

1. THE ULTIMATE INSIDER

Clip Collation - News and commentary about climate change

Intro voice Um, being honest, the first thing I think when someone says 'climate change' is...a slight sense of boredom, my ears don't perk up I don't think 'ooh yeah', I think 'uuurghh'.

Silence for a beat.

My name is Tilly Robinson and you're listening to the first episode of *The Water We Swim In*. A new mini-series all about climate change... sort of.

Not the climate change we know already: David Attenborough and plastic pollution, Hydrogen Cars and melting ice caps. Because I think we already know all about *that* side of climate change. We know the environment is being destroyed, that we're running out of time, and we know what we're supposed to be doing about it. Its left a lot of us feeling kind of bored - by this big, terrifying thing that threatens our existence.

So in this introductory episode, we're going to start at the beginning and try to figure out why this is. We're going to dissect our current approach to climate change, and find out what we need to do to stop feeling this way.

And then the series? Well, the series is more about *you* than it is about an environmental issue. Your life, the society you live in, what you've agreed to without knowing it. Because, incidentally, that's the only way we're going to solve this...and it just so happens that it's a hell of a lot more interesting, too.

PART 1: DOING A DOUG

I first meet Tolemeia in 2020, before the first lockdown. She arrives at my flat, long limbs sticking out of this big pink dress with sequin flowers on it, and absolutely soaked through. She got caught in a torrential downpour on her journey and the first thing she does is ring her hair out in my bathroom sink. She's 19, but perching bedraggled on my sofa, she reads younger.

Tolmeia I wanted to be a fashion designer. Like I was known for that, like friends and family of like: "yeah, you're gonna be a fashion designer! And have, like, catwalks!". And like now I'm like, I went to London fashion week in September as part of the funeral march I turned up and like did a die-in on the floor because I'm like, I, how are there people walking down a catwalk when people, oh [T: yeah] like I've had to shift my whole life

This is why I'm meeting with Tolmeia - because, like she says, she's all in. She shifted her whole life to do something about climate change.

When I finished my masters in Environmental Policy, I was faced with the conundrum of: what next? The course had given me a certain amount of specific climate-related knowledge (stuff like: carbon capture technology, fishery management, EU law) & it indicated several specific career paths...but it couldn't tell me which one I should take, or, *really*...ironically, what to do about climate change. So I did what any aimless, millennial post-grad would do in my place: I scrolled on instagram, looking at the lives of eco-influencers who have it together.

This was how I found Tolmeia Gregory.

Tolmeia is a committed and certain person, and it seems like she always has been. As a little girl she was pretty definite about what she wanted to be when she grew up. At 11 she started a blog called "Tolly Dolly Posh". She took it seriously - there are so many articles it takes about half an hour to scroll back to her first one. 'Harry Styles & Taylor Swift, get the look', that kind of thing. As she gets older, the topics mature, "London Fashion Week Reviews", but she's still singular, focused. Certain about her life's aim.

But then, at 18, her posts change. Tolmeia starts understanding the climate crisis. *Really* understanding it - the full force of what it means, what it threatens. And, she finds out that the fashion industry is a major contributor. And the bottom kind of falls out of her world.

Tolmeia And then, yeah, being terrified of what's gonna happen in the future and like an energy thing as well is like, I don't want to waste my energy on something that could potentially either harm things, you know, make inflict more harm or it's just like a waste of time in what time we have left. Like, sounds so dark and depressing, but it's kind of like all these things come together and it's like, actually, you know, there's a pretty clear answer to this, you know, dilemma I'm having. And the answer is keep going with, you know, trying to make the world better?

She changes direction, immediately. Totally upends her life's goals in order to concentrate on helping solve this crisis. *That's how seriously she takes it.* She starts making art about climate change, designing posters for protests, writing poems. Importantly, she uses her platform to spread the message. Her posts now read: "How do you spot greenwashing? "Top tips for ethical clothing on a budget?".

And, *of course*, she does the obvious thing, what we all do - she turns her focus onto herself...her individual responsibility and behaviour.

