

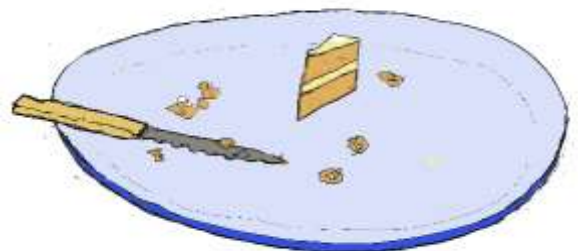
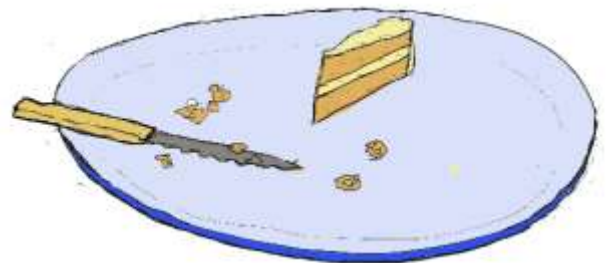
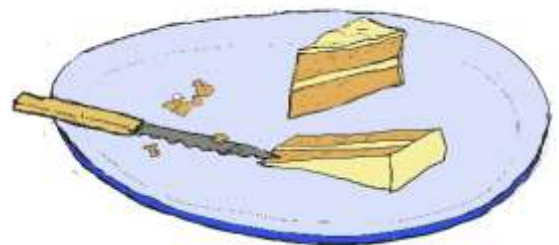
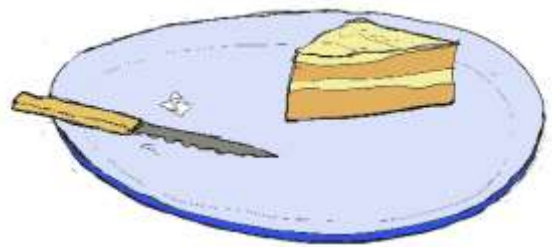


## Chapter 17

# The Last Piece Covid, Climate Change, Resistance and Blue Sky

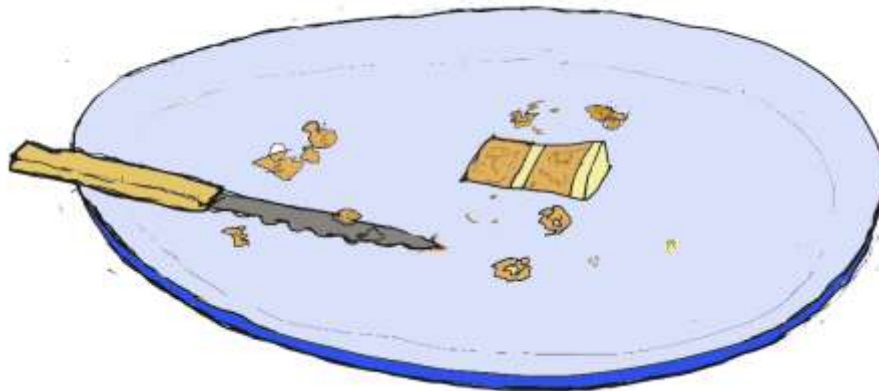
Over the years I have been interested in a particular social etiquette around the last piece of cake. When a group of friends are sitting around a table, everyone is happy to have a piece and maybe a second piece without much negotiation, but once there are only a few pieces left, people start looking and checking with others if they are right to have another piece. When it gets down to the last piece, there will be a lot of negotiation. More often than not people will be offering it to someone else and not wanting to take it themselves. It looks greedy to take the last piece. People are more focused on sharing when there is scarcity.

To resolve the standoff, someone will often cut the last piece in half and take half. The next person may cut it in half again to take a quarter and so on till the final bit is left on the plate. The message for me in this situation is that when there is scarcity, people are much more conscious of the needs of others and people do not want to ‘appear’ greedy with their peers. I emphasise ‘appear’ here because if the cake was not in the middle of the table and say instead on a side table, where you could take the last piece without being seen by others, some quietly would do so. I think you can tell a lot





about people's personalities and their concern for others, even their general political orientation by how they deal with the last piece.



I have seen research that shows in very poor communities, if someone comes into extra money they will often share the money around so as to maintain their position in the community, to remain in the same situation as everyone else. The sense and appearance of equality is a strong value. Poor people in these situations will often need the support of others in the future so it is important to maintain relationships. The alternative is to leave the community with their new wealth and start associating with similar more wealthy people. If people stay and don't share, they will be ostracized by the community. This is also what is predicted by my Network Theory.

