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Dear Naomi Klein,

I recently finished reading your latest book, *The Shock Doctrine*.¹ Your detailed account of the connections between neoliberal economic policy and the use of violent repression, the decline of welfare states, and the rise of corporatized war and disaster capitalism is compelling. You thread together the recent histories of military brutality in the Southern Cone of South America, union busting in Margaret Thatcher's England, and the Tiananmen Square massacre in China. Through these histories you make explicit that acts of violent political repression against leftist organizers were not chance occurrences during periods of economic transition. On the contrary, you show that they were deliberate acts of "shock therapy" used by governments to numb and eliminate those opposed to the implementation of neoliberal policies such as the privatization of public services, the elimination of spending on social programs, and the deregulation of industry wage, safety and environmental standards.

¹ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, 1st ed. (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007).

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You demonstrate the “constricted freedom” of post cold-war governments in Poland, Russia, and South Africa, who, in spite of initial aspirations to build social democratic welfare states, ended up implementing neoliberal economic reforms with disastrous consequences for the majority of their people. You then bring your analysis of neoliberalism to the United States, describing the rise of the privatized war machine and the parallel emergence of the occupation of Iraq as a profitable market for investments in military technology, homeland security, and the rebuilding of basic infrastructure destroyed by the aforementioned military technology. Finally, you tie it all together by concluding that the neoliberal economic model, in its thirst for new markets, is now preying upon areas struck by natural disasters to accumulate the profits it desires. “Disaster capitalism,” as you aptly name it, was evident in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and in Sri Lanka after the tsunami when large numbers of poor people were prevented from returning to their weather damaged homes in order to create lucrative new investment opportunities on the land they previously inhabited. The most sinister part of neoliberalism’s trajectory, as you note at the end of your book, is that when war and disaster are profitable enterprises, there are increased incentives to start wars and allow natural phenomena to deteriorate into social catastrophes.

To begin, I want to say that I learned a lot from reading your book. I was continually impressed by your ability to organize complex historical events into easily understandable patterns. You have clearly demonstrated neoliberalism’s historical dependence on political, economic, and physical “shock.” I am writing you, however, because despite my deep appreciation for the work you have done, I also have a major

concern. You do an excellent job of describing many of the problems that come with neoliberalism, but I am afraid your analysis does not give a good account as to why neoliberal ideas are being implemented in the first place. Without a clear understanding of why neoliberalism is the policy of choice for many governments and economists today, you fail to put forward a comprehensive vision for how neoliberalism can be transformed.

For these reasons, I am concerned that many people will read your book and become motivated to make change, but will not be equipped with the right tools to do so. I am concerned that without the right tools, these motivated people will continue to focus on pressuring governments and/or economists to make change but will have little success persuading them to do so. I am concerned that these motivated people, after not having much success, will start to believe those who say that the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union prove that free market capitalism is the final stop on the train of economic history. Moreover, I am concerned that these motivated people, frustrated by their inability to make change, will reluctantly give into the idea that capitalism (and the neoliberal ideology that now accompanies it) is the only way to organize economies after all.

With these concerns in mind, I would like to suggest that you take a look at another book that maps the rise of neoliberalism in the latter half of the twentieth century. The book is *The Dilemmas of Social Democracies* by two Peace Studies Professors at Earlham College, Howard Richards and Joanna Swanger. Instead of focusing on the violence and repression associated with neoliberal economics, Richards and Swanger

focus on rules. They would argue that your book takes a wrong turn on the second to last page of the introduction when you make the claim that there is no reason that market-based economies are incompatible with decent wages, free health care, and quality public education. They would say that there is a very good reason that markets and government led social welfare programs do not mix: the basic cultural rules that shape our current economy do not allow them to. They would explain that until the basic rules of our economy are changed, governments have few options for making economic policies that serve the needs of all of their people.