Tolmeia And I started with my clothes and what I was shop, where I was shopping and what I was buying - I feel very confident in, kind of, talking about how people can also make those changes within fashion. But then you kind of, I kind of reached this point where I was getting so bogged down in. Okay. What more can I do? So I've done, I'm kind of checked the list, um, check the box off with when it comes to my clothes. So what, what do I do now? I look at my food, I turn vegetarian. Okay. At one, at some point I will be vegan, <laugh> fully vegan.

Tolema is - undeniably - passionate about climate change. I'd kind of thought she'd have this side of things *down*. But when she talks about this, she seems *tired*.

Tolmeia And it's you go through that kind of mental list and then you realize all these things that are really difficult to change or you just don't know when you will ever get there. Like for example, for me, one thing I would find really hard to do right now is, um, commit to going flight free. Cuz I have family and friends who live abroad and I don't have the money to like go on a train journey really frequently to go see them. So it's kind of like, well, what other option do I have?

And...that's when I knew there was a problem, sitting soggily on my sofa. Because even Tolema, one of the *most emotionally engaged* people I've ever met, who *actually* cries when she reads headlines and is fully committed to the cause, is failing to complete the 'what-we-should-all-do-climate-change to-do list'.

We know the things that are on this list: Red-meat, vegetables flown from Mexico, packaging, flights, lights left on, tap left running, heating on too often, take-away plastic, cheap clothes, impulse buys, clicks on amazon, multiple flights.

Obviously she's not the only one struggling with completing it - *most of us do*.

Intro Voice Um, being honest, the first thing I think when someone says 'climate change' is...a slight sense of boredom my ears don't perk up, I don't think 'ooh yeah', I think 'uuurghh'. It's the same thing with recycling a yoghurt pot. It's exactly the same feeling: 'I should do that', I should rinse out that yoghurt pot and put it in the recycling. It's that same sense of 'ought to, should do' but can't be bothered

But Tolemeia shows that isn't a problem with how much we *care*. Because she cares *the most*, and *still* struggles, *still* feels like it's futile.

So what's the problem with the list?

Given focusing on our individual behaviour is - I'd say our first instinct when it comes to tackling the climate crisis - it's probably not a bad idea to check the logic we're following. Why is it our first port of call? Well...what's the first thing you notice about the list? *Pause* It is, almost exclusively - even if you expand it beyond the stuff I've mentioned - a list of things *not* to *buy*. It's a list of 'don'ts'... for a consumer. And that makes sense: we are consumers and we live in a consumer society. That's gotta be a big component in this, right?

So let's talk about that. How did we get here?

Time for a little history recap.

Let's go back to the 18th Century: think kings in big curly wigs. The Industrial Revolution was kicking off, which meant our ability to manufacture stuff was *exploding*: there was new power and bigger factories which meant goods were being produced faster than ever before. And, crucially, *cheaper* than ever before. Which meant suddenly a quality of life, previously unavailable to huge swathes of the population, was...within reach for people.

And this happened at an interesting point in history, because religion was *just* starting to loosen its grip on the culture. For the first time, people started feeling *uncertain* about the promises of an afterlife, and less willing to sacrifice pleasure and enjoyment in *this* life.

Suddenly, for lots of people, the aim became less about achieving *salvation* and more about achieving a better quality of life. And how do you do that? Own *more stuff*. Economists observed people stuffing their pockets with little conveniences, like tweezer cases and elaborate snuff boxes. And then buying coats with *more* pockets to carry even more! And this was encouraged! Because manufacturers - thanks to this explosion in industry - were producing

Speaker 3 You mean the effect that my living has on the earth in terms of the products I consume?

This approach is called conscious consumerism. And it makes sense. So then, what's the problem. Why are we not really doing it very well, despite the fact our lives depend on it? Why does it make even the people who *do* it, like Tolmeia, feel exhausted and helpless instead of empowered? I mean, maybe it's just human nature? An unwillingness to give up our 'little conveniences'. Or it that, deep down, Tolmeia suspects that all of her effort, all her sacrifice and inconvenience and sheer goodness... isn't enough?

I wanted to find out. And to do that, I needed to talk to someone well-versed in subjects I wasn't, subjects like 'economics and consumption'...