At the other end of society, displays of wealth are a competitive tool to 'show off' to one's peers, to gain a bit of status or ascendance over them. Here the value of competition is much stronger and it is in opposition to the value of equality. When there is abundance, there is more greed and gluttony. People are proud of their wealth with obvious overt social displays with expensive cars and ostentatious homes. Capitalism is all about greed and inequality, it drives aspirations, ambitions and competition. The belief that there is abundance, enables those in power to continually reinforce and build the hierarchies of power and wealth. In more self-sufficient, subsistence communities, equality and looking after your neighbours is key to the survival of the whole group.



If we ran our institutions and government as if everything was the last piece, we would all be better off. This would involve a communitarian attitude even when there was abundance. We would not act unilaterally, but we would consult and check with others before consuming. We would make sure others have enough before we took more and we would always leave a piece for later, for the future. There would be more focus on equality, inequality would be seen as a bad thing. Imagine around the Qantas dinner table if their CEO, Alan Joyce took half the cake for himself and left the other 20 guests to share the remaining cake as happens with income distribution there. Very poor manners.

If ‘the last piece’ culture was applied to the whole of our lives we would have sustainability. We would be following the Aboriginal tradition of only taking what is really needed and ensuring the whole of the environment is cared for, as the environment is part of your family.

In 2020 the coronavirus pandemic hit Australia and the globe. It led to some amazing value shifts from our leaders. It was like they were sitting around the table looking at the last piece of cake, and sharing became the goal. Our State and National leaders kept saying “We are all in it together”. In Australia we were not hit initially by the virus as badly as other countries and the commitment to sharing quickly waned and our leaders were back plotting a path back to abundance and greed.

The virus as bad as it has been globally is still a mild forerunner of what will happen if climate change is not properly addressed. Climate change could lead to massive shortages of food and other disastrous consequences for life on the globe. We will all be in trouble if capitalism is left to run amuck, consuming the global cake with no regard to future generations.

### The virus

In 2020 the terrible situations that developed in other countries led Australian Governments to prepare for the likelihood of our health systems being unable to cope, and for many deaths. As we are in our 60’s I worried about Michelle and my own situation, but more so for my Father who is in his 90’s and for our Daughter who was a few months pregnant. From all the warnings and reports it



felt like we were about to be hit with a health tsunami. It felt very likely there would be victims in our own social circle. We all needed to bunker down. We prepared to minimize our social contact. I stopped playing golf, tennis, and bike riding with my friends. We developed processes to allow LOCO to continue in the safest way possible: moving to 2 shifts, so workers had more room, separating work spaces and wearing masks. In the wider community work places were closed, people lost their jobs and others were forced to work from home. Schools were closed and parents had to look after their kids' education. It was a very stressful desperate time for so many.

During these weeks waiting for the disaster, two very opposite things happened. One was that people began to look out for their neighbours and friends, and to actively encourage others to do so. It was apparent we would all need to support each other to get through the disaster. The other was that panic buying started and people were fighting over scarce resources. This panic fed on itself and soon the supermarket shelves were clear of flour, pasta, toilet paper and hand sanitizer. People were looking after their immediate family.

A similar thing happened at the National level. The conservative federal government whose ideology was for small government and to avoid interference in the free enterprise system, began to reach out across the political divide and to unions. They decided to run a huge deficit to try to keep the economy going. They kept saying 'we are all in it together' and the need for everyone to look out for each other, and the importance of community. They were sounding and acting more like a Labor or Socialist government.<sup>1</sup>

Pre the crisis, conservative politicians tended to argue as if homelessness, poverty and unemployment are things that happen to the underserving poor, and generally blamed the victim. In this crisis, it seemed conservatives realized even they and other "deserving" people could get caught up in such situations. This produced

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to hear the interventionist rhetoric of the current conservative government. This same government let car manufacturing in Australia die, saying it is not government responsibility to keep propping up an uncompetitive industry (despite other overseas manufacturers being propped up by their governments).

In many ways it was lucky for Labor that the coalition was in government. The Labor party would have been criticized by the right wing press for years following such action, for taking the country 'recklessly in to debt', just as they were when Labor provided a much smaller and successful stimulus during the global financial crisis.





a change in attitude and even the dole payments were temporarily doubled. It is like they realized how difficult it would be for deserving families to survive on what was paid to the underserving poor before the crisis. Not surprisingly as the discomforts of social distancing restrictions started to be felt and people got acclimatized to the daily death toll the conservatives began to get rid of their newly found socialist sensibilities.

