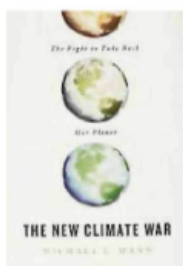


'Danger no longer lies in not knowing, but in not doing'



The New Climate War

Michael E Mann
PublicAffairs, €13.40

Review:
Art Flynn



Professor Michael Mann: 'Doomism and the loss of hope can lead people down the very same path of inaction as outright denial'.
Picture: Getty

MICHAEL MANN is a pre-eminent climate scientist whose academic pedigree is beyond question. In the early 90s he was one of the pioneers of climate science who contributed to the creation of the 'hockey stick' graph which was a powerful visual representation of climate change. The fossil fuels industry attacked the graph and the science behind it, and impugned the integrity of the scientists who did the work in an effort to discredit climate science as false. This was the first climate war.

In *The New Climate War*, Mann shows how the science of climate change has been generally accepted over the years. He

points out how, as a result, fossil fuels' interests have shifted focus from discrediting the science to decelerating action to transform the carbon economy. Mann makes it clear that there are discernable strategies to do this, which are part of a co-ordinated campaign.

This is the new climate war.

One strategy is to shift the onus of responsibility for climate change from industry and policy to individuals. He says that the concept of a personal carbon footprint was created by an oil company. This was intended to keep environmentalists focused on personal actions, such as changing one's diet or transportation choices, rather than demonstrating or taking

collective action to decarbonise the economy. Mann rightly calls these people 'inactivists' as a way to highlight their real objectives.

Another strategy is to instill a sense of despair, making the target feel that there is no point in attempting to change the carbon economy because it is already too late. The tactic is designed to get engaged, thinking people to throw up their hands and quit the fight because it is already lost. According to Mann: "Doomism and the loss of hope can lead people down the very same path of inaction as outright denial."

Mann identifies the leaders of the new campaign, calling out Russian intervention in the discourse on social media and publication of pseudo-scientific papers

by conservative think-tanks masquerading as environmental interest groups. He then draws a parallel between the climate crisis and the Covid pandemic. The same tactics employed by the same players serve to downplay the problem, shift the focus to personal behaviours and finally promote the futility of further action. As a hopeful counterpoint, though, Mann discusses the contribution of the younger generation, showing how Greta Thunberg has brought a sense of urgency and agency to the debate.

Finally, there is a discussion of ways to ameliorate the effects of rising carbon levels, including radical interventions to reflect sunlight away from the Earth and trapping and burying carbon underground. In the end, Mann's expert opinion is that there is no viable way to address climate change without decarbonising the economy. The tools to do that are already known; renewable energy, decentralisation and 'decarbonisation' of the grid itself and carbon-pricing mechanisms to facilitate the transition.

Checking in with an expert climatologist on the state of play and progress towards addressing the climate crisis is important, and reading this book is a good way to do that. Having the new approach to climate disinformation laid out so clearly is beneficial, but Mann spends too much energy focused on the battles of the last climate war.

Without the distractions of the old conflict, the reader can more clearly hear the new message that the danger no longer lies in not knowing, but now the danger lies in not doing.