## Cap K Ups

### Impacts - Environment

#### Neoliberalism intrinsically causes inequality and environmental degradation

Labonté 6/14/22 [Ronald, professor at the University of Ottawa, “Ensuring Global Health Equity in a Post-pandemic Economy,” International Journal of Health Policy and Management, <https://www.ijhpm.com/article_4272_79514f4469319bf15a737fce1b385a18.pdf> ocp]

From Shareholder to Stakeholder Capitalism: More of the Same? The political economy that characterizes most of today’s world – capitalism – is centuries old, although its most recent form – neoliberalism – only became dominant in the 1980s.2 Neoliberalism’s core elements (trade and financial liberalization, low taxation, minimal state intervention, strong property rights) birthed our now familiar globalized economy, criticized almost at its outset for the inequalities it was fomenting. To WEF founder, Klaus Schwab, the problem Labonté 2 International Journal of Health Policy and Management, 2022, x(x), 1–5 lay less with capitalism itself than with its neoliberal emphasis on maximizing shareholder value, where economic decisions are based on creating the greatest return on investment in the shortest time possible. Schwab’s and the WEF’s promoted solution is ‘stakeholder capitalism,’ in which everyone (and not just shareholders) should have a stake in capitalism’s benefits.5 Few might object to the idea of all gaining (even if not equally) from liberalized market activities, but as one economist argued, the stakeholder model is essentially: “…just a way of bringing the opponents of capitalism to a common venture of extending its lifespan, while ignoring the system’s intrinsic and destabilizing profit motive” (W. Bello, interview communication, October 27, 2021). As one example, in a post-pandemic ‘Great Reset’ wealthy investors are encouraged to invest in businesses whose activities align with the Sustainable Development Goals. This, it is said, would allow them to “make a profit and still save the world.”6 To the extent that such investments go into non-fossil-fuel renewables this win-win hyperbole is a partial truth; but with many of these ethical investment portfolios being non-compliant with global climate change goals7 this may simply be ‘greenwashing’ what remains fundamentally profit-motivated investing. We might also ask: What economic policies and practices enable investors to become disproportionately wealthy in the first place? As a recent study noted, the stakeholder capitalism model will do little to redistribute wealth but will strengthen the private sector’s (not unself-interested and growing) role in global health governance.8 The Return of the State: Can Governments Mitigate Capitalism’s Inherent Inegalitarianism? The state is certainly a critical ‘stakeholder’ in capitalism since its policy choices enable or constrain the actions of economic actors within and across borders. The post-1980 drift to neoliberalism saw the state increasingly defer to market interests in efforts to have their countries remain globally competitive (T. Jackson, interview communication, October 28, 2021).9 Tax rates fell, financial markets deregulated, and inequalities within most countries soared.2 The 2008 global financial crisis saw a rapid volte-face, with wealthier country governments spending trillions of dollars to bail out ‘banks too big to fail.’2 The return of the state was brief, with austerity measures (fiscal contraction) quickly following to cover the public costs of rescuing private banks and investors2 at the cost of eroding health systems that proved ill-prepared for a global pandemic. The pandemic saw the state roar back once again, with many countries responding with wage support, cash transfer, credit schemes, tax cuts and delays, support to importers and exporters, policy rate cuts, support to businesses, and rent subsidies or deferrals.10 This fuelled speculation of a turning point in state/market dynamics, which some attributed to the COVID-19 crisis being different from the one in 2008: “It showed us that the people who matter most in society, the ones who protect our lives and care for us, the ones we applauded from our doorsteps during the pandemic, yet they were…left behind in terms of wages, security, the value of their jobs, their status in society” (T. Jackson, interview communication, October 28, 2017). Certainly, the need for greater public investment in health and social protection is an undisputed outcome of the pandemic, especially given how government responses to COVID-19 increased women’s care burdens, employment losses and experiences of domestic violence.10-12 Others saw massive government interventions in the economy as demonstrating that: “…all that neoliberal talk about government intervention is bad, bad, bad just got thrown out the window…what we’ve seen is the ideological assumption of neoliberalism laid low” (W. Bello, interview communication, October 27, 2021). Early post-pandemic recovery plans for those countries with the requisite fiscal capacities appeared to embody such transformative optimism. The original US multi-trillion Green New Deal promised substantial environmental protection, a rapid shift away from fossil fuels, and expansive new social spending.13 When it was later tabled as a ‘Build Back Better’ plan its ambitions were trimmed substantially, and then even more due to fossil fuel industry lobbying and the rise in right-wing populism.14 There are concerns that polarized politics in the USA may prevent it from ever being enacted.15 The EU’s ‘Next Generation’ plan16 has similar intentions to be green and socially more just and, while insufficiently generous,17 it fares better than its American counterpart. It could still be undone by the EU’s own right-wing drifts and, with geopolitical tensions rising globally, notably following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the EU and many other countries are pivoting back to energy (fossil fuel) independence, questioning their 2021 commitments to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.18