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Simon "I'm Simon Mair, I'm a research fellow at the centre for the understanding for sustainable prosperity at the University of Surrey and I'm also a teaching fellow at the university of Salford"

I'm sitting with Simon in his house in Doncaster. I read an article he'd written and wanted to talk to him about it. I was expecting someone severe and dry and – you know, someone who looks well-versed in economics and consumption. But Simon was softly spoken, with curly shoulder-length hair and a taste for strong knitwear.

First of all, he points out to me: using conscious consumerism, what's the end goal for someone who *really* cares? Someone like Tolmeia. What's the *most* you can do? Well, the more you care, the smaller your footprint gets, right? So your goal should be to reduce your carbon footprint to *nothing*. Zero-carbon, zero waste.

And, apparently, that's a problem.

Simon I would say that it would be impossible to live a completely zero-carbon or zero-waste life while remaining, kind of, a part of a modern capitalist economy. The only way you could do that would be to entirely remove yourself from society. Like, maybe if you went and lived, er I don't know, on a hill on the Scottish Highlands and you still managed to grow all your own food and you never interacted with anyone else, you could *probably* do zero-waste, zero-

carbon, or as close to it as possible [T: yeah] But that would be *absolutely knacker*ing. Like I know people who do try to live as sustainably as possible, as low-carbon as possible, and they're often really tired, because it is *so hard*.

Simon's article, the one that led me to him, was about the TV show 'The Good Place', with Kristen Bell. It's a comedy; set in the afterlife, a lovable gang of misfits try to escape eternal damnation. It all comes down to a points system; everything we do has moral points attached to it - plus or minus, depending on whether what you're doing is *good* or *bad*. If, when you die you have enough points, you get into the Good Place, if not, bad luck - flames and pitchforks in the The Bad Place it is.

In this one episode they find the one living man, Doug, who - in a flash of religious inspiration as a teen - has figured the system out. Aware of how it works, and how high the stakes are, he lives his whole life in a bid to gain points. This means that he ends up basically living how we'd have to: alone, in the woods, eating only radishes and lentils.

Clip from The Good Place plays -

Michael *Oh! Well that has an interesting after taste, is that from a nearby river?*

Doug *Oh no, why take fresh water away from the beavers and the fish? No I have my composting toilet hooked up to a water filtration system. (3:59)*

This is because the world in which the characters live is *so* complex, almost anything they do has a negative impact. Our world is the same. I mean, we buy vegan food, but it's wrapped in plastic and filled with palm oil, or we take Tolmeia's advice and avoid fast fashion, fork out for some new organic cotton clothes but don't realise each item uses nearly 150 litres of water to make and was flown from India. Or we might kind of know something about the fact that technology uses unsustainably mined materials, but our phones are deliberately designed to stop working after a few years - so we keep buying them, because of course we do. It's basically really difficult to get it right. So the only truly *good* option is to extract yourself completely.

Simon This is, partly because actually the world is so *complex* and our consumption is so complex, so when you choose to buy something, you can never really know exactly what went into the production process.-You can't really know whether something was produced using lots of coal or using lots of, uh, renewable energy, right?

But, here's the thing: In the Good Place, they find out that actually, the system is *so* complex that *even* Doug - someone who's extracted himself from society almost completely - is headed for hell. They find out the system is broken.

And this is what Simon is trying to tell us: we're doing a Doug.

Simon And so that can mean you spend a lot of time in end trying to make what you think a really good consumption decisions. And actually it turns out they're not that effective anyway, and the reason they're not that effective is because the entire system is essentially set up in a way that kind of damages the climate. So, 80% of the world's energy use is fossil fuels, so it's carbon emitting. So, there is no way that you as a consumer can wipe out all that 80% of, global energy use, it's just impossible from a consumption point of view

Hm "The entire system is essentially set up in a way that kind of damages the climate". Ok, so that sounds like the bottom line. But I came away from that interview still not *really* understanding what Simon was telling me. I still felt like, even if it's *difficult*, it's still within our power to get down to zero-carbon, zero-waste if we *really wanted to*.

And then I read about this MIT study. And realised I'd missed the point entirely.