Fearing that people might understand this explanation to mean that capitalism is here to stay, Richards and Swanger would then enthusiastically proclaim that effective strategies for ending the problems of neoliberalism do exist. There is no reason that the basic rules of our current economy cannot be changed or that concerned people can work collectively to change them so that everyone's needs can be met in ecologically sustainable ways. In the following pages, I will explain some of these strategies as I more fully articulate my concern with your book. I will start by describing what Richards and Swanger mean by "basic cultural rules of capitalism." I will then summarize a few of their case studies of nations whose experiments with social democracy failed as a result of these basic cultural rules. One such case study, that of South Africa after Mandela rose to power, is particularly illuminating. Both you and Richards and Swanger give detailed accounts of how Mandela's South Africa ended up implementing neoliberal economic policy, but have very different explanations as to why this happened. The conclusion of this letter will explain how your differing analysis of South Africa, and the

rise of neoliberalism in general, lead to vastly different approaches to transformative social and economic change.

According to Richards and Swanger, the basic cultural rules that shape and sustain our current economic system are made up of a couple of interconnected parts. First, as Marx explains in *Capital*, capitalism is based upon a culture of accumulation through commodity exchange. Commodities are not produced in order to meet people's needs directly, but to sell to make profit that is then reinvested in the production of even more commodities. Second, a simple set of ethics exists that produces, protects, and makes normal both the right to own property and the freedom to do with it whatever one wishes. This minimalist set of ethical values emerged in western culture as the Romans sought to create a basic system of rules- a common economic language- that could facilitate commerce between the vastly different cultures that had been conquered in their quest for empire. Enlightenment philosophers, such as Immanuel Kant, and classical economists, such as Adam Smith, would later adopt this emphasis on property and freedom to construct the ethical foundations of free market capitalism.

Focusing on the two interconnected parts of capitalism's basic rules allows Richards and Swanger to provide a simple explanation as to why capitalist markets and welfare states usually cannot coexist peacefully. This simple explanation, preceded by another brief summary of capitalism's interconnected parts, now follows. First, the summary: at the core of capitalist culture is the accumulation of profit through investment. At the same time, the ethical values of property and freedom give investors the right to do what they want with their capital because it is their capital. The freedom

to invest in whichever market one chooses, the freedom to remove investment from one market and place it in another, and the freedom to not invest in any market at all, are guaranteed by the rules of the system. Now, the simple explanation: in a capitalist economic system where the purpose of investment is to make profits, and the basic rules of the system give investors the freedom to choose where they invest, investors inevitably choose markets where profit can be made. One is unlikely to find profitable markets in countries with high wages and a large tax base to support government funded health care and education. Thus, investors do not usually choose markets in these countries.

Based upon the second to last page of *The Shock Doctrine's* introduction, where you make the claim that there is no reason that market-based economies are incompatible with social welfare states, I imagine that you might now offer this rebuttal, “But what about all of the countries that have combined social welfare with capitalist systems of production?” Moreover, it is also very possible that you are asking, “But what about Swedish social democracy!?”

Anticipating such responses, Richards and Swanger use several case studies to support their argument that the basic rules of capitalism are causes of poverty and economic instability. They examine Spain's failed attempts at socialism before and after the Franco dictatorship. They explain why Nelson Mandela had to forgo the people-centered economic principles of the Freedom Charter when he became president of South Africa. They note how even the brutal end to communism and imposition of neoliberalism in post-colonial Indonesia still could not entice investors to stay for very long. They lament Venezuela's missed opportunity to organize their economy around

social democratic principles when the country amassed great wealth during the oil booms of the seventies. And yes, they describe the rise and fall of Swedish social democracy. I will now focus on a few of these case studies in greater detail, starting with Sweden, and then making a few comments about their writings on Indonesia. Finally, I will show how their analysis in general, and of South Africa in particular, is different, and more useful towards effecting transformative social change than the one you present in *The Shock Doctrine*.

