

The Oil Drum: Campfire

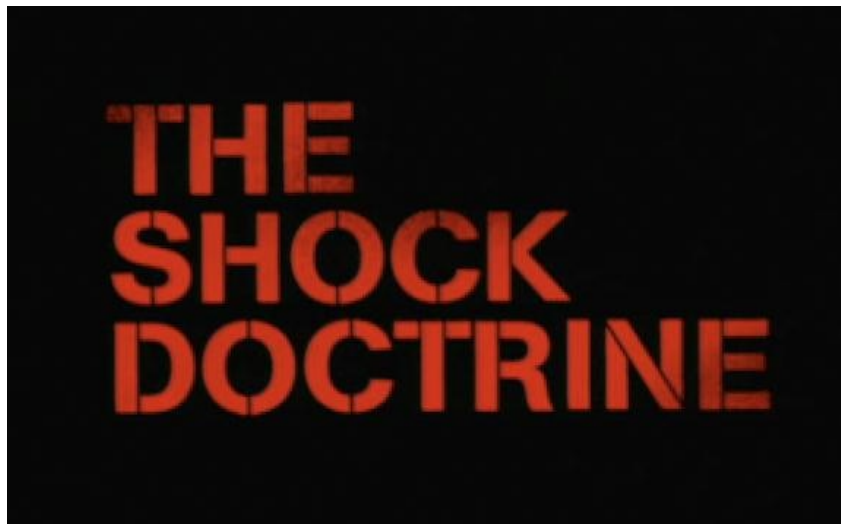
Discussions about Energy and Our Future

A Shock Doctrine for Sustainability

Posted by [Nate Hagens](#) on December 6, 2009 - 9:57am in [The Oil Drum: Campfire](#)

Topic: [Environment/Sustainability](#)

Below the fold is a brief guest posting by [Altaira](#), who is employed at an NGO working on issues related to sustainable development. She has a Masters Degree in Agricultural Science. Previously on [TheOilDrum](#), Altaira wrote [Can the Wealthy Have a Separate Peace?](#)



A Shock Doctrine for Sustainability?

My circle of friends includes many professionals in the world of environmental NGOs. I have noticed something about the way they view the importance of their work and the likelihood of its success that I'd like to share.

In brief, many now admit openly that human overshoot has gone way too far and that the programs they run are like band aids when the wound calls for a tourniquet. They lament the rise of expectations for a narrowly defined version of progress that will only deepen our predicament. It now seems undeniable that structural and psychological requirements for global economic growth have much more sway than any rhetoric about sustainability.

Although the depth of despair is greater than usual, most of these thoughts are old news. However, a couple of new conversational memes have emerged. First of all, my friends are turning inwards, becoming concerned about personal and family security. Second, they are considering adopting a new strategy that plans for responses to crisis and breakdown, rather than their usual fare, which is advocating for course corrections to avoid troubles.

In these conversations, I see a parallel with what Naomi Klein discussed in her book *Shock Doctrine*. <http://www.naomiklein.org/shock-doctrine/the-book> She documents how a particular

wing of neoclassical economists, based primarily out of the University of Chicago, took advantage of disasters to push through legal, policy and business agreements that would never be accepted otherwise. The take home message is that radical changes may only be possible during a crisis, and that in chaotic times the advantage goes to whoever has a response plan available.

I don't see that these discussions have made it into any official programs of the environmental movement, but perhaps they need to be. The existing system does a great job of protecting itself and will be unlikely to change sufficiently to ahead off a crisis. If breakdowns are now inevitable, the standard role of environmental groups may be necessary but insufficient.

Here are questions for campfire:

1. Are you noticing similar conversations, where well-educated and generally well off people are worried about the security of very basic needs, such as food and water.
2. Do you think a kind of "Shock Doctrine for Sustainability" is a good idea?
3. What real-world scenarios might lead to the opportunity to make major structural changes in society?
4. Can you outline what the elements of such a plan would look like?
5. Who might be able to actually make these plans and get them adopted at the right time?
6. Should such plans be kept largely undisclosed and un-promoted until needed?



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