

Article

A Strategy for Resisting the Vested Interests Driving the Collapse of the Biosphere and Civilisation

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ABSTRACT: The biosphere and civilisation are facing existential and other major threats: climate change, biodiversity loss, nuclear war, social inequality/injustice, loss of human rights, and autocracy. These threats are driven by politically powerful vested interests supported by an economic system based on the exploitation of the environment and most people for the benefit of a wealthy minority. This article proposes a strategy to resist and weaken state capture, *i.e.*, the influence of the vested interests driving the principal threats, while simultaneously facilitating the transition to a sustainable society. Despite the achievements of diverse community-based non-government organisations (CNGOs) campaigning on specific issues, scientists are now warning of the potential collapse of civilisation. As the threats are linked together in several ways, I propose a strategy to address them together to yield multiple benefits, supplementing campaigns on individual issues. A broad social movement—comprising an alliance between CNGOs devoted to the environment, social justice, human rights, and peace—could exert sufficient political power to expose and defeat the methods of state capture. Simultaneously, the movement could gain widespread community support by campaigning for a well-being economy, including universal basic services and a job guarantee, thus facilitating the transition to an ecologically sustainable, more socially just, and more peaceful civilisation.

Keywords: Collapse of civilisation; Vested interests; State capture; Sustainability; Neoliberalism; Political power; Social movement; Resistance



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1. Introduction

Civilisation and the biosphere are facing major threats to the environment, social justice, human and worker rights, democracy, and peace. Based primarily on the threats of nuclear war and human-induced climate change, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* recently advanced the Doomsday Clock to 89 s to midnight, the closest it has ever been to catastrophe [1]. There is a growing concern among scholars that modern civilisation could be collapsing slowly under these and other threats [2–9]. This article proposes a broad strategy for avoiding collapse and transitioning away from this looming black hole towards an ecologically sustainable, socially just, more peaceful civilisation.

Within this broad scenario, the purpose of this article is to develop a community-based strategy for resisting and weakening the human-caused driving forces of the threats to people and the planet. At one conceptual level, the well-known *IPAT* identity expresses the driving forces of environmental impact as population multiplied by affluence (consumption per person) multiplied by technological impact. At that level, which does not attribute responsibility to human activities, the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 [10] would be a suitable framework if they had included limits to global population and consumption [11,12]. But, to develop solutions to the threats that go beyond simple technological change, we must identify the human responsibility for the threats, in particular, the methods used by politically powerful individuals and organisations to influence and capture nation-states.

Section 2 discusses the principal threats and the links between them and proposes that they can be resisted together as one common, principal, human-induced driving force. Section 3 identifies this driving force of threats as state capture by politically powerful vested interests supported by the dominant economic system. Section 4 points out that the methods used in state capture are potentially vulnerable to a well-organised campaign by a transdisciplinary social

movement comprising an alliance of diverse community-based non-government organisations (CNGOs) that combines research and social change activism to target the methods of state capture. This is the principal contribution of the paper. The proposed strategy combines this campaign with one for a well-being economy, including universal basic services and a job guarantee. Section 5 gives the conclusions.

2. The Principal Threats Are Linked Together

Global climate change, an existential threat, continues rapidly. The World Meteorological Organization has reported that 2024 was the warmest year on record, with a global average heating of 1.55 (± 0.13) °C above the 1850–1900 average [13]. Climate change is one of the six out of nine planetary boundaries identified by Earth system science that have been exceeded [14–16]. The others—including the loss of biodiversity, forests, soils, and freshwater—are existential threats on longer timescales.

The threats to social justice include the growing inequality in wealth, income, and political power between rich and poor, both within and between countries [17]. The richest 10% of the global population takes 52% of global income [18]. Indeed, during the period 2020 to 2023, the richest 1% captured almost two-thirds of all new global wealth [19]. Although most colonial rule by major powers has ended, settler colonialism—where indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities are displaced from their ancestral lands—still persists in several regions, notably the Amazon Basin [20] and Palestine [21]. Neocolonialism—where powerful nations maintain control over weaker ones through economic, political, and cultural means—is widespread [22]. Hickel et al. estimate that, over the period 1990–2015, the global North has drained from the global South \$242 trillion (constant 2010 USD) in terms of embodied raw materials, land, and labour [23]. In particular, large shares of environmental pressures and impacts resulting from consumption by the European Union are outsourced to countries and regions outside the EU, while more than 85% of the economic benefits stay within the member countries [24]. As Constanza et al. have written in this journal: “To solve the planetary crisis, social justice (within and between countries) needs to be at the heart of green policies, not just an add-on” [25].

