

Michael E. Mann, *The New Climate War: The Fight to Take Back Our Planet*. New York: Public Affairs, 2021.

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Lately, the media is rife with news about the supposed hazards of toxic chemical solar panels, the dangers of wind turbines for bird populations, concerns about highly flammable batteries in electric vehicles, etc. At the same time, those same media outlets claim that individual choices such as switching to a vegan diet, recycling, and reducing personal air-travel are essential in combating climate change. Then there is news which is pro-nuclear, claiming that transition to nuclear power is the only viable option if we're aiming to net zero emissions by 2050. Surprisingly, however, most of this news have very little to do with the concerns about the environment. What they all have in common is the fact that they are knowingly or unknowingly, serving the interests of fossil fuel industry, which is set to disinform, deceive and divide the public, and ultimately delay climate action.

In his book *The New Climate War*, renowned climatologist Michael E. Mann takes on the task of debunking some of the most popular misconceptions surrounding the debate about climate change. As one of the world's leading climate scientists, Mann is most famously known for the "hockey stick," the graph published in 1998 that shows the average global temperature over the past 1000 years with a sudden, sharp increase in a short period of time. As one of the key figures to demonstrate that human activity was the cause of global warming, he was himself the target of attacks by fossil fuel lobby. And, as someone who has been facing the enemy since the beginning, throughout the pages of *The New Climate War* he shares with his readers the "decades of experience on the front lines of the battle to communicate the science of climate change" (15).

According to Mann, the roots of climate denial campaigns can be traced back to the early sixties and seventies, when two interesting cases appeared. The first one he describes as the "cautionary tale of the clash between science and industrial or corporate interests" (20). It

was the attempt of tobacco industry to hide the health threats of their products from the public, even though these were well established by their own scientists. The second one is the case of Rachel Carlson who, after warning the public about the dangers of the pesticide DDT in what later became one of the most important environmental books *Silent Spring* (1962), became the victim of a “full-on character assassination campaign” by corporations such as Monsanto (21). The strategies that were used for discrediting these health and environmental concerns are still implemented today in climate denial campaigns. Even more so, many people involved in discrediting the data behind these cases are part of an organised climate denial movement. In other words, these two cases of denial campaigns are just the beginning of an intricate story about the ongoing climate war.

The New Climate War contains nine chapters organized around various forms of inactivism, all of which mnemonically begin with the letter D: denial, disinformation, deflection, delayism, and doomism. The chapters cover a wide spectrum of topics related to climate misinformation campaigns, beginning with the roots of climate deflection, which are traced back to the gun lobby, the Big Tobacco, and the beverage industry. Each of these actors have resorted to instilling doubt and shifting responsibility from governmental regulations to individual consumers in strikingly similar manners. In the case of the gun lobby, under the motto “Guns Don’t Kill People, People Kill People” from 1920s, the aim was to divert attention from criminal violence caused by weapon possession. The tobacco industry resorted to similar rhetoric, coining the company’s internal memo: “Doubt is our Product”. Another example of such campaigns was the iconic “Crying Indian” ad from 1971, which featured a supposedly Native American (but in reality an Italian American actor) under whose tearful portrait appears a familiar statement: “People start pollution. People can stop it.” Once again, both the blame and the responsibility are shifted to the individual.

All of these cases serve as introduction to the unfolding story of pervasive denial of anthropogenic climate change, starting from the narrative of individual responsibility. Here we encounter various claims about meat consumption being worse than burning oil because animal agriculture apparently exceeds fossil fuel industry in polluting the environment. The author reveals that even the concept of a personal carbon footprint was promoted by the oil company British Petroleum in 2000s. While it is indeed necessary to stress the importance of individual responsibility, these claims serve as a mere deflection tactic for shifting the burden to the individual, whose “personal actions mean little without systemic change” (96).

Mann then proceeds to the debates about carbon pricing, revealing

how various interest groups sabotaged such regulations, which, in his opinion, could be an effective solution to battling climate change (an opinion, we might add, that is quite unpopular amongst the progressive left). In addition to this, Mann argues that we need to turn to what he calls the fossil fuel industry's main competition: renewable energy (139). Combined with market-based solutions such as carbon tax and cap-and-trade system, renewables are the answer to our burning issue, even though both solutions were sabotaged by the fossil industry from the very beginning. The narrative that the fossil industry is trying to instil in the public domain consists of various examples of technofixes and geoengineering solutions, which are discussed in a separate chapter ("The Non-Solution Solution"). These range from already implemented, but nonetheless problematic technologies like carbon sequestration, to more science fiction-like scenarios such as Mars terraforming. However, Mann shows that these supposedly miracle technologies are only delaying climate action, instead of offering real long-term solutions.

Furthermore, there are those narratives that do not even pretend to care about climate action, playing into the feeling of fatalism and defeatism. Such climate doomism that nowadays abounds in the media is one of the main subjects of Mann's book. Take, for example the title of an article by the American novelist Jonathan Franzen: "What If We Stopped Pretending? The Climate Apocalypse Is Coming. To Prepare for It, We Need to Admit That We Can't Prevent It" (*The New Yorker*, September 2019), or a more recent journal tag line: "Soon it will be unrecognisable: total climate meltdown cannot be stopped, says expert" (*The Guardian*, July 2022). Assumptions like this, Mann argues, not only paralyze our actions, but also are often based on bad science, which makes them perfect allies to fossil fuel industry interests. Contrary to such dire predictions, the book offers a whole chapter about why there is still reason to stay hopeful ("Meeting the Challenge").

At the end of the book, Mann concludes this saga of attempts to sabotage climate action with a "four-point battle plan", stressing the importance of fighting the climate war on multiple fronts (16). The first step is to *disregard the doomsayers*, who can immobilize any meaningful effort to make change. Equally important is to *educate* those who are the victims of the so-called "doom porn" (276). In Mann's words, it is important to acknowledge both the sense of urgency and agency. This means that, while it is important to be aware that it is too late to prevent harmful impacts of climate change, we must not fall prey to defeatism, as there is still time to act. "Every ounce of carbon we don't burn", Mann notes, "makes things better" (279). Moreover,

we must model our actions after the youngest generation which are “the game-changer that climate advocates have been waiting for” (16). Finally, we must work towards *systemic change* through supporting policies that will incentivize the transition to clean energy (276–282).

In a time when we just recently witnessed Covid-19 related disinformation campaign and conspiracy theories about the Russia-Ukraine war, this is truly a timely book. Through its comprehensive analysis of the climate denial campaign cases, it can teach us about broader issues, namely about how to differentiate between media sensationalism and/or pure political propaganda, and unbiased facts. Its importance lies not only in arming its readers with critical-thinking tools to fight the climate war, but also the larger war against disinformation, which is the trademark of these odd and turbulent times we are living in.