### Impacts - War

#### Capitalism drives war – cycles of deconstruction and reconstruction provide outlets for over-accumulation

Robinson ’22 -- a distinguished professor of sociology, global studies and Latin American studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara (William I. Robinson, “Global Capitalism Has Become Dependent on War-Making to Sustain Itself,” section: “Militarized Accumulation”, truthout, 4/24/22, <https://truthout.org/articles/global-capitalism-has-become-dependent-on-war-making-to-sustain-itself/> //EH☭

The Russian invasion — brutal, reckless and condemnable by any standard — has sparked debate on NATO’s proposed expansion into Ukraine and the role that it played in motivating the Kremlin. U.S. officials were keenly aware, in fact, that the drive to expand NATO to Russian borders would eventually push Moscow into a military conflict. “We examine a wide range of nonviolent measures that could exploit Russia’s actual vulnerabilities and anxieties as a way of stressing Russia’s military and economy and the regime’s political standing at home and abroad,” notes a 2019 study by the RAND Corporation, a Pentagon-affiliated think tank. “The steps we examine would not have either defense or deterrence as their prime purpose,” it states, but rather, “these steps are conceived of as elements in a campaign designed to unbalance the adversary, leading Russia to compete in domains or regions where the United States has a competitive advantage, and causing Russia to overextend itself militarily or economically.” But the provocation could not be reduced to geopolitical competition, however important, as most observers were keen to do. Missing from the larger picture was the centrality of militarized accumulation — of endless low- and high-intensity warfare, simmering conflicts, civil strife and policing — to the global political economy. Militarized accumulation refers to a situation in which a global war economy relies on the state to organize war-making, social control and repression to sustain capital accumulation in the face of chronic stagnation and saturation of global markets. These state-organized practices are outsourced to transnational corporate capital, involving the fusion of private accumulation with state militarization in order to sustain the process of capital accumulation. Cycles of destruction and reconstruction provide ongoing outlets for over-accumulated capital; that is, these cycles open up new profit-making opportunities for transnational capitalists seeking ongoing opportunities to profitably reinvest the enormous amounts of cash they have accumulated. There is a convergence in this process of global capitalism’s political need for social control and repression in the face of mounting popular discontent worldwide and its economic need to perpetuate accumulation in the face of stagnation. Wars provide critical economic stimulus. They have historically pulled the capitalist system out of accumulation crises while they serve to deflect attention from political tensions and problems of legitimacy. It took World War II to finally lift world capitalism out of the Great Depression. The Cold War legitimated a half century of expanding military budgets and the Iraq/Afghanistan wars, the longest in history, helped keep the economy sputtering along in the face of chronic stagnation in the first two decades of the century. From the anti-Communist fervor of the Cold War, to the “war on terror,” then the so-called New Cold War, and now the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the transnational elite, led by Washington, have had to conjure up one enemy after another to legitimate militarized accumulation and deflect crises of state legitimacy and capitalist hegemony onto external enemies and contrived threats. The events of September 11, 2001, marked the start of an era of a permanent global war in which logistics, warfare, intelligence, repression, surveillance and even military personnel are more and more the privatized domain of transnational capital. The Pentagon budget increased 91 percent in real terms between 1998 and 2011, while worldwide, total state military budget outlays grew by 50 percent from 2006 to 2015, from $1.4 trillion to more than $2 trillion. (This figure does not take into account the hundreds of billions of dollars spent on intelligence; contingency operations; policing; bogus wars against immigrants, terrorism and drugs; and “homeland security.”) During this time, military-industrial complex profits quadrupled. However, focusing just on state military budgets only gives us a part of the picture of the global war economy. As I showed in my 2020 book, The Global Police State, the various wars, conflicts and campaigns of social control and repression around the world involve the fusion of private accumulation with state militarization. In this relationship, the state facilitates the expansion of opportunities for private capital to accumulate through militarization, such as by facilitating global weapons sales by military-industrial-security firms, the amounts of which have reached unprecedented levels. Global weapons sales by the top 100 weapons manufacturers and military service companies increased by 38 percent between 2002 and 2016 and can be expected to escalate further in the face of a prolonged war in Ukraine. By 2018, private for-profit military companies employed some 15 million people around the world, while another 20 million people worked in private security worldwide. The private security (policing) business is one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in many countries and has come to dwarf public security around the world. The amount spent on private security in 2003, the year of the invasion of Iraq, was 73 percent higher than that spent in the public sphere, and three times as many persons were employed in private forces as in official law enforcement agencies. In half of the world’s countries, private security agents outnumber police officers. These corporate soldiers and police were deployed to guard corporate property, provide personal security for executives and their families; collect data; conduct police, paramilitary, counterinsurgency and surveillance operations; carry out mass crowd control and repression of protesters; run private detention and interrogation facilities; manage prisons and participate in outright warfare. Now, these same private military and security firms are pouring into Ukraine, with some mercenary companies offering between $1,000 and $2,000 a day for those with combat experience. The Russian invasion has accelerated but did not originate the ongoing surge in military spending around the world. It is notable that state military spending worldwide skyrocketed in the wake of the 2008 global financial collapse even beyond the post-9/11 spending hike, rising from about $1.5 billion in 2008 to over $2 trillion in 2022. The fact that this explosion in spending coincides perfectly with continued worldwide stagnation following the Great Recession suggests that the heightened militarization of the global economy is as much or more a response to this chronic stagnation than to perceived security threats. If bursts of militarized accumulation (such as that unleashed by 9/11, then by the 2008 financial collapse, and now by the Russian invasion) help offset the overaccumulation crisis further into the future, they are also high-risk bets that heighten worldwide tensions and push the world dangerously towards all-out international conflagration.