For the twenty or so years following World War II, explain Richards and Swanger, Sweden was hailed by the world as a social and economic utopia. Wages were high, unemployment was practically non-existent, and government funded education and health care met the needs of the Swedish people. Things began to change, however, with the dramatic increase in oil prices and other global economic shifts in the early 1970's. The Swedish economy began to run a deficit, unemployment began to rise, and overall economic productivity went down. As a result of these growing economic failures, and their inability to fix them, the social democrats were voted out of power in the early nineties. A government more willing to adopt neoliberal policy replaced them. For the last four decades, the welfare state that had once made Sweden a shining model for those working to create more just economies, has been in serious decline.

If one looks at the rise and fall of Swedish social democracy with Richards and Swanger's understanding of the basic rules of capitalism, it is not hard to understand what happened. Social democracy in Sweden was not a project aimed at changing capitalist economic rules, it was an attempt at carefully working within them. Even in the

glory days of social democracy, the Swedish economy was based upon production for exchange and the reinvestment of profits to initiate further production. What made the Swedish welfare state possible was a beautifully orchestrated dance between labor and business during a time when Sweden was able to export enough of what the world needed in order to maintain steady economic growth. For the first two decades after the Second World War, labor and business were able to fairly divide the profits of this economic growth. When rising oil prices made production more expensive, and when the markets that Sweden had been previously exporting to no longer needed their products, Swedish social democracy began to stumble. There was no longer enough profit to stimulate growth. In order to get investors to choose to keep their investments in Sweden, sacrifices had to be made. Wages had to be reduced. Government spending on social programs had to be cut back. The welfare state had to be diminished. Swedish social democracy did not change the basic rules of the capitalist system, so the basic rules of the capitalist system changed Swedish social democracy.

The plight of Indonesia is a similar story through which Richards and Swanger give other important insights about the basic rules of the capitalist system. When Indonesia achieved independence from Dutch colonial rule in 1949, its people had social democratic aspirations. When in the 1960's their aspirations turned into a communist government attempting to nationalize foreign companies, these foreign companies exercised their freedom and property rights and left the country. The economy then collapsed, chaos ensued, and a military dictatorship rose to power that systematically eliminated leftist organizers and union leaders. The dictatorship enacted government

policy that favored profit over social welfare; investment then returned and the economy began to thrive. At this point in Indonesia's history, without peering further into their tumultuous future, it may seem logical to conclude that violent state repression against leftist social movements, while not pretty, was worth the struggle to "fix" Indonesia's economy.

Two responses can be drawn from Richards and Swanger's work to refute this conclusion. First, while Indonesia's economy did grow during the dictatorship, the result was not the end of poverty in Indonesia. Investing in ending poverty is not usually profitable, and investors do not usually choose to do it. In this way, the argument that free market capitalism is good because it leads to economic growth ignores two important points with regards to ending poverty: the widening of income gaps between the rich and poor that accompanies capitalist economic "development," and the impoverished masses exploited by and/or excluded from this "development." Second, Indonesia's economy, in spite of its military government's hard work to create a climate favorable to investment, collapsed multiple times as a result of investors collectively moving their investments elsewhere. The basic rules of capitalism allow investors to come and go as they please. Regardless of how favorable to investment a government makes their country, investors, for whatever reason, may still choose to leave or never come at all.

Hopefully, these brief overviews of Richards and Swanger's case studies of Sweden and Indonesia have brought more clarity as to how the basic cultural rules of capitalism can be understood as both a cause of the failures of social democracies, as well as many government's decisions to implement neoliberal economic policy. To further

demonstrate this concept, as well as to explain why focusing on rules is more useful than focusing on “shock” with regards to building movements for transformative change, I will now compare your analysis of what happened in South Africa during Mandela’s presidency with Richards and Swanger’s.

Let us begin this comparison of perspectives on what happened in post-apartheid South Africa by focusing on the points where you both agree: Nelson Mandela, upon his release from a twenty-seven year prison term, was still firmly in favor of the people-centered economic principles of the Freedom Charter. These principles included collective sharing of resources through nationalization of major industries and land redistribution, freedom to unionize, minimum wage standards, employment for all, and the right to health care and housing. You both make it fairly clear that Mandela had every intention to make radical changes to the South African economy that for many years had short-changed and excluded the majority of black South Africans. History has since shown that these radical changes were never made and that the majority of black South Africans are still being short-changed and excluded by the South African economy. Explaining exactly why that happened is where your two perspectives diverge.