Human rights and democratic decision-making are threatened in many nominally democratic countries, including Argentina, Bangladesh, Hungary, India, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Pakistan, Russia, USA and Venezuela [26–28]. Even in countries that rigorously maintain fair and free elections, such as Australia, punitive laws, including possible imprisonment, have been legislated for nonviolent protests [29].

Nuclear war could arise from confrontations between NATO-backed Ukraine and Russia, US-backed Israel and the Palestinians and Iran, as well as the tensions between the US and China [30,31].

Attempting to solve all these threats separately is like “trying to kill 10 fleas simultaneously with 10 fingers”, a saying attributed to Zhou Enlai. However, threats to the environment, social justice, human rights, public health, democratic decision-making, and peace are linked as follows:

- A common driving force of all the threats is the dominant economic system, which is arguably based on the exploitation of the planet and its people (see Section 3).
- The global economy is undemocratic, ruled by rich individuals, large corporations, and rich countries [17–19,32–34].
- Rich individuals and rich countries have the greatest environmental impacts. Specifically, the richest 10% of humanity accounts for approximately half of the global CO₂ emissions [35–37].
- Environmental impacts are worse for the poor [38] (p. 12, section B2.4).
- Public health impacts are worse for the poor, as witnessed by the inequality in access to vaccines during the Covid pandemic [39].
- The rights of individuals and CNGOs to protest are being eroded in many countries [26,40].
- Climate change has direct and indirect impacts on human health [41].
- War, and military spending in the absence of war, result in substantial greenhouse gas emissions and other widespread environmental damage [42], as well as death and injury to many people. The United States Department of Defense—comprising military forces and government agencies—is the largest single energy consumer in the US and the world’s largest institutional greenhouse gas emitter [43].
- Funding for war entails less funding for human and planetary well-being.
- The decision to go to war is rarely democratic; in some ‘democratic’ countries, it can be made by the political leader alone [44].

Because the major threats are closely linked together, this paper explores the possibility of resisting them together by combatting nonviolently their common driving forces. Instead of defeating them “with 10 fingers”, we could use a single hand. While separate campaigns on individual issues are necessary, they have not been sufficient to halt the

destruction of the environment and social threats. Addressing social justice, human and worker rights, public health, and peace simultaneously with environmental protection is also a practical way of answering the question asked by many people when faced with the major socioeconomic changes required for mitigating climate change, biodiversity loss, and other environmental impacts, “what’s in it for me?”. My answer is, “better living conditions for all, as well as restoration of our life support system”. This answer is expanded in Section 4.3, but first, we examine a major driving force of the threats, which is also a major barrier to change.

3. State Capture: A Driving Force of the Threats

3.1. State Capture

Scholars, writers, and CNGOs have proposed separate practical programs, strategies and policies for protecting the environment, improving social justice, human rights and democratic decision-making, and reducing the prevalence and severity of war. But governments and international organisations have failed to act effectively. Why is this so?

“We must interrogate what keeps us from acting—including, most essentially, the existing power structures across global political and economic systems that impede the development of capacity, will, or courage needed to enact significant change” [45].

The main purpose of this paper is to discuss how to come to grips with these power structures. Many studies identify the principal, immediate, driving force of the major threats as the capture of nation-states and international organisations by politically powerful vested interests, such as those listed in Table 1 [32–34,46–53]. This process is known as ‘state capture’. It can be defined as the exercise of power by private actors to shape government policies and/or implementation in service of their narrow interests.

Table 1. Threats to civilisation and their human drivers.

