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The Social Movement for Climate Action in Australia

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The Problem

How can sociologists help the climate action movement to
addressing the discrepancy between government inaction and
science-based community concern?

Moyer (2001) on Social Movements

- ★ collective actions in which the populace is alerted, educated and mobilized, sometimes over years and decades, to challenge the powerholders and the whole society to redress social problems or grievances and restore critical social values
- ★ social movements are a powerful means for ordinary people to successfully create positive social change, particularly when the formal channels of democratic political participation are not working and obstinate powerful elites prevail.



Failure of Government Action: Howard Gov't

- ★ Greenhouse mitigation policy determined by vested interests, 'Greenhouse Mafia' – sources Clive Hamilton (2007) *Scorcher*; Guy Pearce (2007) *High & Dry*; Sharon Beder (2000) *Global Spin*.
- ★ Result was:
 - no greenhouse target;
 - starvation of renewable energy research;
 - tiny Mandatory Renewable Energy Target;
 - token demonstration projects e.g. Solar Cities and one big solar power station;
 - big funding for coal with CCS

Failure of Government Action: Rudd Gov't

- ★ Excellent promises and symbolism
 - Ratified Kyoto
 - Set longterm target for 2050, although modest by today's standards
 - Promised to match resources for renewable energy with those for coal + CCS
- ★ Almost no implementation for renewable energy in 2008
- ★ Big funding for coal power with CCS in 2008 onwards

Status of Rudd Federal Gov't Election Promises

- ★ Ratified Kyoto Protocol immediately, but failed to support strong international target at Bali
- ★ Set long-term Australian greenhouse target of 60% reduction in emissions by 2050 (at least 80% needed)
- ★ Promised \$500M to renewable energy deployment over 7 years, but allocated nothing to solar, wind or biomass in 2008-09 budget
- ★ Promised \$150M over 4 years for renewable energy research, including \$100M for solar, but allocated nothing in 2008-09 budget
- ★ Promised to increase Mandatory Renewable Energy Target to 20% of electricity by 2020, but implementation delayed in COAG until 2009 or beyond
- ★ Limited residential solar electricity market with a \$100,000 means test for the \$8000 rebate; delayed feed-in tariff proposal in COAG

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Status of Rudd Federal Gov't Election Promises

- ★ Distanced itself from key recommendations of its own Garnaut Climate Change Review on emissions trading:
 - 100% of emission permits should be auctioned
 - No 'compensation' to coal-fired electricity generators

State Governments

Still focused on new fossil-fuelled power stations and coal mines; privatisation of electricity industry; more roads; more parking; little support for public transport (except in WA) or cycling

Public Opinion in Australia

- ★ Hundreds of climate action groups formed since 2005
- ★ Exit poll of marginal electorates conducted by ARG for Climate Institute in Nov 2007
 - Climate change 3rd most important issue distinguishing major parties
 - For Labor voters, climate change 2nd most important issue.
- ★ Auspoll conducted for Climate Institute in Oct 2008
 - Only 28% think Labor is 'party better able to handle climate change'.
 - 58% couldn't distinguish between climate policies of major parties
 - Although public concern about climate change decreased slightly since March 2008 (89%), it's still very high (82%), despite financial crisis

How to Explain Discrepancy between Gov't Inaction and Public Opinion

- ★ Vested interests in coal, oil, aluminium, steel, cement, motor vehicles, forestry and agriculture
- ★ Also influence of some trade unions, e.g. CFMEU favours new dirty coal power **and** renewable energy
- ★ Economic system and associated ideology that promotes endless economic (i.e. consumption) growth and makes the public pay for externalities

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Is Social Change Achieved by Individual or Collective Action?

- ★ *The Hundredth Monkey* is simplistic thinking
- ★ Individuals acting by example in their own homes have limited impact
- ★ Individuals can be important as leaders, motivators and champions of social change (e.g. Gandhi, Wilberforce, Martin Luther King, Ray Anderson, Al Gore – see Right Livelihood Awards)
- ★ Individual champions are valuable but not essential (e.g. collapse of Soviet empire; anti-nuclear power movements)
- ★ Groups carry much more weight with power-holders, the media and the general public

There is Extensive Sociological Literature on Social Movements, but...

