipeline and traditional railway industries. All people in carbon-intensive jobs would be retrained for employment in "new public infrastructure that can withstand increasingly frequent extreme weather events" that we are still endlessly warned to expect, as throughout the last 40 years. The vast numbers of the newly unemployed would be reallocated to such economically productive fields as care-givers, day-care supervisors, teachers, artists, social workers and public interest media.

We are all to have a universal annual income, paid for by ending fossil fuel subsidies (there are none) and almost all defence spending, together with higher taxes on financial transactions, resources, corporations, wealthy people and any remaining carbon production. On the other hand, the manifesto does support increased immigration (though how they think they would attract any to this anesthetizing society escapes my imagination); this ambition to welcome new arrivals, the taxes on some financial transactions and in general terms the demand for fairer treatment of the native peoples, are the best points in the document. The few people that I know in the front rank of the Leap's backers are well-meaning enough; widespread irritation with many aspects of our current state

of public policy is understandable; and some of the old rallying slogans and betes noires are agreeably nostalgic.

But there are three fundamental problems with the whole concept. First, no one is going to repeal capitalism. It is the only possibly successful system because it is the only one that is aligned with the universal human desire to have more money. Most people have some altruistic instincts and want disadvantaged people to be assisted; almost no one is indifferent to the environment, just as most people would like to be just to the native people though they might disagree that they were entitled to permanent primacy in the whole of Canada.

But only capitalism will generate economic growth and greater prosperity, because only it can enlist enthusiastic participation by much of society. Yet it is also in the nature of capitalism that it is unable to resist the temptation to imprudent pursuit of enhanced gain. This invariably leads to corrective periods, sometimes very destructive ones, of which the present may perhaps be an example.

Dispensing with the invincible engine of capitalism is the first problem of the Leapers. The second problem is their disturbingly naive faith in government. Governments always step in when capitalism goes off the rails. Only they can, admittedly, since they make and enforce the laws and control the money supply and there is no one else to try to sort out these debacles. But that does not mean that governments have any aptitude for this; they almost never do. They are more incompetent than businessmen and immediately proclaim that all such economic downturns are the result of private greed. In fact they are the result of governments not using their authority wisely to prevent excesses, as in the stock market bubble of the '20s and the real estate bubble from the '90s to 2008.

The authors of this manifesto actually believe governments

could be found who could implement their revolutionary program; that governments do a better job for the majority of people when they impose mass changes of occupation, found and close whole industries, and direct how and where people live; and that a state authority so idealistically conceived can be transmitted into positive action. This is a complete and overwhelmingly demonstrable falsehood. Governments can govern legitimately because they are elected and have a legal apparatus to prop them up, but they are very largely venal and incompetent, far beyond what prevails in the private sector, where scoundrels and failures cannot cling to what Shakespeare called "the insolence of office."

Last, Klein and her comrades seem wholly unaware that not five per cent of the people would support this farrago of nonsense and if it were ever enacted the results would be national suicide, for the unions and the native people just as much as for the oil industry. The fact that Klein's book won a prestigious award, as I said to the person who provides the money for that award, reminded me of Lenin's astute observation that the capitalists "are so stupid and greedy, they will sell us the rope we will hang them with." The author may have thought the same thing but this is not Czarist Russia.

"We won't leave our country's future ... to the politicians," Klein vows. "We must work swiftly toward a system ... in which corporate money is removed from political campaigns. This transformation is our sacred duty" and so forth. I share her skepticism about much of the status quo and like her spirit and even a few of her ideas, but if she thinks this giant hot air balloon of fetid sophomorisms will fly, she has in her perceptions gone on to a gentler place. I have long advocated ways of making capitalism more benevolent; it could be done and is the only way forward. This Changes Everything will change nothing and will sink without a ripple, mercifully taking many hands down with it.

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