Threat	Principal Vested Interests Driving Threats
<i>Environmental</i>	
Climate change	Fossil fuel mining, fossil-fuelled transportation, aluminium, steel, property, forestry, agriculture & nuclear * industries; some urban & transport planners; rich individuals; economic system
Biosphere integrity	As for climate change drivers (above)
Land system change	As for ‘Biosphere integrity’
Novel entities	Chemical, plastic & artificial intelligence industries; economic system
Biogeochemical flows	Agriculture industry; economic system
Freshwater change	Agriculture industry; economic system
<i>Social injustice & oppression</i>	
Social inequality & injustice within & between countries	Economic system; financial services industry; rich individuals; governments of the global North
Limited human rights	Autocratic governments; economic system
Limited worker rights	Economic system; employers, especially big business
<i>Loss of democracy & resulting repression</i>	Autocratic governments and their supporters; economic system; big business
<i>War</i>	
All war	Powerful & authoritarian nation-states seek to increase or maintain their power by grabbing land, other natural resources and markets; armaments industry; military system; economic system.
Nuclear war	As for ‘All war’ plus nuclear energy industry *

Source: summarised from references on state capture cited in the main text. * The nuclear energy industry and its supporters campaign to limit renewable energy to a small fraction of electricity generation and to generate most electricity by a technology that is much more expensive, dangerous (proliferation, accidents, terrorism & wastes) and much slower to build than wind and solar [54–57]. In particular, nuclear energy is one path to nuclear weapons [58–60].

The references cited above identify the following methods used by these actors to influence and even control the state: control over financial and physical resources; threat of violence; political donations; election expenditure; propaganda by so-called ‘think tanks’; concentrated media ownership; revolving door jobs between politicians and vested interests; covert meetings between lobbyists and politicians/public officials; consultancies to government; and the dominant economic system (for the latter, see Section 3.2).

Thus, although state capture is a form of corruption, it goes far beyond petty corruption, where an individual or business pays a politician or public official to influence a single government decision. It can involve the capture of political parties of government and opposition, the public service including regulatory agencies, government advisory committees, international organisations, mass media and social media, the military and the police. Clearly, state capture is a threat to democratic decision-making. Captors include large corporations, the military-industrial complex, political movements, criminal networks, religious organisations, neoliberalism, several governments of the global North that ‘capture’ nation-states of the global South, and members and proponents of the dominant economic system. Table 1 shows a selection of threats to a sustainable civilisation and the relevant vested interests driving these threats.

The problem of distinguishing between vested interests that are destroying the environment and undermining social justice, human rights and peace, from ‘vested interests’ that are genuinely trying to protect these assets can be imperfectly resolved by applying the following tests: (a) Are these vested interests acting for the general good or for selfish interests of their industry or organisation? (b) Do these interests reduce or enhance democratic decision-making? These tests are imperfect because the selfish, destructive type of vested interest often practices misinformation and ‘astroturfing’, *i.e.*, disguising an orchestrated campaign as a spontaneous upwelling of public opinion. Nevertheless, astroturfing and misinformation can be exposed by scholars working in the public interest and an independent media. The democracy test is imperfect because democracy is imperfect.

One objection to focusing on state capture as a major driving force of destruction is to blame the human victims, to argue that political-economic power does not exist without consumers and voters who somehow accept it. This ignores the fact that most people are embedded in a system designed by selfish vested interests that limits their knowledge of socio-political-economic forces and constrains their ability to act. For example, environmentally concerned tenants living in an uninsulated building in a neoliberal economy that has left energy efficiency standards to “the market” (*i.e.*, the property industry) must use a lot of heating energy in winter despite their desire to minimize their greenhouse gas emissions. People educated in a system that extols democracy at the superficial level of voting once every four years may be unaware that governments of both major political parties have greatly increased the power of the executive over Parliament and the judiciary, undermining the fundamental democratic principle of separation of powers. Thus, the legal rights of the vast majority of the people are undermined.

3.2. Role of the Economic System

The dominant economic system, capitalism, plays direct and indirect roles as a driver of almost all these threats. Capitalism has captured many nation-states and international organisations, where it is embedded in most political parties, the public service, the mainstream mass media and education [47,61–64]. As well as being a vested interest and captor, capitalism provides the conceptual framework that is used as a tool of state capture by many other vested interests. Nowadays, the dominant theoretical framework of capitalism is neoclassical economics (NCE), defined in the box.

