

How ‘The One Percent’ can be Organized to Fix Climate Change

This strategy paper identifies how ‘the one percent’ can organize themselves so that their self-interest will drive them to act collectively to fix destructive climate change and other existential threats.

Executive Summary

- Human civilization faces destruction if urgent action is not taken to fix climate change;
- Collectively, ‘the one percent’ has the power to co-opt governments across the planet to do what is necessary to mitigate climate change;
- It is in the collective interests of the one percent to use their power to overcome catastrophic climate change — unmitigated climate change will destroy the social and economic systems that provide the one percent and their families with their wealth, power and security;
- But a classical ‘collective action trap’ prevents the one percent from cooperating together to protect their collective interest. This trap undermines attempts to organise cooperative action due to free-riding and narrow self-interest;
- However, collective action traps can be overcome by particular forms of organisation. These forms of organisation align the interests of individuals with the interests of the collective by rewarding cooperation and punishing free-riding;
- The goal of this paper is to identify how the one percent can organise themselves in such a way that they will escape their collective action trap. Once organised in this way, it will be in their individual interests to act for the common good on climate change and other existential threats.

The Strategy:

The power of the one percent

An international coalition of sufficient numbers of the one percent has the power to force governments to do whatever is necessary to overcome climate change and other global existential threats such as nuclear war.

- Groups within the one percent already control (and generally own) the media, and therefore control politicians and governments;
 - The only political parties that can win elections are those that advance the interests of the one percent, and subordinate the interests of ordinary citizens.
- Currently, this power is not organised and coordinated.
 - It operates in a diffuse and distributed fashion, and only emerges when the collective interests of at least some of the one percent happen to be aligned with their narrow, individual interests.
 - Many of the one per cent are unaware of how their pursuit of their individual interests produces collective power in some instances.

- Note that I am using the term ‘the one percent’ to refer broadly to extremely wealthy and powerful individuals and organisations, including corporations and the leadership of non-democratic governments (like China).

But coalitions of the one percent are not using this power at present to mitigate global warming, despite its potential to end human civilization this century,

- and despite its potential to destroy millions of lives, including the lives and legacies of members of the one percent.

Why the one percent are not fixing climate change at present:

Why are the one percent refraining from using their collective power to ‘fix’ global warming?

Their inaction is not because they are ignorant of the dire consequences of climate change for themselves and for human civilization.

- As individuals, many are already making significant investments to establish ‘bolt holes’ in an attempt to escape these dire consequences.

And their inaction is not because they don’t care if human civilization and many lives are damaged, including their own.

- In these circumstances, many of the one percent are just like any other human being, with normal motivations and values: if they could take action as individuals that would save human civilization, they would do so immediately.
 - If any member of the one percent were given a ‘magic wand’ that they could wave to fix climate change, they would use it without hesitation. This paper identifies a feasible way to build such a collective magic wand.
- If the world really was run by a small cabal of the mega-rich, global warming would have been fixed long ago.

The reason why the one percent are not acting is because it is against their individual interests to do so:

- It would require them to contribute their own money, time and energy;
- But without any reasonable prospects of actually mitigating global warming.

They know that individual action will be futile unless enough of their fellow members of the one percent join them in collective action. But:

- individuals and corporations that contribute significant financial resources to fix global warming will be disadvantaged economically;
- And they will be outcompeted economically by those who do not contribute and instead ‘free-ride’ on the investments of others;
 - Economically, the smart thing for individuals to do is to refrain from contributing to collective action, but to take any benefits that it produces.

Members of the one percent know that if their fellow members act like normal human beings, collective action will not emerge, and any individual action will ultimately be in vain.

The one percent face a ‘collective action trap’

The one percent are caught in a 'collective action trap'. Within such a trap, collective action for the common good is prevented because it is against the interests of individuals.

- A similar 'collective action trap' already impedes the emergence of widespread collective action against climate change amongst ordinary citizens.
 - As a consequence, many individuals believe that any attempt they make to mitigate climate change will be pointless.

These traps are universal. They tend to impede the emergence of cooperation amongst human beings and also amongst other living organisms.