#### Capitalism causes war – crisis justifies military accumulation

Robinson ‘22 -- a distinguished professor of sociology, global studies and Latin American studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara (William I., “Global Capitalism Has Become Dependent on War-Making to Sustain Itself”, “Truth Out”, 4-24-22, [https://truthout.org/articles/global-capitalism-has-become-dependent-on-war-making-to-sustain-itself/]](https://truthout.org/articles/global-capitalism-has-become-dependent-on-war-making-to-sustain-itself/%5d) A.G

This crisis of global capitalism is economic, or structural, one of chronic stagnation in the global economy. But it is also political: a crisis of state legitimacy and capitalist hegemony. The system is moving towards “a general crisis of capitalist rule” as billions of people around the world face uncertain struggles for survival and question a system they no longer see as legitimate. Historically, wars have pulled the capitalist system out of crisis while they serve to deflect attention from political tensions and problems of legitimacy. Economically, global capitalism faces what is known in technical language as “overaccumulation”: a situation in which the economy has produced — or has the capacity to produce — great quantities of wealth but the market cannot absorb this wealth because of escalating inequality. Capitalism by its very nature will produce abundant wealth yet polarize that wealth and generate ever greater levels of social inequality unless offset by redistributive policies. The level of global social polarization and inequality now experienced is without precedent. In 2018, the richest 1 percent of humanity controlled more than half of the world’s wealth while the bottom 80 percent had to make do with just 5 percent. The international development agency Oxfam reported in January that during the first two years of the coronavirus pandemic, the 10 richest men in the world more than doubled their fortunes, from $700 billion to $1.5 trillion, while 99 percent of humanity saw a fall in their income and 160 million more people fell into poverty. Such inequalities end up undermining the stability of the system as the gap grows between what is — or could be — produced and what the market can absorb. The extreme concentration of the planet’s wealth in the hands of the few and the accelerated impoverishment and dispossession of the majority means that the transnational capitalist class, or TCC, has increasing difficulty in finding productive outlets to unload enormous amounts of surplus it accumulated. In the years leading up to the pandemic, there was a steady rise in underutilized capacity and a slowdown in industrial production around the world. The surplus of accumulated capital with nowhere to go expanded rapidly. Transnational corporations recorded record profits during the 2010s at the same time that corporate investment declined. Along with militarized accumulation, the TCC has turned to unprecedented levels of financial speculation and to debt-driven growth to sustain profit-making in the face of the crisis. If left unchecked, overaccumulation results in crisis — in stagnation, recessions, depressions, social upheavals and war — just what we are experiencing right now. But there is a related dynamic at work in the global war economy: the need for dominant groups to suppress mass discontent and deflect the crisis of state legitimacy. International frictions escalate as states, in their efforts to retain legitimacy, seek to sublimate social and political tensions and to keep the social order from fracturing. All around the world, a “people’s Spring” has taken off. From Chile to Lebanon, Iraq to India, France to the United States, Haiti to Nigeria, South Africa to Colombia, Jordan to Sri Lanka, waves of strikes and mass protests have proliferated and, in some instances, appear to be acquiring an anti-capitalist character. Wars and external enemies allow the ruling groups to deflect attention away from domestic malaise in their effort to maintain a grip on power as the crisis deepens. The transnational elite, led by Washington, have had to conjure up one enemy after another to legitimate militarized accumulation and deflect crises of state legitimacy and capitalist hegemony onto external enemies and contrived threats. In the U.S., this sublimation has involved efforts to channel social unrest towards scapegoated communities such as immigrants or other marginalized groups — this is one key function of racism and was a core component of the Trump government’s political strategy — or towards an external enemy such as China or Russia, which had clearly become a cornerstone of the Biden government’s strategy well before the Russian invasion of Ukraine. U.S. presidents historically reach their highest approval ratings when they launch wars. George W. Bush reached an all-time-high of 90 percent in 2001 as his administration geared up to invade Afghanistan, and his father George H.W. Bush achieved an 89 percent approval rating in 1991, right as the U.S. declared the end of its (first) invasion of Iraq and the “liberation of Kuwait.” It is unlikely that an increasing militarization of the world economy can in the long run offset either the economic or the political dimensions of the crisis of global capitalism. Global capitalism is emerging from the coronavirus pandemic with more inequality, more authoritarianism, more militarization, and more civic and political strife. In the U.S., class struggle is heating up, with a wave of strikes and of unionization drives in Amazon, Starbucks, and elsewhere in the gig economy. The current inflationary spiral and the escalation of class struggle in the United States and around the world point to the inability of the ruling groups to contain the expanding crisis. The drive by the capitalist state to externalize the political fallout of the crisis increases the danger that international tensions and localized conflicts such as in Ukraine will snowball into broader international conflagrations of unforeseen consequences. As the Ukraine crisis continues to drag on and the global revolt escalates, there will be a radical reconfiguration of global geopolitical alignments to the drumbeat of escalating turbulence in the world economy that will feed new political upheavals and violent conflicts, making global capitalism all the more volatile. While it is hard to imagine a return to the status quo antebellum in Eastern Europe, in the larger picture, the Ukraine crisis is not the cause but a consequence of the general crisis of global capitalism. That crisis will only get worse. Fasten your seat belts; it will get much worse.

### Capitalism Unsustainable

#### Capitalism is unsustainable—it’s self-destructive and obfuscates the causes of existential risks

Chomsky & Mascirota 21 -- Noam Chomsky is a major figure in analytic philosophy and founder of cognitive science and David Masciotra is a political columnist with Salon and has also written for The Atlantic and The Washington Post. (“Dismantle all of this stuff: A conversation with Noam Chomsky,” *Los Angeles Book Review*, 5/14/21, <https://www.lareviewofbooks.org/article/dismantle-all-of-this-stuff-a-conversation-with-noam-chomsky/>, // E.H.☭

