



Maria Bargh and David Hall on the low-emissions transition

Transcript of the kōrero between Maria Bargh and David Hall, 10 July 2019, recorded at the WZ building, AUT, 10 July 2019. The interviewer is Keri Mills.

Nau mai whakarongo mai and welcome to The Policy Fix, a podcast by the Policy Observatory, AUT. Ko Keri Mills tēnei, and today our podcast is an edited recording of a kōrero between Maria Bargh, Tumuaki o Te Kawa a Māui at Victoria University of Wellington, and David Hall from the Policy Observatory AUT. This conversation took place at the Auckland book launch of A Careful Revolution: Towards a Low-Emissions Future, on the 10th of July. The book is edited by David Hall and published by Bridget Williams Books.

KM: Tēnā kōrua. We are going to start with the climate emergency, since that's happening and everyone's talking about it. Both of you have expressed some reservations about the emergency. Could you let us know what those reservations are?

DH: So, being a little bit cautious of the phrase climate emergency puts me in rather strange company at times because I am certainly an advocate for doing as much as we can. But I think that the question is whether climate emergency helps that or perhaps hinders that.

And that's my worry, is that the climate emergency framing can potentially create a lot of resistance and pushback, and slow down the sorts of changes that we want to see. As political scientists we are quite naturally suspicious of language of emergencies because governments have a tendency to take emergency as a justification to use extraordinary powers and to push beyond a lot of ordinary processes, especially democratic processes such as consultation and so on. So that's definitely one risk of climate emergency and one that would be quite likely to provoke pushback.

But then the other risk is that emergency is being used by elected officials as a strategy for looking like they're doing something very dramatic, when actually they're doing something of little substance. A lot of the climate emergency declarations have been quite hollow. The Auckland Council declaration I think is exemplary on that front - it had six points, five of which started with the words "continue to..." So it was very much a business as usual framing. Only the last one was doing something additional by saying that the council was going to put all of their decisions through a climate change lens. But to declare an emergency to get such a small administrative win like that – it seems quite disproportionate.

While the emergency is a symbolic gesture, potentially: that we can hold elected officials to account and say "you're not taking this emergency seriously enough," once they've declared

it. The question is: what are we asking them to do, so are we going to be pushing them to go around their own processes, pushing them to go around their consultation, pushing them to go around their obligations to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. So these are the kinds of worries about the emergency framing. And especially the declaration of emergencies by political organisations like councils or governments.

MB: Ko te tuatahi, tēnā koutou katoa. Thank you for the welcome, thank you all for being here this evening.

I agree with many of the things David said. But also I guess from a historical perspective, if you look at whose rights tend to be dispensed with first, when we've had roading projects and things it's usually Māori land that ends up being taken under the *Public Works Act* - and that's not even state of emergency. The history of dispensing of political and other rights for Māori is a history that we are very familiar with. So that's a key worry.

Also, studying politicians and the behaviour of politicians, you do become a little bit cynical about these sorts of scenarios when greater powers are allocated, to central or local government, for them to mobilise themselves. Yes it might be good to have greater resources to get things cracking, but there might also be projects that aren't that climate change sensitive, that they've had on the back burner and been unable to push through because communities have been objecting, through the due legal process that we have, through the democratic process. And so a state of emergency, a climate emergency, might be a way of shortcutting past those communities who have probably valid concerns about large projects.

DH: And there is a way around this, I mean you could say that the climate emergency is going to be a specific kind of emergency that involves these sorts of processes, but it is different from the standard state of emergency that we know for instance in the Christchurch case, where a large fence was built around the city centre. I'm from Christchurch so I was stuck on the outside of that fence for quite a while and they went around the processes of community engagement and rebuilding the city and the city is left with that legacy of that kind of top-down state driven decision-making. The city centre, the plan just hasn't had any organic community input and so there's large gaps there rather than a thriving city.

And that's essentially what we need to do with the low emissions transition, is to create a world that people are going to want to live in, so it's vital that everybody's input is part of that process. So if the advocates of climate emergency were to be explicit about what they mean when they're asking for an emergency, some of my scepticism might recede somewhat. But at this stage, emergency has been put forward as essentially an empty signifier which elected officials can fill with whatever they like. And the alternative is to say a climate emergency requires us to do this, this, this, this and this, and make it led by action rather than a plea for authorities to take control in whatever way they see fit.

KM: The book is called *A Careful Revolution*, and your chapter in it Maria is called 'A Tika Transition'. Could you both elaborate on what that means, and how the two relate?

MB: Yes, David mentioned the Auckland Council doing some work about a climate lens, and thinking about different policies and proposals using some kind of lens. And the idea of a tika transition is a little bit like that, to use some sort of lens by which to assess the different things that are going on. Tika means 'correct' in Māori. So tikanga are 'the correct ways of

doing things', and I think it's important to consider this as a *flexible* set of ways of doing things.