Most governments’ policies follow the prescriptions of neoliberalism (defined below). Neoliberalism’s ideology includes the following claims that have very damaging impacts on the environment, social justice, human health, democracy and peace—a small sample of refutations is cited:

1. Major political and social decisions should be left to the market; governments should be small. Refuted by [65–68].
 2. Wealth generally trickles down from the rich to the poor. Hence the rich should be subsidised. Refuted by [69] and references therein.
 3. Endless growth on a finite planet is feasible and desirable. (This is one of the basic assumptions of capitalism.) Refuted by elementary logic, Earth system science [15] and many authors, including [11].
 4. Governments with monetary sovereignty must balance their budgets. Refuted by [70,71].
 5. So-called ‘free trade’ achieves the best outcomes for everyone. Refuted as generally true in Section 3.3.
- In addition, there are many general critiques of neoliberalism: *e.g.*, [72–80].

Definition 1. *Capitalism* is often defined as an economic system in which the means of production and distribution are privately or corporately owned and development occurs through the accumulation and reinvestment of profits gained in a ‘free’ market.

Definition 2. *Neoclassical economics* (NCE) is a broad theoretical structure that focuses on market supply and demand as the driving ‘forces’ behind the production, pricing, and consumption of goods and services. It assumes that people have ‘rational’ preferences, that they compete to maximize a subjective concept called ‘utility’, and that decisions are made at the margin (*i.e.*, valuing an addition of something and ignoring sunk costs). It ignores the roles of social

interactions, culture and institutions in the economy and plays down the role of money, private debt and profits. It treats the environment as an infinite resource and an infinite reservoir for waste. An alternative, tighter definition is: NCE is an economic system based on the unproven assumptions of methodological individualism, methodological equilibration and methodological instrumentalism [81].

Definition 3. Neoliberalism is an economic practice for leaving most major socioeconomic decisions to the market and hence for free trade, low taxes, low regulation and low government spending, except on defence. It is alleged that neoliberalism is based mainly on NCE theory, but this basis has been challenged by many, including eminent economists (see main text), who consider it to be an ideology.

As capitalism is deeply embedded in most human societies, the strategy proposed in Section 4 for transitioning to a sustainable civilisation does not assume the collapse of capitalism. Instead, it focuses on changes that could be made in the short term to combat neoliberalism, as in [82], and the flawed NCE theory that is often cited in attempts to justify neoliberalism. Major critiques of NCE have been published by economists, both orthodox and heterodox, e.g., [68,83–87], and a few scientists [88,89]). The overthrow of NCE may reduce the influence of capitalism and, in particular, the role of markets in governments' socioeconomic decisions.

3.3. Free Trade as State Capture

The concept of free trade or globalization (or, more precisely, deregulated international commerce) and the institutions that promote it—the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)—can also be considered to be a form of state capture by large corporations and the governments that support them. Although free trade is allegedly justified by NCE theory, critics see free traders as seeking to “maximize profits and production without regard for considerations that represent hidden social and environmental costs” [90]. Specific criticisms of free trade institutions include [23,90,91]:

- Free trade benefits the global North more than the South.
- In particular, local firms in the South are not permitted to favour local contractors and their emerging industries.
- The needs of the South to diversify their economies are ignored or undermined.
- Free trade ignores or undermines cultural diversity.
- The North retains high tariffs on certain industries, especially agriculture, thus disadvantaging industries of the South.
- The WTO, IMF and WB are undemocratic, giving the most benefit to the North.
- Environmental protection and social justice receive low priority; indeed, environmental and social justice legislation and policies by nominally sovereign governments can be overruled in the interests of large corporations.

3.4. Neocolonialism as State Capture

Free trade is closely related to neocolonialism. Neocolonialism by the global North maintains exploitation and poverty in the global South by *inter alia* placing the latter into a situation of sovereign debt that forces them to export food and natural resources, resulting in loss of self-sufficiency. Furthermore, the austerity policies imposed by the government and private lenders to ensure repayment of debt result in decreased funding for health, education, social security and basic infrastructure [92–94]. Apart from the unequal trade relationships mentioned above, other methods of neocolonialism by the North are covert subversion, coups, invasions and support for autocratic governments in the South [93,95–98]). Under these pressures, the development of many South countries has been slow or non-existent.