Here's Matthew, another writer on the series. He's the one who researched this study.

Matthew Ok, so, yes: the professor of this MIT class wanted to find out how far someone's consumption choices affected their carbon footprint, so they decided to run a statistical analysis, to calculate and compare different people and their lifestyles. They covered a big range - housewives to buddhist monks. And obviously it varied: if you're a multimillionaire, you're probably consuming a hell of a lot *more* than if you're homeless. *But...*the finding that surprised the professor...was that even the homeless man has a *big* carbon footprint.

An American who has no money, no home, makes no purchases, who eats in soup kitchens and occasionally sleeps in shelters... *their* carbon footprint is over double the global average.

A *homeless man* still has a massive carbon footprint. *Because* he's a part of the US system and still has access to all the government services that come with that. The study showed it's like there is a floor you can't fall below. You personally may not buy much, but you exist within a

larger system that keeps whirring on, burning thousands of tonnes of fossil fuels, regardless of your personal choices.

So, Simon is right, you could do a Doug and remove yourself entirely from society and *still* your 'bad points', or your 'carbon footprint', in this case - is still wracking up. And growing lentils isn't going to solve that.

So, maybe *this is* why we're resisting committing ourselves to going zero-carbon, we know on some level - that's going to be a lot of hard work getting us nowhere. We have so little time to cut emissions, pretty much *everyone* would have to commit, like Doug, *right now* for it to work, and will they? Will they look at you in your hut on the Scottish Highlands and say 'yeah, I'll do that'.

And people are starting to realise this - *clips of people talking about 'system change'* - people are starting to realise that in order to really change things, we need to focus on how that system - that's just whirring on without us - is set up. In order to make it *possible* for people to live sustainable lifestyles and still remain a part of society, we need things like policy changes to support it, we need laws in place, *infrastructure... renewable energy*.

It would certainly *speed things up* if we focused on that, instead of putting the onus on the individual, instead of obsessing over our carbon footprints.

But *maybe* that's exactly why this obsession has been encouraged.

Narrator What size is your carbon footprint?

Speaker 1 Ah, the carbon footprints there. That I don't know.

Speaker 2 Whatever it is, the whole population of the world make that a very, very big number.

This clip, which I played earlier, is from an advert run by BP. British Petroleum. The second largest non-state owned oil company in the *world*. And, in 2003, they hired a top PR company to help them with their image. This is what they came up with - a campaign to divert attention away from them, away from policies and regulations that would put the responsibility on *them*: and to instead offer a cool new tool: carbon footprint calculator *for the public*.

It's considered one of the most effective PR campaigns ever run. BP who have - this year -

announced record profits and a plan to *scale back* their investment into renewables, have successfully managed to guide the conversation around climate action. They *very* purposefully coined and marketed a term that shifted focus from *them* to *us*.

And it worked! We accepted the responsibility, and dutifully started measuring our own personal consumption, trying to be as 'good' as possible. Some of us do this casually, and some of us, like Tolmeia, try and commit ourselves to it utterly. But we all struggle with it, because we are all increasingly afflicted by the suspicion - correct, as it turns out - that our effort is misguided, that our hard work isn't paying off...that - like Doug from The Good Place - we can never quite be good *enough*.

PART 2: "THE COMPLACENCY OF TWEAKING"

There's a town called Orangeburg in South Carolina. It has a real all-american feel to it, squat buildings, redbrick town squares with tall statues at their centre. The Edisto River runs through it, like a glistening snake, with its wide banks and dark tannin-stained waters.

In the 1950s, this town was home to a boy called Gus Speth. He lived with his family in a small agricultural community, and passed his childhood like a lot of little boys do: causing trouble. He nearly drowned in the Edisto River, got caught by police shooting out street lights with his BB gun, and was sent to the principal's office for fighting Bobby Stokes. If you want All-American, Gus is it.

During bedtime prayers, his grandfather once said to him: 'Son, [when you grow up] you're either going to be president, or in jail'. Turns out, he was almost right on both accounts.