One of the simple but profound statements in the book is that the “problem isn’t individual, but institutional.” Mainstream political discussion tends to obsess over individuals rather than institutions. There are many Americans who are angry about politics but aren’t exactly sure why or how to direct their rage. Is part of that because — as much as, say, Biden is preferable to Trump — the overall problem isn’t individual, it’s institutional? There are differences, which are significant, but basically institutions place tight constraints on what can happen. Let’s take the most urgent issue that has arisen in human history: the destruction of the environment. If we don’t take care of that in the next couple of decades, nothing else matters. We’ll be off on an irreversible course of self-destruction. Well, there are institutions and individuals. There’s the CEO of ExxonMobil. There’s Jamie Dimon, who runs JPMorgan Chase. They make decisions, and the decisions to some extent reflect their own goals, priorities, sentiments, and so on. But they are narrowly constrained. So, for example, the CEO of ExxonMobil surely knows as much about global warming as you or I do, probably a lot more, at least if he reads the materials that come to him from his own scientists and engineers, and they’ve known it for 50 years. ExxonMobil scientists were in the lead, back before many people were warning about the extraordinary dangers of heating in the environment. In fact, when James Hansen, a famous geoscientist, made a speech in 1988 warning of the threat of global warming, putting it into the public realm, ExxonMobil responded with significant efforts to undermine the idea that there is a threat. They didn’t do it stupidly. They didn’t deny it, because that would have been easily refuted. What they did is try to develop doubt — “Maybe we don’t know,” “We haven’t looked into clouds,” “Let’s put off any big decisions so we can have a richer society,” “We might have to do something about it a long time from now,” etc. They all knew that was nonsense. They all knew that if we don’t do something about it quickly, we are in severe danger. Back to your question. Suppose a different individual CEO came in and said, “Let’s tell the population the truth. Let’s tell them that we are destroying the prospects for organized human life on earth. Let’s tell them that we are going to stop doing it. We’re going to move to renewable energy, because we care about your grandchildren and ours.” He would be out in five minutes. That’s part of the institutional structure. If you aren’t maximizing profit and market share, you aren’t going to stand. Of course, there is a point to criticizing individuals, but the real point is that, within the system, they don’t have a lot of choices. Therefore, we have to ask, “What is it about the structure of our institutions that is leading us in this direction?” Let’s take another current example, right in the headlines. We are in the midst of a pandemic. It is well understood, across the board, that unless vaccines are provided quickly to the poor, suffering areas of the world, such as parts of Africa, it is going to be a disaster, not only for them, but for us. Mutations will take place. It is unpredictable, but some might be lethal. They’ll get back to Europe and the United States, and we’ll all be in deep trouble. So, we have a choice. We can work on a people’s vaccine, sending the vaccine freely and openly to the people of Africa. That’s good for them, of course, but it will also protect us from future disaster. That’s one choice. The other choice is to protect the profits of the major pharmaceutical corporations, already loaded with profits because of the highly protectionist elements of the mislabeled “free trade agreements.” Which are we pursuing? Not just us, but Europe as well. The idea is you work for yourself, for the system of power within your society, and if it kills people elsewhere, that’s someone else’s problem. That is the way the institutions work. In fact, if you look at the details, it is pretty shocking. Imagine yourself a rational observer from outer space watching this species. Take a look at the United States, which has one of the best — or least bad — records on the vaccine. There happens to be a surplus of vaccines in the United States, because the FDA has not yet authorized the use of AstraZeneca, and there’s a large extra supply. So, Biden did the sensible thing. He dispensed them to other countries. Which countries? The first one is Canada, which is the world’s champion in storing unused vaccines that it will never be able to use because it has hoarded them way beyond any potential use. So, that’s the first recipient. The second recipient is Mexico, as part of a bribe to violate international law and minimal ethics by keeping desperate refugees away from our border. This isn’t because Biden is a bad person. He seems like a nice guy. It is just the way that institutions structure decisions. That said, there are different forces operating on how decisions are structured. There are the corporate boardrooms, and there are the activists in the streets. Who is going to win? That’s the issue, and it’s not subtle. Go