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Naomi Klein: The Shock Doctrine: Review

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The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism
By Naomi Klein Penguin Allen Lane 558pp

Naomi Klein, the award-winning *Guardian* columnist and best-selling author of the seminal 'No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies' (2000) has just completed her most ambitious project to date. With the publication of 'Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism', Klein may have achieved what many political leaders, economists and journalists the world over have failed to do during the tumultuous tenure of the current Bush Administration – namely to forensically prove that a 'rolling coup' has taken place within the United States that has subordinated its domestic and foreign policy imperatives to corporate interests and naked greed by way of the implementation of ruinous and violent strategies from the Bayou in Louisiana to the banks of the Tigris in Iraq.

In the opening chapters of her work Klein introduces the reader to the deeply anti-democratic and laissez faire capitalist ideology of George W Bush's neo-conservative clique as articulated by its intellectual architect Milton Friedman. Friedman's philosophy of unfettered right-wing capitalism – characterised by wholesale asset stripping within states to include the totality of their natural resources and manufacturing capacity along with the privatisation of their respective education, health and security sectors – is explored by Klein in the first half of her book by way of a detailed account of the mayhem and misery caused by the neo-cons trademark 'economic shock therapy' as implemented in countries around the globe including Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, South Africa, Poland, Russia and Iraq.

Klein demonstrates quite clearly the manner in which Friedman's 'disciples' – his powerful admirers and student graduates of the Chicago School of Economics – known as the 'Chicago School' or the 'Berkeley Mafia' were intimately involved in the dismantling of democratic structures across many continents from the 'Southern Cone' of Latin America to Central Europe, Russia, the Middle East and Asia. Among Friedman's disciples Klein clearly identifies former US Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld – of whom President Richard Nixon said in 1971, 'He's a ruthless little bastard. You can be sure of that' – former US Chief Envoy to Iraq, Paul Bremer along with a host of other conservative Washington Republican luminaries including US Vice President, Dick Cheney.

Klein's detailed accounts of various CIA-inspired interventions in south America during the 1970's set the scene for the manner in which these neo-conservative economists, businessmen and would-be politicians exploited bloody military coups and repression in states such as Chile under Pinochet, Argentina under various violent Juntas and Indonesia under Suharto. The violence and crises the neo-cons fomented in various jurisdictions were designed to temporarily stun host populations into a collective state of fear and inaction. This process known by the neo-cons as 'fearing-up' allowed them to subject millions of traumatised people world-wide to economic experiments designed to maximise profits for US multinationals.

Klein's central hypothesis is that in order to further the US Administration's economic and political neo-conservative agenda, an enduring climate of apocalyptic violence, fear

and crisis is required. To this end, Klein describes in painstaking detail the systematic human rights abuses, repression, fear and torture in various countries world-wide that she alleges have been backed by the United States most eminent neo-cons over many decades. The detail is at times tedious and dense with many footnotes and some degree of tiresome repetition as Klein brings the reader through a step by step global audit of violent coups, natural disasters and the subsequent imposition of savage free-market economic experiments that have impoverished over 72 million Russians in the Northern Hemisphere and dispossessed a similar number throughout Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

Some of the detail is graphic and disturbing - from the application of 'picanas' or cattle-prods by the Junta in Argentina to the genitalia of whole families - including small children - in the 1970s to allegations of the use of similar torture methods by the CIA and US security contractors or mercenaries on Afghan and Iraqi men and boys today. The detail, despite being wearying to the reader from time to time, does however prove to be an essential and compelling part of Klein's case against the Bush administration. Klein never once slips into anti-American rant or overblown polemic. Rather, she systematically and calmly demonstrates to the reader the manner in which a hard-core nucleus of neo-cons, including Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney have been intimately linked to seismic events worldwide over several decades that have not only resulted in the loss of millions of lives internationally but have also generated – and not by coincidence Klein would argue – billions of dollars in reconstruction and 'anti-terror' programmes for a small nucleus of neo-con business men-turned-politicians.