Our leaders angrily berated the panic buyers, trying to reassure people shortages would be resolved, and that it was selfish and “un-Australian” to panic buy. Internationally there was a shortage of face masks and protective clothing for health care workers. Two mining magnates via their contacts secured huge quantities of resources from China and they were applauded by the Government for looking after Australia’s interests. We were all in it together, but apparently that only meant Australians. Bugger the other poor countries that now would miss out as Australia ensured its own stock pile. A bit of national panic buying and hypocrisy from our leaders. “We have to look after Australians first”, the same attitude taken by the toilet paper hoarders, “we have to look after our family first”.

Another anomaly with the conservative response was their extremely angry reaction to hearing some people were profiting buying and selling toilet paper. How could they be so immoral when everyone is in need, and yet is this not the very heart and soul of the market economy that they normally promoted? What was different, perhaps, was now the rich were missing out on supplies, and this was simply not right. Whereas, when the poor go hungry because food is too expensive, that’s just the way of the world, it’s not immoral. Our attitudes and values are so radically different when we can identify with the victim, as opposed to blaming the victim.

In a crisis, we have seen there can be a shift to more concern for others and more community, but it can also lead to selfishness and withdrawal. This applies at both the personal level and at the national level. What can also happen is that there is a bigger gap between what is espoused and what goes on in practice. I suspect that while the leaders were clamping down on panic buying they were probably also ensuring their own personal stocks were adequate for anything



unexpected. There have been lots of examples of politicians getting caught out breaking their own social distancing rules.

While the ‘we are all in it together’ mantra was encouraging, it quickly became apparent not everyone was actually involved in that “we”. Some people were excluded from the more generous forms of government ‘job keeper’ help or any help at all, like casual workers and overseas students. When pressure came (from the Labor Party) to include other people in the benefits, the treasurer responded by saying there has to be a limit, and “it is all tax payers money”. So there is still a deserving ‘we’ and the underserving ‘others’. The cake was cut in to 18 pieces but there was 20 people needing a piece.

Fortunately being an island assisted us in controlling the import of the virus, and by acting relatively quickly, the impact to date has been far less than what was expected and seen in most other countries. The actions knowingly had a big impact on the economy but it was done to save lives. Everyone was at risk but particularly older people and people with underlying health conditions. This meant the virus would impact on all sections of society it was gender, class and race blind. Consequently I think this meant our leaders could see their own families effected by personal tragedy and so they acted to protect lives and sacrifice the economy. I wonder what the reaction would have been, if say, the virus only effected black people or Asian people. I am hopeful they would have acted, but sadly maybe not anywhere near to the same extent.

While a lot of older people have died we avoided the expected tsunami across the country and health services have been able to cope. While second waves have occurred, compared to other countries and what was possible, it was not as bad as expected. Not surprisingly the government has shifted back to their normal language and the need to look after the budget and tax payers’ money. Rather than going for eradication of the virus the conservative government was keen to get the economy moving again. It seems a few deaths should not get in the way of restoring the economy. Their objective has been to support and nurse the capitalist system through the recession, rather than nursing vulnerable older people. The focus also shifted from support for those unemployed, to supporting business owners with the false rationalization that the benefits will eventually



trickily down to everyone. Rather than continuing to support the poor they are now trying to use the crisis to bring in tax cuts for the rich.

It is difficult to write about the Pandemic as the situation changes so rapidly and in 2021 the delta variant of the virus put half the country back in to lockdown and it spread more rapidly effecting younger people more seriously as well. Effective vaccines were now available and vulnerable groups were prioritized but the anxiety in the wider community grew as the federal government has failed to secure enough of what turned out to be the best vaccine (the one with the lowest side effects). This saw different groups competing to be seen as a priority. Two different approaches also emerged with some pushing for everyone to get vaccinated to save lives while other were wanting to get most vaccinated so that business and the economy could avoid future lockdowns. It seems like in the future there will be a tension between the vaccinated and unvaccinated as business pushes to reopen as soon as possible. The unvaccinated whether because of a lack of supply or choice will be then be exposed. Again the blame will shift to this group and the “we are all in it together mantra” will be replaced by “individual choice and responsibility”. It will be a case of you are late for the party so why should we save you any cake.

One thing the pandemic has highlighted is how unsustainable the free enterprise system is. How dependent it is on Government intervention. Capitalism clearly is ill-equipped to self-manage its own progression unless there is constant growth. Once the free enterprise plane stalls, it heads in to a downward spiral. Selfishness and self-interest lead to the quick collapse of markets as people panic and try to get what they can before the final crash. We have never actually had a successful free market system. It only survives because it is underpinned by Government support and guidance to manage the overall economic conditions. Like a selfish self-centred teenager, when times are good ‘capitalist elites’ wants the government to get out of the way to remove constrains on free enterprise, so they can make bigger profits, when times are tough they need assistance and protection from their parents.