According to your analysis in the tenth chapter of *The Shock Doctrine*, while Mandela’s party, the African National Congress (ANC), was in important and heated discussions about the political transition to a post-apartheid South Africa, the country’s economic future was being decided in back room deals. You claim that through these covert economic negotiations, a constricting net began to fall upon Mandela and the ANC, limiting their options to make radical economic changes. You note that last minute

changes were made to the constitution protecting private property and preventing land distribution; industry subsidies that would have created millions of jobs had to be removed because the ANC had already signed on to free trade agreements that prohibited them; money could not be printed because the central bank was still a private institution run by its apartheid owners; and funds originally destined to build houses for the poor ended up being used to pay off South Africa's massive international debt that had been incurred by the previous apartheid government. Your explanation of what happened in South Africa is that as a result of the shock of political transition, not enough people were paying attention to what really mattered: planning the future of the economy. You thus infer that had the ANC been more aware of the decisions being made about their economy at the time, they could have escaped the constricting net that began to fall on them and gone ahead with their radical plans to change the South African economy.

By now it should come as no surprise that Richards and Swanger's analysis of what happened with post-apartheid South African economy starts with the basic cultural rules of capitalism. Their analysis is rather simple and strikingly similar to what they argue about Sweden and Indonesia. Post-apartheid South Africa was a poor country with high unemployment, few resources, and great debt. Ending unemployment requires creating jobs, and creating jobs requires investment. According to the current economic rules, investment occurs in a country when investors choose it to occur, and frequently only after that country has demonstrated that it has created an environment where profits can be made. Creating an environment where profits can be made usually means discarding values based in social welfare, like those of the Freedom Charter, and

adopting neoliberalism. Based on this analysis, Richards and Swanger would probably agree with you that a net constricting economic policy options covered South Africa during this time. They would most certainly disagree, however, with your analysis that this net fell upon South Africa while the ANC was focused on negotiating the countries political transition. They would say that this net was there before the ANC came into office. Furthermore, they would say that this net is the basic cultural rules of capitalism.

By ignoring the basic cultural rules of capitalism and concluding that the ANC could have acted differently in its economic negotiations, you are stating implicitly- as you stated explicitly in your introduction- that governments still have the ability to build social welfare states within a capitalist economic framework. This sentiment is seen throughout your book from South America's Southern Cone to England and China, to South Africa and Poland and Russia. You seem to be saying that if governments had only implemented more socialist policies or not had neoliberalism violently imposed upon them, they could have met the needs of all of their people. You ignore the cultural rules of the capitalist system that leave governments in need of resources with few choices but to adopt neoliberalism in order to attract investment. You ignore the fact that most socialist economies have struggled and declined in the face of the basic rules of capitalism, and that those who violently imposed neoliberalism on these countries usually did so with the intention of stopping that decline. In sum, you ignore the current cultural fact that given the basic rules of capitalism, neoliberalism is a logical choice for governments in need of foreign investment, and that the violent repression of leftist organizers is a logical choice for governments who want to retain or attract this

investment.

As an activist and community organizer, my major problem with your failure to ground your analysis of neoliberalism in an understanding of the basic rules of capitalism is that you are unable to provide your reader with a clear framework to guide work for transformative change. According to your analysis, governments and/or concerned citizens would be able to stand up to investors and neoliberal economists if it were not for the physical or economic “shocks” that leave them stunned and disoriented. From this analysis it would follow that concerned people need to become more “shock resistant” so they can elect or create new governments with better, less neoliberal economic policies that are also more resistant to “shock”.

