

Shock Them Back

by Emily Posner and Luke Allen

Naomi Klein's *Shock Doctrine* describes how "shocks" to our daily routine create the political and cultural climate within which economic rules can be rewritten. Through these shocks, big business and government have been able to synchronize free-trade policies worldwide and create a consumer climate to support this economic agenda.

Klein points out that the psychological disruption of these shocks softens entire societies, leaving us to yearn for a quick-fix solution. Whereas sometimes political elites take advantage of these shocks to promote their own agendas, at other times they fail, leaving communities to fulfill their own basic needs.

In Argentina, neoliberal economic failure in 2001-2002 paralyzed the country. Banks froze assets, unemployment skyrocketed, factories closed and presidential leadership changed 4 times in just a few months. Communities responded to government failure by organizing neighborhood councils. Workers occupied abandoned factories. Families planted hundreds of thousands of urban gardens and started community cafeterias. Barter fairs became a standard way to exchange goods in the absence of monetary capital.

Just as regular Argentines were left stranded by a failing economy, New Orleanians were abandoned by our government in 2005, after the (un)natural disaster of Hurricane Katrina. In the absence of private or public relief services, the people came together to save themselves. Independent journalist, Jordan Flaugherty reports the reality of those left to die by our government:

Denise [Moore], one of those trapped in the Convention Center told family members, "yes, there were young men with guns there, but they organized the crowd. They went to Canal Street and 'looted,' and brought back food and water for the old people and the babies, because nobody had eaten in days."

Where there should have been government relief services, a power vacuum emerged as the housing, water, food and health-care crisis in the city exploded. Energies of people of conscience from around the world filled the vacuum. They worked with New Orleans residents to open free health and legal clinics, build workers' rights centers and bike shops, start community gardens and after-school programs, create food distribution centers and community kitchens, and to replant the wetlands. For every seed that is saved, meal that is served, health consultation provided, bike distributed and factory in operation, we can see what happens when philosophies of cooperation, mutual aid and solidarity amongst peoples are presented as a viable option in the face of crisis.

Today the corporate economic cartel is trying to take advantage of the financial crisis shock to increase

their wealth. This is evident with the Bush Administration's economic bailout plan and the stated goals of the G20. On the other hand, everyday people are not looking to Washington, or the stock exchanges as saviors to global economic problems. Instead, solutions are being found within ourselves, families, neighbors, and communities. In Cook County, IL, the Sheriff's Department will no longer do the work of the banks and serve foreclosure related evictions. The Central Maine workers cooperative, FED-CO Seeds, a regional agricultural supplier, has seen its business increase by 25 percent in every department in the last year due to more people growing their own food. And in Uruguay, the people are exploring ways to promote cooperative enterprises.

We hold the solutions to our problems. Our answers will be numerous and reflect the cultural and ecological diversity of our communities. This is a golden opportunity to shift our economic priorities, rearrange the way we spend our money, and break our dependency on big business and big government to meet our basic needs. We have a duty to ourselves, our families, the earth and future generations.

Politicians and economists have shocked us enough over the last four decades, its time to shock 'em back!

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