- Collective action traps have also been referred to as cooperation barriers, 'the tragedy of the commons', multi-polar traps, collective action problems, the propensity of natural selection to favour self-interest over altruism, coordination problems, etc.
- Within a trap, individuals are dis-incentivized to join collective action, no matter how beneficial it may be for the group,
 - and are incentivized to refrain from contributing to collective action.
- Unless special forms of organisation are in place, self-interest tends to trump cooperation amongst living organisms.

How to organise the one percent so that it is in their interests to act collectively for the common good against climate change

However, during the long evolution of life on Earth, collective action traps have been overcome repeatedly. The evolutionary process has discovered how to organise self-interested organisms into collectives that cooperate for the common good:

- Evolution has organised groups of molecular processes into cells, groups of cells into multicellular organisms, multicellular organisms into cooperative animal societies, humans into tribes, tribes into kingdoms, and so on.
- You are a cooperative of trillions of cells. Your cells don't know you or care about you. But simply by pursuing their individual cellular interests, your cells produce the complex, coordinated functions that constitute you.

The methods discovered by evolution can be used to organise the one percent so that they will use their collective power to fix global warming.

- Fortunately, this will not require the one percent to abandon their own individual interests or to become self-sacrificing.

Evolution produces collective action for the common good by embedding organisms in arrangements that make it in their interests to act collectively. Within these forms of organisation:

- It pays to cooperate: the disadvantages of cooperation are removed, and where necessary, cooperation is rewarded.
- Free-riding and other actions that operate against the common good are dis-incentivized e.g. by punishment and other sanctions.

- The punishment of free-riding by the group has been essential for enabling cooperation in human tribes and other non-hierarchical groups of humans.

In organisations that implement these principles, cooperation and the common good will triumph, and free-riders will be out-competed.

- If sufficient numbers of the one percent are organised in this way, the easy and self-interested thing for them to do will be to act collectively to fix global warming.

Specific actions that can be taken to organise the one percent

These principles identify in broad terms what the one percent must do if they are to organise themselves so that their self-interest will then drive them to fix climate change.

In essence, they will need to use their power to ensure that members of the one percent who take collective action benefit from doing so, and any who refuse to act for the common good suffer financial, reputational and other damage.

- Crucially, this will include punishing any who refuse to use their power in this way.
- As a result, it will be in the individual interests of members of the one percent to take the specific actions needed to overcome the collective action trap,
 - and it will be evident to the one percent that taking these actions will ensure that collective action to fix climate change is both feasible and effective.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to develop a detailed action plan that identifies the specific actions that the one percent could take in order to organise itself in this way. I will restrict myself to identifying a number of possibilities.

- However, so that there is no misunderstanding, I need to emphasize that I am not advocating that the one percent take any action that is illegal. The options discussed here should be interpreted as referring only to actions insofar as they are legal.

Examples of possible action include:

- Co-opting the power of the media to, for example: promote actions that will mitigate global warming; impose reputational damage on any who endanger human civilization by opposing such action (including by destroying their legacies); make it impossible for any politician to be elected who refuses to support appropriate action; impose reputational damage on members of the one percent who do not act collectively; organise boycotts and other financially-damaging campaigns against recalcitrant members of the one percent; and so on.
 - The power of the media will be co-opted by using the collective power of the one percent to, for example: organise advertising and financial boycotts against recalcitrant media corporations; impose reputational and financial damage on proprietors of media corporations and their families; destroy the stock price of recalcitrant media companies then take them over; and so on.
- Co-opting the power of governments to, for example: declare a World-Wide State of Emergency against climate change; impose regulatory and taxation regimes that drive businesses to mitigate global warming (including regimes that remove economic externalities that currently prevent corporations from acting pro-environmentally);

fund specific mitigation measures; establish a new legal framework that punishes any actions taken by corporations or individuals that contribute to endangering the survival of human civilization; impose financial and reputational damage on corporations and their owners who do not join ‘The Coalition of the One Percent’ (including by destroying their legacies); and so on.

- The power of governments will be co-opted by, for example: withdrawing and blocking campaign funding to any recalcitrant politicians; de-funding think tanks that produce climate-denial propaganda; funding new think tanks that support action against global warming; using the co-opted power of the media to destroy the careers of political opponents; and so on.