3.5. Neoliberalism's Assault on Climate Mitigation

Fremstad and Paul [82] argue that neoliberalism is partly responsible for undermining climate action in the USA. In particular, economic consultants, hired by the fossil fuel industry, have played an important role in directly undermining climate action policies [99]. Leading academic economists, e.g., William Nordhaus [100,101] and Richard Tol [102], have claimed, based on unrealistic assumptions, that the economic impacts of substantial global heating would be trivial. These claims have been refuted by climate scientists, e.g., Tim Lenton, and a heterodox economist, Steve Keen [6,103,104]). Clearly, neoliberalism and its theoretical supporter, NCE can be considered pernicious methods of state capture.

4. A Sustainability Strategy Based on Two Campaigns

4.1. Building a Mass Movement

Former US President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, is supposed to have told a delegation, “OK, you’ve convinced me. Now get out there and make me do it!”. In other words, a soundly reasoned argument is not sufficient to get action from government decision-makers. In campaigning for policies, CNGOs must be able to exert sufficient pressure on politicians to influence the votes they receive potentially and on businesses to influence their sales and sources of finance potentially. With many governments captured to a large degree by vested interests, social movements are necessary to apply much greater pressure than single-issue CNGOs to achieve an ecological civilisation. When social movements campaign openly in the public interest, they support and broaden the concept of democracy.

The proposed strategy consists of building a social movement to conduct two simultaneous campaigns. One campaign, called Resistance here, involves exposing and weakening the methods of state capture used by vested interests (see Table 2 and Section 4.2). The other campaign, called Visionary here, involves promoting achievable visions of societies with substantial improvements in environmental protection, social justice, human and worker rights, public health and peace (see Section 4.3). Together, Resistance and Visionary amount to a strategy to protect the planet and its people.

The vested interests are small in the number of individuals but huge in terms of wealth and, hence, political power. Although social change movements are mostly small in wealth, they are potentially huge in numbers. When they have recruited large numbers of members and organised them, they can become politically powerful. In the words of community activist organiser Saul Alinsky [105] (p. 113), “Change comes from power, and power comes from organisation. In order to act, people must get together.” The larger a well-organised movement, the stronger its potential political influence.

Mass movements have nonviolently achieved votes for women, civil rights for black Americans, the decolonisation of India, ending government support for slavery, and the removal of autocrats in the Philippines, Tunisia, Serbia and elsewhere [106,107]). Other inspiring achievements by social movements, created by individuals and small CNGOs, have been recognised by the Right Livelihood Award [108].

Table 2. Principal methods of state capture.

Method of State Capture	Indicative Community-Based Campaigns *
<i>General</i>	
Political donations	Campaign for legislated limits and for publication of donations in real time; government-funded elections as an option.
Revolving door jobs	Campaign for time limits (3 years minimum) on retiring politicians & public officials accepting appointments in industries for which they were responsible; require competitive appointments of political advisers & public officials with constraints on conflict of interest.
Concentrated media ownership	Campaign for legislated limits in national, state, and city media.
‘Think tanks’ funded by big business	Expose by independent media; create public-interest think tanks.
Consultancies to, and procurement by, government	Campaign for mandated tenders for consulting jobs and procurement, with regulations against conflict of interest.
Covert meetings between lobbyists and politicians/public officials	Campaign for the publication of work diaries of politicians and senior public officials in real-time.
Propaganda	Exposés. Campaign for legislation against misinformation in election campaigns.
Powers of corporations	Demand public review with the aim of reducing powers, e.g., access of mining corporations to lands of First Nations peoples.
<i>Neocolonialism</i>	
World Bank & International Monetary Fund, national & private lenders foster sovereign debt of global South, resulting in unequal trade; loss of self-sufficiency in food & resources; loss of funding for health & education; loss of land to foreign investment; structural adjustment & austerity. World Trade Organisation can undermine national sovereignty.	Campaign for Global South countries to diversify their economies and set up their own investment bank and monetary fund. Demand restructuring and, for very poor nations, cancelling sovereign debt or converting it into development grants; reduction of the power of World Trade Organisation to take legal action against countries. Publicise the impact of so-called ‘trade agreements’ on the global South; expose secret clauses in trade agreements.
Subversion, coups and invasion by global North	Expose in international media. Form alliances between CNGOs of global South.