Crises like the pandemic and the global financial crisis help to remind people about the problems of the system we have and the value of family and friends. While governments will return post pandemic to the normal economic growth



rhetoric, some of the community spirit and concern will persist in the wider community. One thing that happens in a crisis is that people start to get more interested in self-sufficiency and growing things for themselves. Seeds and seedlings were also part of the panic buying. The Yoorala St community garden saw an increase in people interested in having a plot. This interest wanes, but hopefully some interest and knowledge about self-sufficiency persists. With each new crisis or incident more people decided they had better get prepared for the next event. This preparation is very wise as we have a crisis much more significant than the virus bearing down on us, climate change.

The virus has highlighted the nature of our culture, the extremes of selfishness and caring and also the desperate need for people to protect their own family and themselves in a crisis. The virus has transformed the economy driving it in to a recession and commanding governments to get more involved as it turns out capitalism left to its own devices would spiral down like the collapse of a multi-level marketing scheme. Capitalism and Socialism seem to need each other but they don't like to advertise their secret liaison.

### Climate change

We are already in a climate crisis, impacts have not been sudden but slowly increasingly each year over the last few decades. If rising temperatures cannot be kept to tolerable levels it will lead to a crisis far, far, worse than the pandemic. Rising sea levels could force millions of poor people in low lying areas around the world to seek new homes creating a surge of environmental refugees. Heat waves will kill people particularly older and poor people. Rising temperatures seriously threaten the whole ecosystem and with that our food supply from land and from the sea. There will be more extreme weather and bush fires and cyclones will be supercharged with the extra heat energy.

If nothing is done in the future the clear expectation is that within a hundred years there would be a catastrophic collapse of ecosystems, and with that, human society. It's hard to know what life would survive. Governments around the world have begun to take some action to try to prevent the worst effects. While preventative action has occurred, temperatures are still rising. Unfortunately the





slowness of some developed and rich countries like Australia have greatly weakened global efforts and makes a global catastrophe still a real possibility.



We can expect some similar responses to the climate crisis as we have seen in the pandemic, with moves by some, to greater community, and by others to more selfishness. Australia's poor response, given we are per capita one of the biggest carbon emitters, is very disappointing and highlights an extremely selfish response at the national level. Our selfishness is highlighted by existing common arguments from the conservative parties and their supporters that: we are a small country by population, and whatever we do will not make a big difference; or that if we don't sell our coal to developing countries then someone else will. Australia is clearly trying to profit from our coal reserves while making the situation worse for everyone. These same arguments are made by individuals to avoid taking any responsibility for changing their own behaviour.

What a difference there would be, if the same pandemic arguments about us "all being in it together", and all having to sacrifice and change our behaviour for the



safety of all, was also applied to climate change. We would now be in a very dire pandemic situation if Australia had not used lockdowns to slow the virus. We would have had thousands of deaths. Instead our leaders listened to the expert ‘scientific’ advice and acted to save lives first. For the last decade the conservative parties have sought to deny or avoid the scientific advice about the dangers of climate change.

While the conservative federal government has adopted this selfish response, there has also been a very strong opposition from many groups pleading for more action. Young people have a vested interest in minimizing the harmful effects of climate change and they in particular have been leading some great campaigns encouraging their parents and grandparents to take more action. There is a great variety of different proposed options for responding to climate change from trying to reduce rising temperatures to finding ways to adapt to them. Those seeking more action, vary from those who believe we can continue to have similar lifestyles and economy by relying on great use of renewable energy (like the Labor Party) to the other extreme (like Extinction rebellion) who argue everything will have to change and that the capitalist system is actually the core of the problem. Part of the denial of conservatives about climate change is I think that perhaps they actually realize at a ‘deeper’ level their philosophy of constant economic growth is part of the problem. They maybe know it is wrong but can’t bring themselves to admit they were wrong and adjust their lives and thinking. Denial is easier and convenient to maintain their lifestyle in the short term.

It is not going to be enough to just change a few of our carbon using behaviours, our world views also need to be reformulated to recognize ecological constraints. The belief that we can control and dominate the environment is the reason we are heading for a climate catastrophe. We cannot expect that we will be able to make some small adjustments and continue on the same economic path. We need a radical change of direction toward a sustainable, non-growth orientated economy.