I think often there's a criticism that indigenous people as the canaries of climate change, they're going to feel it first and worst, and that they have this knowledge that's going to be obsolete once climate change has kicked in a bit further. And I think it's important to think about mātauranga Māori, Māori knowledge and other forms of indigenous knowledge not just as a set of 'things' that you know about 'stuff' but actually values and ways of looking at the world, - kind of *how* you would collect information, as well, about the environment, people, and the relationships between people, and so on. And *that* actually is adaptable and flexible over time despite significant changes to the climate.

There are some key values that I think are important as part of that. One is around whanaungatanga, that's a key aspect of Māori law and Māori ways of doing things is thinking about the relationships between people, how they're looked after and cared for. I think one of the things we see in the Crown's Treaty Settlement process at the moment is there isn't a great deal of care taken around ensuring that ongoing positive relationships are maintained between peoples.

The other element was around mana, and that in part is similar, thinking about the mana of the environment, the land, the waters, water quality all these kinds of issues as well as the mana of people, people's views, feeding into decision-making processes. So that's another element.

I think one of the really important ones, apart from kaitiakitanga, which you may be familiar with in terms of guardianship of the environment. For me one of the other really important ones is utu. Which sometimes gets mistranslated as revenge, but it's all about balance. Hirini Moko Mead has a framework which he calls the take-utu-ea framework. So it's not saying that from a Māori worldview that things can't become unbalanced, things clearly *have* become unbalanced. When it comes to water quality, that's another example. Things are unbalanced, but they can be re-balanced. So again, in a careful transition and revolution, things can become unbalanced, but they can also be balanced out if you like. So if there are subsidies - you know getting to the nitty-gritty - if there are subsidies, things can be assessed, cost benefit kinds of analyses. Things can follow a process and be re-balanced and I think it's focusing on that that's quite important too.

DH: Another prominent framework of thinking about transitions, which is in the public conversation at the moment is a 'just transition'. And that evolved out of the union movement. Sam Huggard the Secretary of the New Zealand Council for Trade Unions – he contributes a chapter to the book on this theme. And this is again a way of thinking around how do we navigate that change, and how do we make sure that people aren't left behind and especially that workers in high emissions industries have some sort of stake and some sort of confidence in the future that they're being brought into? And also, where possible, forms of assistance in order to make that transition from the jobs in the sectors that they know well into the jobs in the sectors of the future, which are emerging as we go through this energy transition.

So they've worked with MBIE, the Ministry for Business Innovation and Employment, which has a Just Transitions Unit within it - which is thinking around how to help with this transition. Especially in that New Plymouth context where the choice was made by the

government to cease issuing licenses or permits for offshore oil exploration, which has major implications for the regional economy down there. And so one of the things that happened in the budget was that money was committed to a new energy centre there. So that's the kind of just transitions thinking where on the one hand you're taking something away but on the other hand you're providing something so that people can move into a sector and keep their well-being consistent while having to make this transition, and not just being left in the cold.

And I know that this government is especially alert to the dangers of not doing that well, given that they did it very poorly in the eighties, with the reforms that occurred under the fourth Labour government. So it's reflecting on these sorts of disruptive transitions and what their effects are along the way, not just the ends but also the means, which informed the title *A Careful Revolution*, in the sense of care. I would argue that those 1980s reforms lacked a sense of care both for the ends and the means, and the injustice and disruption occurred in both situations, whereas in this situation, I think, when we're talking about the scale of disruption that climate change is likely to produce, there's obviously a moral case for the ends of a low emissions transition. But those ends don't necessarily justify any means. And so a sense of care needs to be taken for the rollout of those reforms. It isn't sufficient just to feel that the ends justify themselves, without any consideration of the disruption which is caused along the way.

KM: You mentioned New Plymouth, David, and I wondered if there any other examples of a careful revolution – this being done well, or in a way that's tika. Or what would it look like if there were?

MB: Well I guess, what would it look like, I think because we're in Aotearoa New Zealand, here it would need to be grounded in the kind of constitutional framework that we have, the political framework, certainly the Treaty of Waitangi, te Tiriti o Waitangi and the sorts of obligations the Crown has to Māori and to Treaty relationships. In the chapter I talk about a couple in particular. One is around partnerships, and I know some people don't like that idea, but, certainly Treaty relationships I think are key: so that's sharing the decision-making, and active protection of Māori rights and interests, and some reciprocal relationships around that. Those are key Treaty principles that are fairly well known.

I think one of the difficulties with the Zero Carbon Bill is the way it doesn't really reflect the Treaty obligations that the Crown has. Māori are to be consulted, after the fact around different plans, reduction plans and so on, and adaptation plans. Really those need to be codesigned to really adhere to Treaty obligations. You can't just design something, and then go around later. That doesn't really meet the minimum threshold that we have now established around Treaty obligations. Also the Climate Change Commission that's proposed - the idea of ensuring that there are nominations from Māori groups, really again fall short of a minimum standard. Really we need to be talking about the kind of obligations for the commission itself, and what the make up of the actual commission is. Not who nominates people - that's an issue, but much less of an issue than actually who's going to be sitting there. And I think ensuring that there's Māori representation on that Commission is key, which isn't one of the proposals in the Zero Carbon Bill.