Although many of these actions involve sanctions, in practice few members of the one percent are likely ever to be punished. This is because:

- sanctions will be imposed only after individuals are given ample opportunity to avoid the sanctions by acting in the interests of humanity; and
- if the arrangements that impose the sanctions are credible and effective, self-interested individuals will avoid them by acting for the common good.

Once a critical mass joins ‘The Coalition of the One Percent’, this collective action will be self-organising and self-expanding. It will increasingly be in the interests of the remainder of the one percent to join The Coalition.

Organising the organisation of the one percent

But won’t the collective action trap tend to prevent the emergence of this critical mass in the first place?

A major challenge is to develop a strategy that will ensure it is in the interests of a sufficient number of the one percent to join before the critical mass is reached and it becomes self-organising.

Key elements of the strategy are likely to include:

- Initial recruitment will target those members of the one percent whose interests are already aligned with the common good because they are strongly motivated to act ethically and morally; early adopters will establish a leadership group for ‘The Coalition’; those who join The Coalition will use their personal networks to recruit others like themselves and to promote the strategy being developed here; conferences, planning meetings and think tanks will be funded to develop more refined and detailed strategies for overcoming the cooperation traps that beset the one percent; as the number of adopters increase, their collective ability to influence political and media systems will also increase; they can begin to use this growing power to identify members of the one percent who will not join The Coalition, and who are particularly vulnerable to financial and reputational damage that can be imposed by the emerging collective; successful punishment of recalcitrants will be publicized as a warning to others; recruitment will often use the device of seeking “conditional commitments” to support collective action (e.g. individuals will be asked to make a commitment that they will join The Coalition once a specified number of other members of the one percent also either join or make conditional commitments to do so [provision for

conditional commitments enables individuals to avoid any personal costs until it is evident that sufficient will join to ensure the viability of the campaign]); and so on.

- Bottom-up climate activism also has the potential to play a significant role by pressuring members of the one percent to join the coalition and by sanctioning those who show reluctance.

Early joiners of The Coalition are likely to be:

- systems thinkers who are smart enough to understand how and why this strategy will overcome the collective action trap; and
- individuals who are motivated by a desire to leave a legacy that is of historical and evolutionary significance, and avoid leaving a legacy of shame.

The one percent will not be able to escape the consequences of inaction over climate change

The longer it takes for serious action to be taken against climate change, the easier it will be to overcome the collective action trap.

- This is because it will become increasingly likely that individual members of the one percent will be unable to escape the destructive consequences of inaction.
 - Runaway global warming will be so damaging and widespread that its consequences will soon become unavoidable and out of control.
 - ‘Bolt holes’ will become increasingly ineffective at enabling the one percent to avoid the consequences
- Eventually, the only way that individual members of the one percent will be able to avoid the destructive consequences of climate change will be to fix it for everyone.
 - It is understandable that individuals will try to desert a sinking ship. But if their escape is blocked, they will have no other option but to stay and help save the ship.

Once inaction over global warming causes systems of law and order to collapse, ‘bolt holes’ will not protect the one percent.

- Their ‘bolt holes’ will become prime targets for pillaging and theft.
 - Including by the private guards that they hire to protect themselves and their families – the guards will not trust their masters, and will eventually realise that it is in their best interests to turn against them.
- In the meantime, collective action initiated by the one percent will impose reputational and financial damage on those who attempt to set up ‘bolt holes’ (including by destroying their legacies).
 - Eventually, collective action by the one percent will force governments to outlaw the use of ‘bolt holes’ and to confiscate any existing ones that survive the reaction against them.

Smart members of the one percent are realizing that they will not be able to rely on ‘bolt holes’. They understand that they need at least to hedge their bets by supporting collective action that is essential for the survival of complex human civilization.

Overcoming other existential threats, including nuclear war

Finally, it should be emphasized that the general principles that apply to organising the one percent to fix climate change apply equally to overcoming other global existential threats that face humanity:

- these include the increasing threat of nuclear war, and other forms of global environmental destruction and degradation.

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For enquiries about joining the Coalition: 1PercentCoalition@gmail.com

For a companion article that outlines the wider evolutionary context that informs the strategy outlined in this article, go to:

<http://www.evolutionarymanifesto.com/evolutionarycontext.pdf>