back to the beginning of this 40-year assault on the general population called “neoliberalism.” It was pretty obvious at the start. You may not be old enough to have heard it, but I’m sure you’ve read about Reagan’s inaugural address in 1981. The punchline was, “Government is the problem, not the solution.” Okay, so if government is not the solution, who is the solution? Where will decisions be made if not in government? Does it take a genius to figure this out? They’ll be made in corporate boardrooms. So, in other words, we shift decisions from government — which whatever its flaws, is, at least, partially responsive to the general population — to private tyrannies, which are totally unaccountable to the public, and which are dedicated, explicitly — there’s no secret about it — to maximizing what’s called “shareholder value”: dividends, benefits to management. That’s their task. The name for that in the United States is “libertarianism.” All of these are ways in which, to go back to my and Marv’s course, “common sense” is instituted. We happen to start with Gramsci. We go back to earlier sources, even David Hume’s “Of the First Principles of Government.” These themes run through, and it is understood that you have to impose common sense. You have to manufacture consent. As progressive democratic theorists have argued, “The people are too stupid and ignorant to do what is in their own interest. So, we the responsible men have to make decisions for them.” Of course, the intellectuals and the responsible men are actually following the dictates of private power. They don’t like that part of the story. They like to see themselves as running the show. In my lifetime, I’ve seen it over and over. During the Kennedy and Johnson years, the technocratic and meritocratic elite, my colleagues from Harvard and MIT, were flocking down to Washington to show how the world should be run. Well, in Vietnam, we saw what came of that. It was not unpredictable. Those of us in the streets were warning of it all along. Now, it is the same. Neoliberalism, whatever is in the minds of people who advocate for it, maybe they don’t even think about it, is an explicit effort, and it is evident from the structure, to hand power to private institutions, which are dedicated to self-enrichment. It would be obvious to a 10-year-old, even if economists don’t see it, because they have some theory that says it leads to “Pareto optimality.” Whatever. We have 40 years of experience, and we can see what’s happened. It was totally predictable. To give you just one example, you may have seen it, but a couple of months ago the RAND Corporation did a detailed study trying to determine how much wealth was transferred from the working class and middle class to the superrich during the 40 neoliberal years. They estimated $47 trillion. Some call it “transfer.” “Robbery” is a better term. Meanwhile, the top 0.1 percent of the population doubled their share of total wealth from 10 percent to 20 percent. Take a look at the effects: the majority of the population gets by paycheck to paycheck. Real wages have stagnated for 40 years. The gains of productivity growth concentrate in very few pockets. This leads to what you mentioned before — unfocused anger. Is it surprising? People aren’t told what is really robbing them. Instead, they are told that it is immigrants, Blacks, some pedophiles from outer space, if you believe QAnon. Anything but what is actually happening. That’s another mode of manufacturing consent and establishing “common sense.” The job of people like you, activists on the streets, people who are trying to change the world for the better, is to dismantle all of this stuff. It is to get people to see what is not that far from right in front of their eyes. None of it is very profound. You can talk about it to high school students. They often understand it better than graduate students at major universities, who have been more indoctrinated. As we discuss in the book, this is a point George Orwell made. Something that not many people read but should is the introduction to Animal Farm. Animal Farm is seen as safe, because it is a satire of the totalitarian enemy. The introduction, which was not initially published, is addressed to the people of England. Orwell warns not to feel too self-righteous, because in free England, unpopular ideas can be suppressed without the use of force. He calls it “literary censorship in England,” and one of the means he describes is simply a good education. You go to the best schools, like Oxford and Cambridge (similar to Harvard and Yale), and have it instilled in you that there are certain things that it just wouldn’t do to say, or even think about. It is funny the way it works. A couple of days ago I had a talk with a group of Latin American activists. They were from all over Latin America. Well, just for fun, I read for them a column that appeared in The New York Times that day by one of their top foreign affairs specialists. It was about how the United States has been committed to the rule of law, human rights, and democracy. They just burst out laughing. They’re living in the real world, not the world of US intellectual culture.