	War	Peace activism; social defence [109]. Strengthen anti-nuclear weapons movement [110]. Campaign for national legislation and international agreements on no first use of nuclear weapons; for amendment to Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to place uranium enrichment and reprocessing of spent fuel under international control; and expansion of signatories to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.
Nuclear war in particular		
	Neoliberalism & neoclassical economics	In general, disseminates refutations of economic ideology and myths [68]. Campaign for replacing neoclassical macroeconomics with qualitative frameworks integrating ecological & institutional economics and political economy; taxation of the rich; removal of corporate tax loopholes & subsidies to fossil fuels.
Myth: endless growth on a finite planet is feasible and desirable		Publicise exceeding planetary boundaries and links to consumption. Campaign for replacement of GDP by broader economic and non-economic wellbeing indicators that take account of social equity [111–113]). Develop & publicise models of a steady-state economy in addition to existing ones such as [4,114,115].
Myth: wealth trickles down from the rich to the poor; hence subsidise rich individuals & large corporations		Refute myth by drawing upon empirical studies, e.g., [69]. Campaign for removal of subsidies to the rich and for taxing wealth & high incomes, and introduction of Universal Basic Services and job guarantee funded by government.
Ideology: leave major social & political decisions to markets		Refute ideology from the failure of the ideology during financial crises and pandemic, and theory of second best [65]). Campaign for the creation of government institutions for environmental protection, social justice, human rights & democratic decision-making. Strengthen legislation and enforcement against monopolies.
Myth: a government with monetary sovereignty must avoid budget deficit		Refute myth by publicising that a government with monetary sovereignty need not balance its budget, and many do not, without driving inflation [70,71]). Publicise that Modern Monetary Theory shows funding for the global sustainability transition is potentially available [116,117].

Source: summarised from the references on state capture cited in Section 3. * Only a few of these community-based campaigns can be implemented directly by CNGO alliances without the involvement of government. Hence, there is a need for CNGOs to pressure governments to implement effective policies.

At present, most environmental, social justice, public health and peace groups limit their activism to their specific issues on local and national scales. Much action by CNGOs—e.g., against fossil energy and for renewable energy, including community renewable energy projects; against ‘Big Pharma’ and for alternatives, including generic, low-cost pharmaceuticals—plays an important role in social change through public education and community empowerment. Without these individual campaigns, the planet and its inhabitants would be in a much more dire situation. Nevertheless, campaigning on specific issues and local community projects has limited ability to change the system.

Governments make the main decisions on the following: urban, land-use and transportation planning; environmental protection and pollution control; building standards; consumer protection; public health; public education; social security; taxation; trade; immigration; currency controls; banking regulations; and defence/offence. Hence major socioeconomic and political changes must come from community pressure on governments. To increase their political influence, CNGOs, assisted by scholars of sustainability, could form alliances across a wide range of issues involving threats to people and the planet. Their targets would include the methods of state capture discussed in the next subsection.

4.2. Resistance to State Capture

Table 2 summarises the principal methods of state capture identified by the studies cited in Section 3.1 and a selection of potential community-based campaigns to weaken or destroy them. Some comments on specific entries follow.

In the General category of Table 2, all campaigns except the last two could be implemented by legislation by national governments under pressure from a social movement based on an alliance of CNGOs. Indeed, controls on

several methods of state capture were legislated in the past in several countries, but subsequently have been either weakened or ignored by governments. Campaigns on these issues could be revitalised.

One of the practical problems with controlling political donations and election expenditure is to ensure that such controls are not shaped by major political parties to stop Independents and small parties devoted to environmental and social sustainability from entering the political arena; this is a current issue in Australia [118,119]. Some countries have, or had, laws and regulations against concentrated media ownership and revolving door jobs [120,121]. To expose lobbying by vested interests, work diaries of politicians and public officials can be published in real-time.

So-called ‘think tanks’ that are funded by corporate interests to assist in state capture [122] are being exposed in independent media by academics and activists. In contrast to these think tanks that are pro-big business and anti-environmental sustainability, is a growing number of alternative think tanks committed to serving the people and the planet with research, public education and information, and policy development and implementation. Examples are the International Institute for Sustainable Development, Stockholm Environment Institute, Agora Energiewende, Environment and Society Centre of Chatham House, the Regulatory Assistance Project, Transforma, the coalition South-South Global Thinkers, the Australia Institute, and Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25). They are supported by memberships, donations and active involvement.

