

## Energy, environment and global health

**The new climate war: the fight to take back our planet.** By Michael E. Mann. Melbourne and London: Scribe. 2021. 368pp. £16.99. ISBN 978 1 54175 823 0. Available as e-book.

The past four years of reprobate behaviour from Trump's America appear to fade in the rear-view mirror as the Biden–Harris administration develops a climate-centric approach to both domestic policy and multilateral relationships. Unfortunately, increasing societal acceptance of climate change in America has not curbed the coordinated global resistance by polluters to government efforts to decarbonize economies. As discrediting the urgency of climate action is becoming a mainstream political strategy, we are reminded that if you are not following climate politics, you are not following politics.

For readers wishing to get up to speed, Michael Mann's latest book offers a welcome alternative to the 'climate doom' literature and a timely antidote to techno-optimists who view climate change as just another engineering problem. *The new climate war's* candid analysis is not just about politics for Mann—it is personal. Mann, along with other scientists, was subject to online abuse following 'Climategate' in 2009, an effort to undermine confidence in scientific evidence of climate change. *The new climate war* goes beyond the 'role of data in policy' debate, exploring the fraught relationships between power, politics and science. Not since *Merchants of doubt* (Erik M. Conway and Naomi Oreskes, London: Bloomsbury, 2010) and *This changes everything* (Naomi Klein, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015) have readers of climate non-fiction gained such insight into how a small group of people representing billions of dollars has an outsize influence on public discourse and government action.

What makes this a new war? Mann argues that polluter tactics have shifted to a 'kinder, gentler' approach. For decades, prominent conservative think tanks and politicians outright denied the existence of human-induced climate change. Now, as America is poised to reach a tipping point in accepting the reality of climate change, sophisticated efforts to block action are evolving. Readers are introduced to the inactivists—those who seek to divide public opinion, delay action and deflect blame. Foot soldiers in this war undercut subsidies for clean energy, resist pricing carbon and question scientific evidence. Though focused on the US, the book features examples from Australia, Russia, Saudi Arabia and France to show how state, civil society and corporate interests all play a role in inactivism.

These examples demonstrate that the war is not solely conducted by corporate barons. Beginning each chapter with a precautionary quote, Mann draws from Abraham Lincoln to remind readers that 'a house divided against itself cannot stand'. *Divided* is one of the 'D words' that Mann identifies—including *deflect*, *delay*, *despair* and *doom*—to inform the main analytic contribution of the book. By threading these 'D words' through his nine chapters, Mann demonstrates how polluters and concerned citizens alike impede action: while inactivists understate

the threats posed by climate change, a sector of the activist community overstates them, viewing climate change as a lost cause.

This form of doomism leads to disengagement: there is no reason to vote if the climate apocalypse is upon us. Defeatist rhetoric dismisses the initiatives of tribal communities, cities, states and companies and fails to acknowledge real progress. Fossil fuel companies follow the playbooks of other industries such as tobacco and chemical producers, deflecting responsibility and promoting a view that individual behaviour modification is an alternative to systemic change. Mann points out that, while individual agency is important in a democracy, consumer choice alone does not lead to massive investments in infrastructure or develop incentives for renewables.

The deflection from systemic change shapes a restrictive policy landscape that fails to advance practical solutions. Mann, who sees carbon pricing as ‘the main lever arm we have available to us in a market economy’ (p. 111), notes that the Green New Deal rejects any market mechanisms. Aversion to market solutions has led inactivists to portray environmentalists as ‘watermelons’—green on the outside, red on the inside (p. 95). (This is perhaps bolstered by the coincidence that Earth Day, on 22 April, falls on Vladimir Lenin’s birthday, although communism does not have an illustrious environmental legacy.)

While there is a scientific consensus on climate change, the political consensus lags far behind due to the strategic clout of the inactivists. An area that merits further exploration is how inactivists have come to define American culture, values and ideology. The book gives due credit to youth activists, though a more explicit focus on indigenous leaders is warranted.

In his closing chapter, Mann suggests a four-point battle plan, including ‘disregarding the doomsayer’, educating those who are ‘reachable, teachable and moveable’ and redirecting the conversation to focus on systemic change. By emphasizing both urgency and agency, societies can shift from discussing the cars we drive and the food we eat to countering the policies that polluters support and the politicians they embolden. Overall, Mann offers readers an absorbing and accessible take on an alarming pattern that stands to shape the course of climate action—and our collective future.

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**Global environmental governance and the accountability trap.** Edited by **Susan Park and Teresa Kramarz.** Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 2019. 280pp. £75.00. ISBN 978 0 26203 906 2. Available as e-book.

In recent years, an emergent body of International Relations scholarship has taken an interest in global governance and responses to new transboundary threats. *Global environmental governance and the accountability trap* is animated by similar concerns about the global governance crisis of the environment, mostly because of what the book refers to as a ‘culture of unaccountability’. The contributors to this edited volume are interested in how global environmental governance institutions are