As a result of this line of thinking, the conclusion of your book places high hopes on the growing number of left-leaning presidents now in Latin America. Chávez in Venezuela, Lula in Brazil, Evo in Bolivia, Ortega’s return in Nicaragua, and (former president) Kirchner in Argentina, are evidence to you that “shock” is wearing off and the people of Latin America are ready to stand up again to the neoliberal policy that was so brutally imposed upon them in the last four decades. I, too, am pleased that the left is gaining a strong foothold in the Americas, but I am doubtful these presidents hold the golden key to unlocking the door of economic change. The current economic independence felt by many of these left-leaning governments is in many ways a result of the large number of natural resources that they now control. The large revenues generated by oil in Venezuela or natural gas in Bolivia provide these countries with a temporary buffer against the whims of investors, but if oil and natural gas prices go

down, or when these resources run out, Venezuela and Bolivia will once again have to face the consequences of the basic cultural rules of capitalism. That is, unless they can use this buffer period to build alternative economies that would release them from the constraints of those rules.

This brings me to a second part of your conclusion. It is a part that doesn't exactly line up with the rest of your book, but a part I find much more hopeful than looking to presidents and governments to make social and economic change. This is the part where you talk about people organizing to meet their own needs, from the landless people's movement in Brazil and the number of growing co-ops in Argentina, to the indigenous fishers who rebuilt their own communities after the tsunami in 2005 and the Hezbollah-organized and locally led construction of Beirut after the 2006 Israeli missile assault on Lebanon. I mentioned above that these examples of alternatives to neoliberal economic development do not exactly line up with the rest of your book. I say this because throughout most of your book you seem to be arguing that it was the presence of some form of "shock"- whether economic turmoil or violence or a period of political transition- that led governments to impose neoliberalism. You do not seem to be arguing that governments imposed neoliberalism in the absence of an alternative economic system that could meet people's needs based on other basic cultural rules. It therefore comes as a surprise, albeit a pleasant one, when you also conclude that that above people-led movements, that are in fact meeting their needs using different rules, are also examples of ways to resist and transform neoliberalism.

The problem is, though, that when talking about alternatives to neoliberalism,

listing examples of community organized systems of meeting needs in the same breath as the return of leftist governments in Latin America makes it sound like both examples are equally effective paths towards social transformation. The problem is- that after an introduction and twenty-one chapters that more or less explain the rise of neoliberalism as a mistaken choice made by governments after periods of “shock”- your claim that leftist governments can resist and transform neoliberalism holds a bit more weight in your conclusion than the idea that communities can work to overcome neoliberalism as well. The problem is- that particularly in North America, where much energy of concerned people is already spent on criticizing conservative politics and working to elect more progressive politicians- people will think that if they only did more of what they are doing now, we would eventually have more people-centered economic policies.

Finally, the problem is- when you describe these community- led movements that have built economies independent of the current basic cultural rules of capitalism without having previously talked about these rules in your book- you do not make clear what makes these community-led movements an effective alternative to neoliberalism. When you do not make clear what makes these movements effective alternatives to neoliberal capitalism, you do not help concerned people build similar movements. Working with concerned people to organize movements that build alternative economies is, in my opinion, the most important thing those who desire social change need to be doing today. The conclusion of this letter will, for this reason, focus on some concrete strategies for doing just that.

As Richards and Swanger lay out their numerous case studies of countries that

have thus far failed to build long-lasting social democracies, they also put forward numerous ideas for constructing better, sustainable models. Based upon these ideas, I have created a series of interconnected tools that can be used to help us organize alternative economies. These tools are symbols, metaphors, and simple reminders that help guide our collective work for transformative change.