#### Capitalism unsustainable – drives consumption and inequality which destroy the ecosystem

Hertrick et al 22 -- Sarah Jaclyn Hertrick is an MPA﻿ and writer for Circular Triangle, Jennifer Hill is Circular Triangle’s executive director, and Dirk Philipsen is Research Professor of Economic History at the Duke University Sanford School of Public Policy (“The elephant in the room: Capitalism is not sustainable,” Circular Triangle, Sept. 2022, <https://www.circulartriangle.org/blog/the-elephant-in-the-room-capitalism-is-not-sustainable>] A.G

Capitalism is an unsustainable economic system. That idea may seem radical or extreme, particularly since the vast majority of us have been taught about and regularly experience neoliberal economics, but the truth is our current economic system is designed for consumption and growth, creating unsustainable conditions that are depleting our planet. To further understand and explore this concept, Circular Triangle’s Executive Director, Jennifer Hill, recently interviewed Associate Research Professor of Economic History at the Duke University Sanford School of Public Policy, [Dirk Philipsen](https://sanford.duke.edu/people/faculty/philipsen-dirk), for his thoughts and expertise. Philipsen, a political economist and historian, has been working in the sustainability arena for thirty years and has written extensively about sustainability and economic metrics. The interview began with what Phillipsen described as the five million dollar question, “What does sustainability mean to you?” Unsurprisingly, there are a lot of different definitions. Philipsen explained that initially sustainability came out of conversations concerned about the limits to growth. Therefore from the very beginning, in the political spirit, it is a question with an economic dimension. Philipsen said that the term originated in the German forest industry by a ranger who wanted to maintain a forest in a way that could serve future generations the same way it serves the current. “Ultimately it is trying to figure out a way to run an economy and run a society in a way... so that we have in the 7th generation the same kinds of opportunities that you and I have today.” Specifically, sustainability means getting away from depletion and pollution, from degradation, destruction, and moving towards a circular economy. “If someone cares about sustainability, why should they also care about economics?”, Hill asked next. Phillipsen expressed his difficulty conceiving of anyone that does not care about sustainability, stating that if you care about the future of our children and grandchildren you have to care about sustainability because it is the proposition that we leave behind a world that provides equal or better opportunities. However, “we are increasingly leaving behind a burning trash heap,” and the reason why is mostly because of our economic system. Phillipsen further explained that our current economic system does not know how to care for the future. Its one purpose is to create profit and growth through “extracting and exploiting and producing and creating evermore output,” ultimately producing for the trash dump. If our current economic system works this way because it was designed for consumption and growth, we could also make it work a different way, Hill notes, further adding that we can choose a different economic model with different outcomes. “I describe waste as not a bug in the system but a feature of the system; it is designed to create waste and therefore it does.” “I describe waste as not a bug in the system but a feature of the system; it is designed to create waste and therefore it does.” The biggest elephant in the room is that the growth regime of our current economic system is not only unsustainable, it is logically impossible. Phillipsen turns to a book “Doughnut Economics,” by [Kate Raworth](https://www.kateraworth.com/doughnut/), in which she describes that “sweet spot” in the center of a doughnut where everyone has what they need to thrive without exceeding the limits of the ecosystem. Her book also examines the graph of exponential growth. Considered to be healthy and robust by economists, the United States currently has a growth rate of about 3%. At this rate, the economy (meaning consumption) would have to double every 25 years. Phillipsen states that this simply cannot happen no matter how much we innovate and improve efficiency. “This is a system that, more than any other system ever, benefits a shrinking number of people and we are now at a point where 8 people in the world have as much wealth as the bottom 50 percent (4 billion) of all people combined.” He continues to highlight the levels of inequality, “...you can basically throw out everything we believe about prosperity, freedom, democracy, justice ... all of that goes out the window.” And yet, conservatives, liberals, and socialists have all subscribed to this idea of exponential growth. Phillipsen argues that we are already at a point where economic growth comes with more costs than benefits by destroying and exploiting, alienating, and producing inequalities. However, we continue to live in a system that was deliberately designed to require growth. “Capitalism cannot function without growth and so here is the big thing that nobody wants to talk about and yet we have to, which is, if we can’t have growth we have to change capitalism.” Perhaps the biggest challenge to making a change, is not so much designing an alternative economic model, as Philipsen states, but rather recruitment and organizing. “How do you get people to give themselves permission to imagine something different and better, because you and I and everybody in the world has never experienced anything other than capitalism. And to figure out a way to make it politically possible, to overcome the massively concentrated power and control in the hands of capital. That's a big step.”

### Alt – Degrowth

#### **Only alternative is degrowth through socialist movements – ecosystem collapse imminent**

--decoupling and recycling are insufficient

Labonté 6/14/22 [Ronald, professor at the University of Ottawa, “Ensuring Global Health Equity in a Post-pandemic Economy,” International Journal of Health Policy and Management, <https://www.ijhpm.com/article_4272_79514f4469319bf15a737fce1b385a18.pdf> ocp]