I have been promoting a flatter, egalitarian, self-sufficient, community based society for other reasons. I think it is better for everyone’s overall happiness, both rich and poor. Not surprisingly, it is also a recipe for a low carbon, sustainable society. Some like the Labor party argue it is possible to keep the same economic model and just fuel it with more renewables. This would require



a lot of government intervention to end coal mining and other carbon producing industries and or some miraculous technological advance to achieve very cheap renewable energy. Even if the capitalist elites allowed such Governments to exist, (we saw the massive campaign waged to get rid of the Julia Gillard and the Greens' carbon tax) there are many other ecological disasters heading our way beyond climate change.

If we did have an endless supply of cheap renewable energy, we could see economic growth accelerate and with it, all its other externalities. We are already seeing the dangerous accumulation of micro plastics in our marine environment and animals. The insatiable need for more and more consumption to support our material lifestyles, leads to more forest clearing to make palm oil, grow cattle and food and to build more housing. The loss of habitat is leading to the demise of more and more species including our insect populations essential for the pollination of our food crops. So even without climate change, there are so many environmental reasons to turn away from our high levels of consumption, and towards a simpler more self-sufficient lifestyle. We should be improving the world for future generations but instead we are leaving less and less resources and more and more ecological dangers. We need to share the cake with future generations.

All these ecological problems provide some pressure to move towards the sort of societal change I am advocating, but unfortunately there is not a 'material necessity' that will move things in this direction. It is possible to imagine the response by the capitalist elites in the world will be to ensure their own survival at the expense of others. Things could get even more unequal, selfish and violent with the elites living in climate controlled mega cities while the rest of the poor are locked out to fend in an increasingly hostile world. I know this sounds like science fiction, but it is actually already happening. Rich countries like Australia increasingly air condition their environment, emitting carbon and making the world hotter for the poor people all over the world. So we will need to prepare for some very maladaptive responses to climate change as the rich try to hold on to their wealth and power as environments and markets collapse. To ensure a better society will involve a concerted effort to steer things in a positive direction.



The history of global attempts to tackle climate change provides some insight in to the difficulties of achieving positive change with some rich countries blocking international agreements. Nationally, vested interests have done the same here, fuelling climate denialism. People are reluctant to change their own lifestyles, leaving the hard work to others or the future.

Sometimes people are very happy to support macro changes by government, but see little benefit in making their own personal changes. It is however the same ‘cop out’, as our national government saying whatever Australia does will not make a big difference globally. Sacrifice and leadership is required at all levels, and action at one level will encourage action at the other.

A lot of research has gone in to how to encourage more individual and government action on climate change. I want now to reflect quickly on my own efforts to tackle climate change and see what insights can be gleaned from my own experience.

### *My own campaigning*

Given how long Climate Change has been talked about I am embarrassed that it was not as significant an issue for me earlier. Maybe this was, in part, because I felt the direction of my own long held goals of self-sufficiency and a more equal community based society have always been in accord with climate change actions.

Over the last few years I have felt the need to do a bit more than this. I will discuss a particular action I initiated called Blue Sky soon. But the increased concern also lead me to be a regular attender at rallies, to add my number to those pushing for change. I have particularly liked supporting the rallies organized by the school students. I think these have had a very strong impact. In 2019 we joined a local group which regularly waves climate change action placards on Waterworks Rd in peak hour traffic to help encourage support for the student rallies. These local campaigns are a good way to remind the passing people to think about the issues, and to allow them to voice their support by honking their horns. In many ways the biggest benefit however is actually for the campaigners,





as the need for consistency encourages the campaigners to take even more personal steps to lower their own consumption. It also provides a stimulus to be more vocal with friends and family and to encourage them to join the campaign. Action encourages other action. This has certainly been the case for me with several of our friends and family joining in.

I know I can and should do more myself in relation to my own consumption and that it is good to set an example. I hope I am getting better and better at reusing, recycling and reducing my consumption of energy and energy consuming products. Our commitment to organics is in part because organic agriculture uses more manual labour and less fossil fuels in production. Organic farming also stores carbon in the soil as opposed the chemical farming which uses very high levels of fossil fuels and degrades soils of carbon. We don't have many holidays and when we do we don't travel far. I don't fly and I have never been overseas. We have minimized our meat consumption. Our scraps feed our chooks. Michelle clothes are almost entirely second hand. Over the years Michelle and I have planted thousands of trees all over south east Queensland at our various homes and also with community projects like Balaangala, YCSG, Northey St and so on. Our current Bellata St house had air conditioning installed when we purchased it. It was too expensive to have it removed, but we have never turned it on. One of the air conditioner units is now hidden by an art work which depicts the increase in temperature in Australia over the last 80 years.