- ★ “My research on social movements showed me just how little social scientists have to say about strategy. Over the years many protesters have asked me what they might read to help them make better decisions. I had nothing to suggest beyond Saul Alinsky...We knew almost nothing, I discovered, about how activists (and others) make strategic decisions, much less how they might make good ones.” (sociologist Jasper, 2006)
- ★ “The most relevant theories relate to the school of new social movements on values and paradigms, incrementalism, pressure groups, discourse, organizations and the Movement Action Plan.” (environmental studies scholars Hall & Taplin 2008)
- ★ Greenpeace and other environmental NGOs recommend MAP (Kennedy, 2004)

The Movement Action Plan A Strategic Framework for Social Movements

- ★ Bill Moyer, JoAnn McAllister, Mary Lou Finley & Steven Soifer (2001) *Doing Democracy: The MAP Model for Organizing Social Movements*. New Society Publishers.

Movement Action Plan is based on the concept of participatory democracy.

Supplemented by tactics drawn from e.g.:

- ★ Gene Sharp (1973) *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*

Movement Action Plan: Eight Stages

(Source: Bill Moyer)

1. Normal times
2. Prove the failure of official institutions
3. Ripening conditions
4. Take-off
5. Perception of failure
6. Majority public opinion
7. Success
8. Continuing the struggle

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MAP Stage 1: Normal Times

- ★ A critical social problem exists that violates widely held values.
- ★ Power-holders support problem. Their official policies express widely held values, but the real operating policies violate those values.
- ★ Public is unaware of the problem and so supports power-holders.
- ★ Problem/policies not a public issue.

MAP Stage 2: Prove Failure of Official Institutions

- ★ Many new local opposition groups
- ★ They use official channels – courts, government channels commissions, hearings, etc. – to find and demonstrate that they don't work.
- ★ They become experts; do research.

MAP Stage 3: Ripening Conditions

- ★ Recognition of problem and victims grows
- ★ Public sees victims' faces
- ★ More active local groups
- ★ Protests
- ★ 20–30% of public opposes power-holder policies

Note: Victims could be Arctic ice-cap; Great Barrier Reef; polar bears; Pacific islanders; future generations

Protest Group at Kingsnorth Coal-Fired Power Station, UK



MAP Stage 4: Take-Off

- ★ Trigger event (could be environmental or political)
- ★ Dramatic nonviolent actions/campaigns around the country
- ★ Actions show public that conditions and policies violate widely held values
- ★ Problem put on social agenda
- ★ New social movement takes off rapidly
- ★ 40% of public oppose current conditions/policies

MAP Stage 5: Perception of Failure

- ★ Movement sees its goals unachieved
- ★ It sees power-holders unchanged
- ★ It sees numbers down at demonstrations
- ★ Despair, hopelessness, burnout, dropout. It seems movement has ended
- ★ Emergence of negative rebel

MAP Stage 6: Majority Public Opinion

- ★ Majority oppose present conditions and power-holder policies
- ★ Movement shows how problem & policies affect all sectors of society
- ★ Involves mainstream citizens & institutions in addressing problem
- ★ Puts problem on political agenda
- ★ Promotes alternatives
- ★ Power-holders demonise alternatives and activism
- ★ Movement counters each new power-holder strategy
- ★ Promotes paradigm shift, not just reforms
- ★ Retrigger event may happen, re-enacting Stage 4 briefly

MAP Stage 7: Success

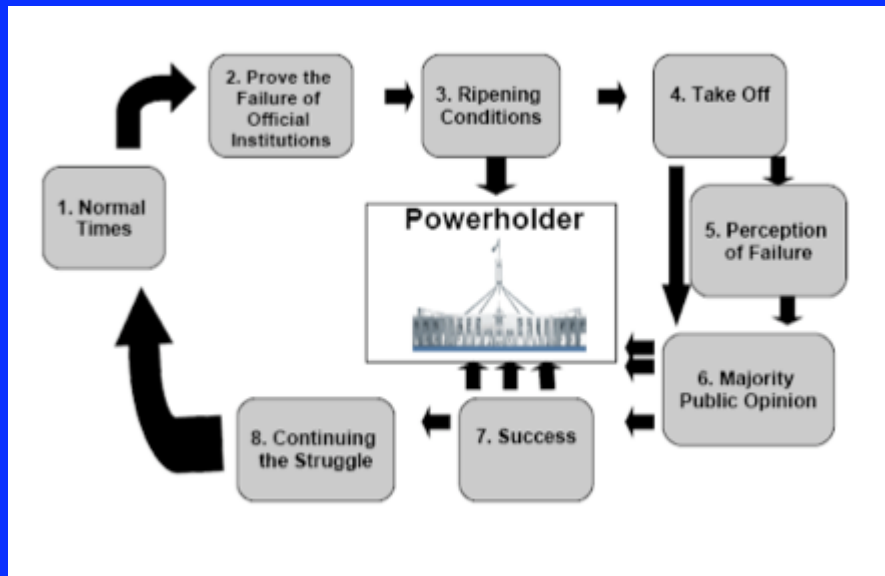
- ★ Large majority oppose current policies and no longer fear alternatives
- ★ Some power-holders still try to make minimal reforms, while movement demands social change
- ★ Many power-holders change position
- ★ End-game process: power-holders change policies or lose office
- ★ New laws and other policies