Employing the calm calculus of logic combined with a forensically detailed chain of evidence Klein demonstrates the manner for example in which Donald Rumsfeld has become the first Secretary of Defence in US history to profit personally and directly from war as a result of decisions made by him in relation to the current 'War on Terror' and concerns over Homeland Security – over 1 billion dollars to be precise from his shares in Gilead Corporation. Klein also outlines the profits made by Vice President Dick Cheney from his involvement during the invasion of Iraq – an event he oversaw in office - with US reconstruction giant Halliburton and the US arms manufacturer Lockheed Martin. Klein compares the behaviour of Cheney and Rumsfeld in office with that of US President Franklin D Roosevelt during the Second World War who said of war and crisis 'I don't want to see a single war millionaire created in the United States as a result of world disaster'. Roosevelt's sentiments contrast starkly with contemporary observations made by neo-con business associates of the Bush Administration. Commenting on the first phase of Iraq's invasion, Klein quotes one such neo-con as stating, 'It's the best 18 months we've ever had. We made money and we made it fast'.

Klein's overarching hypothesis is that the much vaunted 'neo-conservative project for the 21st Century' as articulated by George Bush's inner circle is not about the 'implanting of democracy' in countries such as Iraq but a repressive prescription for the maximising of global profit for a small 'elite' of neo-cons. Their ultimate aim, according to Klein, is the creation of a new feudal order – involving the 'evisceration of the middle classes' – resulting in a radical new distribution of wealth worldwide. Neo-cons see the ideal ratio

of super-rich to permanent-poor as consistent with an 'uber-class' of business oligarchs and their political cronies drawn from the 'top' 20% of society. The remaining 80% of the world's population, the 'disposable poor' would subsist in a state of what the neo-cons refer to as 'planned misery' – unable to pay for adequate housing, privatised education and healthcare.

The most ambitious component of Klein's work is to suggest that in order to foist such an inequitable system on the majority of their fellow citizens, the neo-cons have long realised that a 'shock' to the system, a permanent 'crisis' or period of 'extraordinary politics' would be necessary to stun the population into an acceptance of the dismantling of social democracy. This 'rupture' or 'opportunity' Klein argues, occurred in the US with the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers in September 2001. The subsequent 'War on Terror' has allowed the Bush Administration to pass a raft of anti-democratic laws, re-introduce torture and state surveillance into US society and – most tellingly of all – to make a unilateral grab for Iraq's invaluable oil reserves at a time of 'peak oil production'.

On balance, Klein's work is not simply another 'conspiracy theory'. She weaves primary and secondary sources, facts and figures into a compelling narrative that describes eloquently the political economy of a morally bankrupt neo-conservative global oligopoly. *The Shock Doctrine* makes for uncomfortable reading. There is plenty to interest Irish readers in the book including references to Bono's campaign to rid the developing world of crippling debt along with a telling quotation from David Horgan, Chief Executive of Irish oil exploration company, Petrel who states, 'Iraq is the last great frontier in the Middle East ... In Iraq 80% of the oil wells ever drilled have been discoveries'. Horgan's quote seems to corroborate Klein's hypothesis as to the real reason for the British and American invasion of Iraq – a land grab for oil security.

Perhaps of more relevance to Irish readers would be a consideration of Donald Rumsfeld's vision for a stripped-down privatised US military machine whose future rationale would be to engage in profit-generating warfare in support of the neo-conservative economic agenda. Such an army according to Rumsfeld's vision would possess 'virtual US Air Force Bases' dotted around the globe to service an increasingly privatised US military. Some would argue that Shannon Airport fits precisely this template – a civilian airport in a neutral country with a small permanent US military presence answering to Eucom – the US military's European Command based in Germany – and operating in direct support of Centcom operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Certainly the largest army in Ireland's history, consisting of almost a million troops, a quarter of our population – greater than any invading force or armada in Ireland's troubled past - has passed through Irish territory in the last four years virtually unnoticed.

The US military operation at Shannon fits neatly into the neo-conservative modus operandi as described by Klein. So also does the slow creep of privatisation within public infrastructure, education and particularly health-care in Ireland. Naomi Klein's work should be compulsory reading for those who would propose that Ireland continue to gravitate towards Boston and not Berlin.

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