The first tool I have created from Richard and Swanger's analysis is a pair of glasses that allow us to see more clearly what we need to change in order to improve our world. These glasses bring into focus what most economists, social scientists, and even many well-intentioned progressives ignore or take for granted: the basic cultural rules that organize capitalism. Without these glasses, these rules rarely come in to the view of those thinking academically about capitalist economics. Richards and Swanger support this idea by making the point that you can learn more about these rules by pretending to be homeless on a park bench for an afternoon than spending a semester in a university economics seminar. According to the basic rules of our capitalist culture, the people who pass you by as you sit on the bench have no obligation to help you. They may or may not stop to give you money or food. Somebody might hire you to do a job at a decent wage, but since nobody has a duty to do so, there is a good chance they will not. Having no money to pay rent, you will continue to sit on the bench until someone offers you an alternative. No one has to offer you an alternative, however, so it is very likely you will continue to sit on the bench.

I have already spent a great deal of time talking about the basic cultural rules of capitalism, and it should be relatively clear how the plight of the homeless person is

mirrored on the larger scale of international investment relations. In today's economic culture, poor countries, poor communities, and poor people on park benches frequently find themselves without resources and no one obligated to help them do anything about it. The tool of the glasses is important because it allows us to clearly see what we need to be working to change: the basic rules of this economic culture. As we now move on from this first tool, it is important to note that these glasses also give us the focus we need to work with the other tools that now follow.

The second tool is a holster without a gun. In this metaphor, the holster represents activists and movements working to change neoliberal capitalist economic culture. Here, both the holster and activists/social movements can be understood as carrying containers; where the holster typically carries a gun, activists/social movements carry an approach for effecting change. The gun thus represents one common, but often ineffective, approach to social change work carried by activists and movements: focusing on taking control of state power and/or the economic means of production whether by force or even through the ballot box.

Allow me to reiterate why carrying such an approach is ineffective. As previously noted, governments in need of resources, even those with the most progressive intentions, can do very little to build people-friendly economies in the face of investors backed by the cultural rules to make free decisions about where to place their investments. Similarly, a labor-friendly owner of the means of production will not be able to pay higher wages to her workers, and sell her products at competitive market prices, and accumulate a profit, and have enough money left over to start the production

cycle over again. As long as the rules of the economy are organized around competition, profit, and reinvestment, the ability to pay workers high wages will often be the first casualty of the system- regardless of who owns the means of production. In each of these examples, the outcome remained the same both before and after progressive people took power. The tool of the empty gun holster thus shows us the importance of dropping our guns, that is, our focus on taking state and economic power when working to change capitalist economies.

While carrying an approach to social justice work that focuses on taking power is not usually effective, carrying one that focuses on changing the basic rules of capitalism is. Again, the above case studies of Sweden, Indonesia, and South Africa have shown that even when there are governments in power that strive to meet the needs of all of their people, the basic rules of capitalism that demand economic growth and privilege the freedom and property rights of investors, frequently prevent them from accomplishing this goal. The problem is not that the “right” people aren’t in power, but that the options of those in power are limited by the rules of capitalist culture. For this reason, we need drop our focus of working to take power, and begin to carry a new approach that focuses on changing rules. This change in what we carry can be symbolized by placing our first tool, the glasses that help us see the basic cultural rules of capitalism, into the holster that was previously occupied by the gun. Dropping the gun and carrying the glasses in our holsters is a visual representation of this shift in how activists and movements should approach transformative social change- moving the focus of our work away from taking state and economic power, and towards changing the basic cultural rules of capitalism.

For Richards and Swanger, changing rules involves two parts: having a clear idea of what new rules should guide our cultural economic systems, and having a method for how to make those new rules a reality. Continuing with the theme of organizing to build alternative economies, I will describe the “what” and the “how” of changing rules as two more tools useful for our jobs as cultural construction workers. Richards and Swanger suggest that the rules of our new economy should be based on a culture of solidarity. The tool of cooperative games is helpful towards understanding what is meant by “a culture of solidarity.” Cooperative games are games organized around the theme of working together towards a common goal. They are different than competitive games because the object is not to win by defeating another team, but to win by achieving something together. A brief, personal reflection about cooperative games will help describe this tool further.