### *Blue Sky*

One special project of mine warrants some mention. I had the idea for a social media campaign before the 2013 election. The Coalition parties were campaigning to remove the Carbon Tax. The idea was for supporters to place a piece of blue cloth outside their home as a declaration of support for action on climate change to their neighbours and passers-by. I had hoped that if people



noticed these blue rags appearing in their neighbourhood it would lead others to wonder what was going on, encouraging their curiosity to find out and in doing so, recognize the ground swell of support around them . Hopefully, encouraging them to join in.

People were asked to post a photo of themselves with their blue cloth and post it on a Facebook page, I set up for the purpose. I thought it was an easy way for people to show support. The project was called ‘Blue Sky’. I had no experience with social media, not having used Facebook. So it took a while to learn how to manage the page. I hesitated a lot before doing all of this and I was quite anxious the day the page started. I really thought it would go viral. Being shy I was worried that I might get calls from media outlets once it took off. I did not need to worry. It actually required an awful lot of encouragement (sometimes badgering) to get some friends and family to join in.



Picture of facebook page

Slowly the number of participants built up to 60. Blue Sky did encourage some to be more active and it provided an extra avenue for their own campaigning. Several supporters agreed to hand out flyers about Blue Sky at a Climate Rally. I developed a logo and made some T-shirts for people these to wear. The rally lead to a few extra photos but it did not go viral. I also spoke to the Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC) hoping a young person might take it on to get it all moving, but while supportive they were already immersed in their own campaigns.

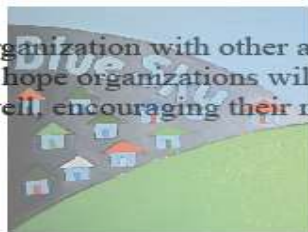




**Blue Sky** supporters believe in strong action on climate change and in particular, keeping a price on carbon pollution. The supporters of **Blue Sky** have demonstrated their support by attaching a sky blue rag or some other recycled material to their front fence, balcony, gate, door or a tree on the footpath.

For more information visit the Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/BlueSkyMovement> .

**Blue Sky** is not an organization with other agendas beyond the above. However we hope organizations will appreciate and support the idea as well, encouraging their members to take part in **Blue Sky**.



Despite not going viral, as hoped (and feared), the page was successful in other ways. It certainly got me on the campaign trail, talking to people I would not talk normally talk to. I was very pleased several of our own immediate neighbours also joined in. Similarly, it got those that joined to Facebook page talking more to people around them. I know a few in particular really used the opportunity to do more campaigning with their friends. So for all the people that added their photos and the wider group of people that “liked”, the Page it was another thing encouraging action and commitment. The Federal election however went the way





of the climate deniers and so The Blue Sky page slowly went in to hibernation. It was nice to still see some blue rags out the front of people's homes many months later.

While feeling good about my participation in these direct campaigns, I think my main efforts to work on climate change are actually more indirect and arise from my attempts to encourage and build flatter more community based organizations and co-operatives over the last 40 years. Climate change for me is another manifestation or consequence of the hierarchical structures we have in society built on ambition, self-interest and a need for control over others and the environment. Trying to establish a different sort of society is about addressing climate change in a much more wholistic, long term fashion.

In all my efforts to move society in this different direction, I have been able to use arguments and some evidence to try to influence people and build support, but ultimately what is really required is a value change. I am appealing to people's ethics and emotions, saying we will all be happier. I can argue selfishness leads to the harm of others and also, in the long term, to the selfish person. These are moral, value arguments encouraging people to think more about others and less about themselves. As moral arguments they tend only to be successful with people who share a similar morality.

What has been very different in arguing about climate change is the decades of scientific research supporting action and highlighting the very real current and future dangers of inaction. It is not just a value judgement about a desired society, like the Pandemic it is a life and death situation where science has been able to accurately predict what will happen if we don't act. The recent extreme bush fires in Australia being an example.

With all this scientific evidence, you would think there would be little debate, but unfortunately we are still in a situation where the leaders of our conservative Parties have been denying or down playing the evidence, painting it as a left wing, ABC, weather bureau conspiracy. Despite overwhelming agreement in the scientific community in Australia over the last decade, the debate around climate change has still been about values. Some sections of society preferring to rely on religious teachings for example. There are those who would normally listen to science but the evidence is not in their interest so they go in to denial. Self-





interest “trumps’ truth (or ‘Donald Trumps’ truth). The Coal industry, the (Coal)alition and the capitalist elite more generally can see their wealth and power will be threatened by a less consumerist society. I assume this is why Rupert Murdoch has played such a powerful role through his newspapers in supporting climate denialism. The science moved people (including our leaders) in relation to the Pandemic but even with the virus, we have a people including federal politicians, supporting conspiracy notions that it is a hoax, or down playing its seriousness, including leaders of various countries. Self-interest encourages people to promote these conspiracy theories.