DH: Yeah it's very difficult to think of positive examples of careful revolutions. Partly that is perhaps because the low emissions transition or revolution is quite unique in many ways –

unlike the agricultural revolution 10,000 years ago and the industrial revolution 200-odd years ago there's a sense of preemptiveness around this particular technological revolution. Those earlier revolutions involved technologies that humans invented, and stumbled upon, and scaled up in ways that transformed human society, and also, unfortunately, transformed the atmosphere and our landscapes along the way. So we need to arrest those negative impacts now, and to some extent reverse them by doing what we can to unpick ourselves from a fossil fuel-dependent energy system, and to reverse deforestation - as two obvious causes of climate change.

There is something quite unique here – that we're afforded an opportunity to think about how exactly we want that revolution to play out. Which I think probably is different to the way those earlier revolutions happened. And I think, if we were to look for examples of careful revolutions, maybe we would find them more in say the social revolutions of the 1960s where people did transform society. Which was a different kind of revolution, but perhaps that's a better example.

MB: I think if we think about it a little bit differently in terms of leadership. We have seen New Zealand take leadership internationally on a number of issues – our nuclear free policy – but we've also more recently made a mountain – given it its own legal personhood, and a river, so Te Urewera and Whanganui or Te Awa Tupua. So there's leadership I think, which is slightly different from a careful revolution - and both of those processes, to lead into that, were fraught. But I think they're signs of hope and examples where we can feel good about doing something internationally that's bold and different. So I think there are moments of time that should give us hope that something is possible.

KM: You've both got toolkits as appendices to your chapters – could you tell us what's in them and what you hope they will be used for?

MB: Well, my toolkit's mainly got questions in it, under each of the tikanga values that I picked out. as well as some of the Treaty principles. And then I've also drawn in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as a set of minimum standards that we have now internationally about how governments should be interacting and engaging with indigenous peoples. Alongside each of those I have some questions, mostly for policymakers, but also for communities thinking about: what should we be asking for? There's a proposal for something, a windfarm, or solar panels on the latest building here, or whatever it is. What are the types of questions that we should be thinking about if we're using a tika lens? What would the kinds of questions we might ask Council be? That's what mine involves.

DH: So there's ten principles in the checklist that Jonathan Boston mostly devised and I contributed to a little bit. I won't go through them all, but the intention very much was that policy is going to need to be done under urgency over the next ten years. One of the things with urgency is the importance of checklists; this is one of the ways to mitigate against some of the errors and poor judgment that is made in conditions of urgency. You know we have this myth of policymaking being done in a way of, analysing policy, and checking all of the options, and doing a sensitivity analysis, assessing the policy..

MB: Calm and rational, you mean.

DH: Yes, there's this perfect ideal of the cycle...

MB: When really it's "is there an election year coming up?" and "what do we need to rush through before Christmas?"

DH: Yes, exactly. The reality of policymaking is much more crisis management, constant crisis management. In a sense decisionmaking is always being done under urgency, the problem is it's not always the urgency that we would like. It's more urgency around looming political scandals or embarrassments. And that's often when policymaking is actually done, in finding these quick turnaround solutions that address crises that are occurring in the moment. And so having these checklists is very helpful because it gives the chance for some more considered judgment perhaps to enter the policymaking process and to make sure that policymakers are thinking around some of the potential secondary effects of their policy and not just focusing on that long term destination.

I think some of what's going on here is that this plea for emergency at the moment is a manifestation of the larger problem of a crisis of representation in democracies generally. Political decisionmakers are failing to represent the interests of all sorts of constituencies. They're failing to represent the interests of future people, they're failing to represent Māori. There's all sorts of other communities that are not being represented. And there *is* a large community, a majority of New Zealanders, who *are* concerned about climate change, and do want to see change happen. And so they're also a neglected constituency, that feel like they haven't been properly represented.

I sense that this call for emergency is this call for decisionmakers to be decisive in a way that they haven't been up until now. And while I have reservations that that's the right way of asking for that decisiveness – it is perfectly understandable that it's come to this. Because we've known about this problem at least since 1891, when Svante Arrhenius, who happens to be an ancestor of Greta Thunberg, the climate activist – he pulled together all the science around the global warming effect. And we've sat on that knowledge and done nothing really with it for many decades. And increasingly we *are* doing things with it – sometimes it's said we're doing nothing, that's not right either, we *are* making huge strides. I think of the conversation with farmers at the moment – it's easy to forget that even just 5 years ago there was massive denialism, whereas now the conversation is much more around "yes we accept that change is happening, and that we need to do something, but we're just disagreeing about how we do it. But that's a much better place to have the conversation. So, change is happening, and it will be of a revolutionary scale, that's inevitable; it's just how we manage that change.

MB: I don't know if anybody here attended the school climate change protests. I went with my children in Wellington, and I just felt like crying the whole way basically, because there are all these kids, nine and ten, and younger, going along, chanting. A) they did very well on the organising, and the chants – but B) they knew about the issues and were calling for that action. So that's kind of heartening, and very upsetting as well at the same time.

KM: I think that's a hopeful note to finish it on. Tēnā kōrua.

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