The methods of neocolonialism and war are more specialised and so are listed separately in Table 2. Clearly the countries of the global South need to diversify their economies to become self-sufficient in food and energy, to expand South-South trade and partnerships, and to develop South-South finance and investment. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), hosted by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), are assisting cooperation between countries of the global South. The expanding intergovernmental organisation BRICS (initially comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) is also fostering cooperation, although the dominance of China is of concern to some [123]. CNGOs in the North could assist by applying pressure on their governments to end neocolonialism and to fund climate adaptation in the South.

Several CNGOs are being formed with democracy as the unifying theme to campaign against state capture and/or to develop more democratic alternatives. For example, DiEM25 is a pan-European political movement and political party founded in 2016 by a group of Europeans, including Yanis Varoufakis and Srećko Horvat [124]. The Democracy Collaborative [125] is an international “action-oriented think-do tank building community wealth and the democratic economy”. The Australian Democracy Network [52] was founded in 2020 by three national CNGOs, the Human Rights Law Centre, the Australian Conservation Foundation and the Australian Council of Social Service, thus bringing together human rights, environmental protection and social justice through the common theme of democracy.

Another unifying theme is the movement for the replacement of NCE and neoliberalism with transdisciplinary approaches to economics that prioritise ecological sustainability and social justice. Ecological economics is a well-established transdisciplinary field of research [25,112,126,127], whose practitioners include enlightened economists, natural and social scientists, engineers, lawyers, *etc.* The International Society for Ecological Economics (ISEE) [127] was founded in 1989. It has regional societies and a thriving international journal, *Ecological Economics*, which publishes transdisciplinary research as well as disciplinary environmental economics. The Chinese Society for Ecological Economics was formed in 1984; it is not affiliated with ISEE [128]. Despite its attempts to establish a *modus vivendi* with NCE, ecological economics has only been able to create dedicated courses in a handful of universities around the world [89]. Recently, concern about the excessive influence of neoclassical economists on the development of ecological economics has led to the new transdisciplinary field of social-ecological economics, with a stronger focus on environmental protection and social justice [129,130]. Political economy [131] too, which has much to offer in understanding power structures, has had to struggle for places in universities [132]. Among the numerous alternative and heterodox economic CNGOs are l’Association pour la Taxation des Transactions financières et pour l’Action Citoyenne (ATTAC) [133], and the Post Growth Institute [134].

The social movement for ‘freedom’ sometimes brings together social justice and human rights, but it only includes environmental protection when the right to protest is threatened. Campaigns for freedom have sometimes been successful, for example, the movement to end colonialism in several countries of the global South (although neocolonialism still exploits the South) and the movement to end government support for slavery.

Alliances based on the closely-related themes of democracy and human rights may offer the best prospects of the unifying theme of CNGO alliances because they span essentially all the individual campaigns.

4.3. Visionary Policies for a Sustainable Civilisation

Solutions exist to the existential threats to human civilisation. These solutions offer visions of a better world and, in some studies, propose strategies that could achieve it [47,53,117,135–138]. From (social) ecological economics comes the demand that the economic system must prioritise ecological sustainability and social justice over economic efficiency. Emphasis is on the well-being of humans and the planet, where well-being is measured by a wide range of indicators, not necessarily monetary [111,139].

A key specific policy program to promote human well-being is universal basic services—e.g., provision of public health, education, transport, housing, parks, libraries, low-cost childcare and aged care—and a job guarantee for all who wish to work but cannot obtain employment in the market economy [117]. To those who reject these proposals as socialism or a path to poverty, an obvious answer is that the rich countries Norway, the Netherlands and Belgium have already progressed substantially along this path and have Gini coefficients (a measure of inequality in income distribution) of 23, 26 and 26 percent respectively (*i.e.*, low inequality) compared with 41% for the USA [140]. Resistance to the concept of a job guarantee is often based on the neoliberal ideology that markets can provide all employment that is needed, despite the obvious gaps in environmental protection and caring for people. This notion will collapse as neoliberalism continues to fail, for example, as during the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 and the Covid pandemic.