Degrowth/Post-growth: Should We Build Back at All? Two common elements in many post-pandemic plans are commitments to decouple economic growth from carbon intensity, and to embrace a ‘circular economy’ in which all goods are reused or repurposed to reduce material throughput and to eliminate (or massively reduce) waste. Such measures are essential, but many environmental economists are sceptical that they are sufficient. They also allow societies to avoid confronting ‘an inconvenient truth’[1]: That capitalism’s growth imperative is predicated on ever increasing levels of material consumption. The human population already consumes annually 1.7 times the ecological resources the world can regenerate. If everyone consumed at the level of OECD countries it would require the resources of 4.7 earths,21 even before accounting for the environmental damages such consumption generates. A relatively new concept has entered the lexicon of environmental economics: degrowth[2], which captures the importance of reducing aggregate global consumption levels to avoid catastrophic ecosystem collapse. The bulk of this responsibility lies with citizens, governments, and corporate actors in the historically over-consuming Global North,32 partly to make space for those in the Global South to reach consumption levels compatible with healthy life expectancies while remaining within safe planetary limits: “…it’s abundantly clear it’s in the poorest parts of the world that income growth makes a huge difference to prosperity. Life expectancy increases. Infant mortality decreases. Maternal morbidity decreases. Participation in education increases…that’s where growth makes a difference” (T. Jackson, interview communication, October 28, 2017). Labonté 4 International Journal of Health Policy and Management, 2022, x(x), 1–5 The implications of such a transition are enormous. The burden of change rests heaviest on the world’s wealthiest regardless of which country they may live in. Their carbon emissions and consumption levels massively exceed those of the majority of the world’s population, indicative of the link between rising economic inequality and environmental devastation.33 But a degrowth (or ‘fair growth’) economy will demand substantial change for hundreds of millions, and although: “…degrowth is the only alternative at this point in time, there will need to be political and social psychological transformations from societies that have been weaned on overconsumption. I will not underestimate this cost [since] we’re talking about transformations in the way that we have structured our lives” (W. Bello, interview communication, October 27, 2021). Others describe this as transitioning to a post-growth economy, one in which the pursuit of ‘prosperity’ replaces that of growth: “Many of our problems, both social and structural and environmental, arise from the idea that progress is about increasing productivity, the speed with which we create material goods and services, distribute them to people to buy and throw away as fast as possible, the belief that this material sense of productivity and progress is what human prosperity is really about. But what we saw through the pandemic is that health is really the meaning of prosperity. Health is the foundation for prosperity(T. Jackson, interview communication, October 28, 2017). This requires a very different economy: “…a care economy, one that enriches us as well as saving lives. It’s a lower carbon economy, with a lower footprint because it is about engagement and attention and time in the service of each other” (T. Jackson, interview communication, October 28, 2017). Such an economy is an extension of what: “…feminist economists have always talked about. There is the direct care which is looking after people… Then there’s extended care…doing things that help in adaptation to climate change…it is essential work that is being done in unpaid fashion by a significant part of the population” (J. Ghosh, interview communication, November 14, 2021).[3] Towards a Post-growth Caring Economy: Can We Challenge the Rise in Autocratic Regimes? Transforming from a consumption-based capitalism to a sustainable caring economy requires governments willing to discipline markets for public good purposes, and to initiate tax and fiscal policies that radically redistribute access to the resources people need for healthy lives. The immediate challenge to this aspirational goal is reversing the fifteen years’ worldwide decline in democratic accountability and parallel rise in authoritarian rule.34 One of the pandemic’s ironies is that even as it increased the state’s role in health and economic protection, it incentivized alt-right populism and provided opportunities for autocrats to increase their grip on power. As Walden Bello, a sociologist and economist who was interviewed for this editorial, noted: “We are in a race between the forces of the far right and progressive forces [which threaten] any sort of coordinated global action on climate” (W. Bello, interview communication, October 27, 2021). In response, Bello ran as a vice-presidential candidate in the May 2022 Philippines elections in an effort to avoid that country’s “resurgence of authoritarianism.” He did not win, but remains committed to the scale of transition needed for a survivable post-pandemic economy, one in which democratic participation must remain strong: “We can’t leave it just to the politicians. We’ve got to have civil society stepping in because if we leave it to the usual actors, we’re not going to get anywhere” (W. Bello, interview communication, October 27, 2021). Even as the space for such participation is under authoritarian attack, the importance of civil society efforts to retain and expand it is more important now than in the pre-pandemic period. We know the political economy tools that can bring us closer to what the Sustainable Development Goals describe as ‘the world we want.’ But only organized citizen demand will create the political will to adopt these tools, with recent history bringing us evidence of unwavering activism in global climate strikes, Black Lives Matter, buen vivir and peasant’s movements, and poor people’s campaigns worldwide. The post-pandemic public health imperative now is to protect and support such movements.35