For a great many people ‘facts’ simply don’t matter. Change in relation to climate change will require a ‘value’ shift. While science may sway some, for many any change will be resisted as it requires a shift of values and with that a change of identity. I know just how hard it is to get people to change their ideas and values. People may be willing to change or extend their thinking but generally only if it fits with their identity. People will take on lots of new arguments and ideas if it supports their own position. I can now see the success of my whole approach to change really relies on being able to actually change people’s ideas and so their identity. I have always know this was a difficult goal, but thinking about climate change, I am now realizing just how difficult this is. The sorts of changes to society I am advocating far eclipse what is necessary to keep temperatures from rising. They involve changes to our political systems and income distribution. Given the lack of success despite the massive campaigns and support for action on climate change, the reality of what is possible for the very much less supported position of mine, is a reality check.

To make the task even bigger, when I think back through my own life, back through the chapters of this book I can see how I have been applauding myself in lots of ways that I have remained fairly consistent in my values and attitudes. While I have extended and developed my ideas. I feel like I have changed very little. This is a bit of a rude shock for me. How can I expect others to change when I have changed so little? How can I be expecting to change others values when I have such little personal experience of how values can dramatically shift. I either need to temper my expectations about what level of change is actually possible or to learn more about how to shift people’s values and ideas.



Having that sort of power to change values raises ethical concerns, but parking these for a moment, we can see evidence of value shifts in a crisis. We saw our conservative leaders have a temporary socialist shift in the pandemic. I have some friends who in response to a major life crisis have altered their values in significant ways, becoming more open to lifestyles previously frowned upon. Maybe when the water is lapping at their doorsteps, our conservative leaders might change their minds. Karl Marx recognized the power of a crisis to lead to change. He saw Capitalism as inevitably heading to a crisis, a crisis that would lead workers to unite and take over the means of production. Certainly climate change unchecked will lead to a social, political and economic and ecological crisis globally and will force some changes. Unlike Marx however I don't think there is a determinism pointing to a new and better future as a result. While a crisis is sometimes a powerful tool for positive change it is also often a stimulus for further disaster, with increased selfishness and annihilation. Lots of species have faced huge crises, some have adapted and survived, but many have not. Some only survive in a much weakened state. Homo sapiens have proven to be adaptable but maybe we are too adaptable. We have grown in population and so ravaged our environment that we could end up extinct.

In any case what are the possible directions we can take to move through and escape this crisis? What are our alternatives? The Capitalist system of economic growth and competition has become so dominant that there are not many constructive clear alternatives in the minds of the general community. While capitalism has been criticized, alternatives like a socialist state or alternative lifestyles are nowhere near as popular as they were last century and have fallen in to disrepute as a result of totalitarian actions and economic failure. The current criticism of capitalism comes from many directions but there are few alternatives being put forward. Radicals today compared to the 1960s have become critics without an alternative. The relativism of postmodern thinking has become part of the problem, "undermining" not only the existing system but any alternate options proposed as well. There is no acceptable "truth" upon which any actions can confidently be based. Everything becomes 'problematic'.

Unlike the Marxists I don't think we should be relying on, or seeking a crisis as a solution. We need to try to improve things before hand and also to have enough good options in place before a crisis, so that people can choose to join these



positive options. So moving away from a reliance on a crisis to change values means we are back to the very difficult task of shifting people's values and the ethical issues involved.

### Changing values

I mentioned that there are serious ethical questions in relation to better understanding how to change people's values. This sort of information is exactly what big business and political parties want to grow their own power. Over the last decade the giant digital companies have been able to access everyone's data and from that to find better ways to manipulate people's desires and wants. Governments have been able to use social media to influence elections in foreign countries. It's scary to imagine just how far this digital influence could perhaps develop

I am troubled about the ethics of developing better interpersonal techniques for attitude change. If I could work out a better, more effective technique, this would actually be very dangerous. Others could use such techniques for their own ends to become super salespeople or brain washers. Such techniques would also be able to be adapted by Governments (and the big digital companies) to control their citizens. If attitudes were easier to shift then our society would be even more open to the manipulation by the established elites. Even aside from all these dangers, the desire to change others attitudes is actually a very controlling orientation

Rather than wanting to be better at attitude change I have decided it is better to assist people to resisting the influence of others. We need to be able to help people see the ways their desires, needs and values are already being manipulated and to actively resist this. Rather than trying to change people the focus of this approach is to get to know people and their values and concerns and to work together on the shared values that are being threatened by those in power.