MAP Stage 8: Continuing the Struggle

- ★ Movement extends successes (e.g. even stronger civil rights laws)
- ★ Opposes attempts at backlash
- ★ Promotes paradigm shift
- ★ Focuses on other subissues
- ★ Recognises & celebrates successes so far

MAP 8 Stages

Simplified from Moyer et al (2001) *Doing Democracy*



Applying MAP to Climate Action Groups (CAGs)

Subissue: Acceptance that climate change is serious & urgent

- ★ At Stage 6 'Majority public opinion'

Some elements of Stage 5 'Perception of failure' following federal election

Subissue: Implementing mitigation strategies

- ★ At Stage 3 'Ripening conditions'
- ★ May need trigger event to move more people from being concerned to being activists --> Stage 4 'Take-off'

MAP: The Four Roles of Social Activists and Social Movements

1. Responsible citizen

Supporting fundamental values of a good society

2. Rebel

Opposing social conditions & policies that violate those values

3. Change agent

Educate, organise, involve citizens to oppose present policies and seek constructive solutions

4. Reformer

Work with official, judicial & political institutions to get solutions into new laws and policies, and to gain social acceptance of them

Climate Action Groups (CAGs) in Australia

- ★ National & State generalist NGOs with climate campaigns – e.g. ACF, Greenpeace, Environment Victoria, Nature Conservation Council of NSW
- ★ Predominantly dedicated CAGs – e.g. Clean Energy for Eternity, Rising Tide,
- ★ Business groups – e.g. Aust. Business Roundtable on Climate Change
- ★ Networks of CAGs – e.g. climatemovement.org; ASEN; CANA
- ★ Trade unions with concern – e.g. AEU; AMWU; ACTU
- ★ Professional organisations – e.g. ANZSES; EIANZ
- ★ Faith groups – e.g. Faith Ecology Network
- ★ Local government – e.g. Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance
- ★ Academic – e.g. CEEM & IES at UNSW
- ★ Left discussion groups – e.g. Politics in the Pub; SEARCH Foundation

Types of Actions available to Climate Action Groups

ACTIONS	PRESENT ACTORS
Lobbying power-holders and building partnerships with influential organisations	Large generalist NGOs
Nonviolent direct action	One large + a few small dedicated CAGs; Greenpeace, Rising Tide
Education, information and research for particular groups and the general public	All
Networking among NGOs	A few medium- large NGOs
Setting up alternatives	Some small dedicated CAGs
Media	All – local, state & national scales
Legal	Large NGOs & alliances

Gap between Theory (MAP) and Practice

- ★ Large numbers of CAGs (#100), mostly devoted to local actions
- ★ So far, insufficient pressure on federal & state gov'ts
- ★ So far only one national grassroots event per year (Walk Against Warming) + elections every 3 years and little continuous pressure in between these rare events.
- ★ Need continuous pressure on gov't & business

Campaign Actions that may Merit Intensification

Challenge is to maximise pressure on gov't and polluting business while minimising inconvenience to the public

- ★ Naming and shaming
- ★ Consumer boycotts; worker boycotts
- ★ Lobbying delegations to all MPs, both houses, federal and state
- ★ Pickets and sit-ins (selected MPs & businesses)
- ★ Nonviolent demonstrations at greenhouse-intensive sites, existing & proposed
- ★ Media with all of the above, except delegations

Essential Policies

- ★ Ban on new dirty coal-fired power stations
- ★ ETS with strong cap on emissions, all permits auctioned and no 'compensation' to generators
- ★ Expanded Renewable Energy Target, tax incentives and national gross feed-in tariffs
- ★ National energy efficiency program including existing buildings and appliances
- ★ Incentives for farmers
- ★ Termination of native forest logging
- ★ R & D funding for renewable energy and energy efficiency
- ★ Funding for railways and other public transport modes
- ★ Population policy

Further Reading

Diesendorf M (2007) *Greenhouse Solutions with Sustainable Energy*, UNSW Press, Sydney