The *IPAT* identity reminds us that environmental impact is proportional to consumption, which can be broken down into the product of consumption per person and population. This offers one of many arguments for making a transition to a steady-state economy (SSE), *i.e.*, one with no growth in the use of energy, materials and land, and no population growth. The evidence that there is no absolute decoupling between environmental impact and gross domestic product (GDP) [141,142] suggests that the SSE would also entail no growth in GDP. Economies would still be dynamic, with environmentally sound and socially beneficial industries growing while polluting and socially useless or destructive industries decline. Universal basic services and a job guarantee would form a vital part of an SSE by increasing human well-being in the absence of economic growth and helping to scale down destructive and unimportant forms of production without negative social consequences [117].

Next, the inevitable question is, how will this socioeconomic transformation be funded? Keynes' study of how the British government could pay for World War II showed that the need was not primarily revenue but rather accounting of the resources (labour, skills, raw materials, technologies) that could be assembled and weighing them against what had to be done [143]. Keynes' insights are one of the inputs to Modern Monetary Theory (MMT) that shows that monetary sovereign governments are not constrained by financial considerations in creating and spending money. However, to avoid inflation, their spending must be consistent with the economic capacity of their country [70,71]. What government money is spent on is relevant—spending to increase the nation's economic capacity can reduce the risk of inflation.

Using the insights of MMT, governments of monetary sovereign countries could be freer to spend on universal basic/public services and a job guarantee, thus reducing social injustice and gaining public support for the necessary transition to an ecologically sustainable, socially just civilisation. However, in the context of decades of propaganda that governments of monetary sovereign countries must balance their budgets, it will be challenging to convince the people that, under neoliberalism and neoclassical economics, they have been subjected to artificial scarcity that can be relieved, at least for the basics. One of the biggest challenges is informing the public of the benefits of the transition when the mass media are largely controlled by vested interests [144].

5. Conclusions

Climate scientists and climate activists in many countries are well-aware of the political power of fossil fuel and related industries. However, public awareness of the extent and depth of state capture by a much wider range of industries and other vested interests that threaten the future of our planet and its people, is at an early stage. To assist in overcoming these driving forces of environmental destruction, social inequality/injustice, erosion of human rights, and war, this paper recommends that CNGOs that campaign on these specific areas of concern form alliances to expose and combat the methods of state capture. These methods—including political donations, election expenditure, revolving door jobs, concentrated media (and social media) ownership, covert lobbying, 'think tanks' and neoliberalism—are common to all the above campaign areas. They have been challenged successfully in the past and are potentially vulnerable to new campaigns by well-organised alliances. In particular, a much stronger campaign is needed against neoliberalism and for a socioeconomic system that places ecological sustainability, social justice, human rights, democracy and peace ahead of economic efficiency.

It is emphasized that the strategy proposed in this paper is intended as a supplement to existing specific campaigns. Specialist CNGO action on particular issues—such as climate change, deforestation, consumer protection, public housing, and nuclear disarmament—may always be needed. However, by weakening state capture and pushing for a fairer society, the proposed overarching strategy would benefit all individual campaigns.

To implement the proposed strategy, all the tactics of nonviolent social change may be needed, e.g., strikes, boycotts, demonstrations, teach-ins, popular articles and videos, non-cooperation with existing institutions, forming alternative institutions, and supporting independent media [105,106].

Time is of the essence, especially with climate change and the risk of nuclear war. Although most past technological and socioeconomic transitions have taken at least several decades to succeed, more rapid transitions are possible, as witnessed by the rapid replacement of fossil-fuelled vehicles with electric vehicles in Norway [145] and the introduction of gay marriage in the Catholic country of Ireland [146]. The transition from Keynesian economics to neoliberalism is another example of a rapid transition—this is seen as a backward step by critics of neoliberalism [62,78].

A major task of the sustainability movement is informing and organising the wide range of CNGOs and the public who have become accustomed to neoliberal ideology, declining human rights, gradual loss of democratic decision-making, and the alleged need for the military-industrial complex. Scholars can assist the sustainability movement by speaking up, conducting public-interest research, and publicising its results widely.

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