I am currently an organizer in the Dominican Republic with a grassroots organizing school based out of Santo Domingo called Justicia Global. During our leadership formation process of new organizers, we lead groups through a sequence of games that challenges them to reflect upon the difference between cooperation and competition, and how these games represent different models for organizing society. We will usually begin by playing musical chairs. This is the classic children’s party game where the group will walk in a circle around a row of chairs as music is being played. There is always one less chair than the number of people walking, so when the music stops, and after the mad dash and the pushing and shoving, one person is always left without a place to sit. The game continues until there is just one person, the “winner,”

sitting in one chair, while the rest of the group, the “losers,” watch chair-less from the sideline. Not surprisingly, this game often results in tears at birthday parties for younger children.

After we play the original version of musical chairs in our leadership formation workshops, we teach the group a different, cooperative, way to play the same game. In this second version the group walks around the row of chairs to music as before, but instead of working against each other to leave one person out each round, they work together to get the whole group on the chairs without anyone touching the floor. The game continues like normal musical chairs and each round another chair is taken away. The result is that the group must work harder and more collectively each round to get everyone on the chairs without touching the ground. Quite the opposite of the original version, cooperative musical chairs usually ends up with a pile of tangled people, laughing hysterically on the floor.

Cooperative games, understood in relation to competitive ones, are a useful tool for understanding what sort of rules might help us build an alternative culture to capitalism that would meet everyone's needs in ecologically sustainable ways. The rules of the current economic culture that emphasize freedom and property are echoed in competitive musical chairs. In our current economic culture, investors are free to do what they want with their investment. Exclusive control of property is encouraged while sharing is not. Likewise in competitive musical chairs, all participants are responsible only for themselves and have the right to claim sole ownership of a chair if they can get there before someone else or push hard enough while the parents are not looking.

Cooperative musical chairs, however, provides a model for what can happen when the rules of the game are shifted towards principles of solidarity, togetherness, and sharing of resources. Keep in mind (and keep those glasses handy in their holsters) that the only basic difference between competitive musical chairs and cooperative musical chairs is the rules. The number of people starting the game is the same. The number of chairs in each round is the same. The difference is that the rules of the game were changed to serve a different purpose.

Similarly, changing the basic cultural rules of capitalism so that they are organized around cooperation and sharing of resources means changing the very purpose of economics. Capitalist economics will never meet everyone's needs because the purpose of capitalist economics is not meeting needs, but the accumulation of capital. Investors invest to make more money than they started with. They do not invest to end poverty, or pay workers a living wage, or provide tax revenue to local governments to pay for schools and health care. Fortunately, investing in order to accumulate more money is but a cultural practice, made possible by cultural rules. Cultural practices can be changed. New cultural rules can and should be constructed. If it were the cultural norm to create meaningful jobs with high wages for all, then everyone would have meaningful, high paying jobs. If it were the cultural norm to fund quality education and health care for everyone, everywhere, then health care would exist universally. Moreover, if it were the cultural norm for people to share their resources and work collectively to end poverty, then, working together, poverty would be ended. It is both that simple and that complicated.

So, how *do* we change the basic cultural rules of capitalism? What is the magical tool that will help transform our current economic system that, as you described so well in *The Shock Doctrine*, relies on all sorts of nasty practices to keep profits flowing? The tool is us. We are the ones we've been waiting for. It is up to us to build cultures of solidarity, to think about our property in new and creative ways, to share the resources we can share with others, to organize communities that meet their own needs independent of the current cultural rules of capitalism. It is not enough to write letters to our governments or work to elect more progressive presidents. It is not enough to take the streets in protest of economic summits where a small group of elites makes decisions about the future of the global economy. It is not even enough to bring the current economic system to a halt through coordinated strikes. We can, and should also organize alternative economies together, nourish the alternative economies that already exist, and practice, teach, and promote the alternative cultural rules needed to build these economies within our families and communities. We can, and should also organize alternative economies, not just to meet everyone's needs in ecologically sustainable ways, but because there is great joy in working collectively to improve our own lives.

Sincerely,

Mark Porter Webb

Klein, Naomi. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. 1st ed. New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007.