### Resistance

This orientation accepts that it is hard to change people's values and ideals. It accepts that the elites have the data and skill to try to do this much more than is



available to individuals. Rather than supporting these controlling techniques, we need mutual relationships where people work together.

This involves trying to listen and learn about others (not changing them), trying to encourage and support their ability to see how powerful elites try to manipulate others and their desires and behaviour. It also involves listening and trying to understand what the other values, what is meaningful to them. With this understanding it is then possible to work together on shared values where they are being threatened. I realize this behaviour does not always come easy to me and I quickly slip in to seeing myself as being on the right track where I want other to join me on my track. I need to begin genuinely trying to better understand the others goals and motivations and to leave aside my own and not rushing too quickly to the first shared idea. The others ideas need to be understood as a whole and this takes time and patience. I am reminded how effective my friends Mal McKenna and Mal McCouat where both at doing this with me and others.

If these shared values can be worked on together, it then makes it also possible for others to join in. Building such a group is very helpful for achieving change but also to enable each to help the others resist the societal pressures working against these shared values. These simple ideas are the basis of a lot of community work theory, but unfortunately my impression watching many community workers over the years is that while they espouse such ideals, their actual behaviour is more controlling. The key is to spend time listening and building a mutual relationship from the outset. I have benefited from watching Michelle do just this on behalf of Balaangala with First Nation's people.

Establishing these mutual relationships in a little group allows this group to swim against the tide. It creates a little lifeboat of alternate activity moving against the flow. It provides an example to encourage other like-minded people to join or to form a new group.

The other critical part of an effective resistance is that it is not just about ideas, it must be material. Values are much more resilient and meaningful if that are manifest in actual behaviour. Having a practical embodied examples of the espoused values makes them much more understandable and accessible. It is good talking about a new future economic system, but it is better to try to experiment with a desired model now, learning and fine-tuning in practice.





Talking about caring for country is one thing but having a practical way like the Balaangala garden to enact this value is much better.

These life boats are needed everywhere but in particular we need some that are in the centre of the system not hidden away where no one notices. They need to carry the seeds of a new society so they need to be a demonstration in practice now not just an wish about something for the future. If there are lots of lifeboats working together against the dominant stream this will raise concerns and there will be all sorts of things done to try to disrupt and damage these lifeboats. So the resistance will need to scale up to a new level and the need to support each other will be magnified. These lifeboats need to be able to deal with the expected resistance while maintaining their same values. In this way the method of change must be consistent with the new society. The means are the ends. The next chapter will expand on these ideas and this direction for change.

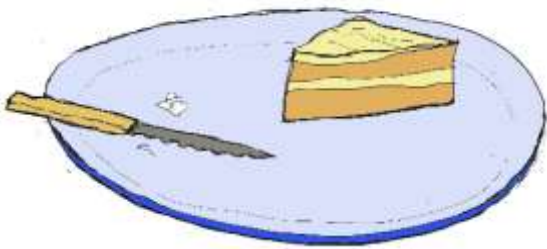
### Conclusion

Early Aboriginal society probably learnt lessons from experience that taking too much from the environment created future problems and so altered their approach to be sustainable. This requires people and leaders who can see beyond the current generation to look long term many generations down the track. Unfortunately our political systems of governance are set up on a very short 'election to election' time frame. If we thought the cake had to last several days instead of just for morning tea a different approach to consumption would be evident. Maybe we would only bring out a  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the cake. From now on I am going to try to think about everything being the last piece and approach my consumption in this way.

While this is good and moral and will make me feel better it won't change the behaviour of others. How can I encourage the 'last piece' orientation amongst others, especially the rich? The Pandemic and Climate Crisis could encourage more sharing but we have already seen how more selfishness is also a possible response. As soon as the crisis is over, we can expect a quick return to capitalist self-interest.



Change will requires shifts of attitude and values but to try to force such change is to repeat the controlling behaviour that I am trying to avoid, so rather than being a change agent, what I am on about is better described as resistance where with like-minded people we try to avoid the influence of the controlling elites and maintain our connection to the desired values of caring, sharing, equality, consensus and sustainability. In the process creating some life boats that manifest the values desired in real practical ways, so that when there is a crisis there are some positive directions or leads for individuals and society to turn towards.



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