When Gus was little, just after the war had ended, 'environmentalism' wasn't really a thing. Nationally, the focus was on boosting the economy: bigger industry, bigger agriculture, *more* chemicals - the side-effects weren't really given much of a thought.

Similarly, in the Speth household, there wasn't much talk of 'nature' or 'conservation'. But he *was* surrounded by it. Swimming in the river everyday, hunting, fishing out on the lake at his grandfather's. But one day he went down to the lake and found that it was closed: warning signs had been hung up and the water smelled rancid - dead. A nearby factory had dumped its waste into it. And it wasn't just his grandfather's lake: there was weird grey foam in the river, thick smells hanging low over towns he loved. Before long, Gus started noticing pollution everywhere.

He wasn't the only one. By the time Gus was a young man, leaving Orangeburg to study law at Yale, a growing consciousness of 'the environment' had begun to form.

Walter Cronkite The gravity of the message of earth day still came through: act, or die. Good evening. A unique day in America is ending a day set aside for a nationwide outpouring of mankind seeking its own survival: earth day.

In 1970, millions of people took to the streets as part of the first 'Earth Day'. And they had one demand: start taking the environment into account, start *protecting* it. Well, Gus had graduated from Yale with flying colours, and having been raised as an idealist, he thought - 'Yeah, I can do something about this'. Here he is, in an interview with Harry Kriesler.

Gus We obviously were children of the sixties. Uh, we were motivated to believe that we could change the world, uh, that we could use government as an instrument to change the world. We believed that we could create a federal environmental law, uh, that would really, uh, save the environment.

So, that year - at the age of 28 - he decided to found an environmental advocacy group - the NRDC, Natural Resource Defence Council - to lobby the government to pass environmental laws. And, pretty quickly, they saw two *major* successes: The Clean Water Act, and the Clean Air Act. This felt good: Gus had helped protect his grandfather's lake. But he wasn't finished. He realised that government is where a lot of change happens - behind closed doors, talking to powerful people - so he didn't mess around. He got a job heading the Council on Environmental Quality for the President for the United States.

And he put his time to good use. In fact, it was *him* who received a report written by a group of concerned scientists, it was *him* who arranged a meeting with President Jimmy Carter, and it was *him* who said, "Sir, I think we should be worried about this 'climate change'".

So, his grandfather was pretty close! One of the reasons Gus is such an interesting character is because he's an environmental advocate who's been *so* successful. If you want to look at altering *the system*, Gus is your man. He knew, early on, what the rest of us are only just beginning to cotton on to - that in order to really initiate change, you need that change to happen at a higher level.

He made sure that he got into the rooms where decisions are being made. Because otherwise, I probably don't need to tell you, it's a pretty daunting prospect - to enact policies, laws,

infrastructure - if you're just a regular joe.

And this sort of explains our second most common approach to climate change mitigation: which is to hope that there are people who know what they're doing. Hope that there are intelligent, committed people - like Gus - who work in charities, international bodies, the government, and who dedicate their lives to caring, professionally, about the climate. And we support them by...you know.... reading articles, voting, posting infographics on Instagram, going to maybe *a couple* of protests a year - and, just generally *hoping* they've got this.

And, again - there is logic to this. You see the thought process: we *can't* really enact policies, Gus *can*...and it's been going ok - if you trace the course of Gus's career, you can see the environmental movement growing and gathering pace alongside him. Which is comforting. We've come so *far*, in the span of one man's lifetime: from not thinking about the environment...to, in 2015, the biggest shows of global cooperation, ever seen!

Christina Never before has a responsibility. So great. Been in the hands of so few. The world is looking to you. The world is counting on you (00.49)

The Paris Agreement! If you're not sure what went on there, it was a moment where the whole world held its breath, waiting to see whether its leaders would heed the warnings from scientists. The IPCC - that's the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change - told the world leaders that, if they wanted to prevent civilisation collapse, it was *absolutely necessary* to stop the global temperature from rising. They said that the *highest* the temperature could be allowed to rise was 1.5 degrees.

Miraculously, the world leaders managed to reach an agreement. 193 out of 197 nations agreed to work towards the goal of limiting our temperature rise to 1.5 degrees, with a hard limit of 2 degrees.

So, we have a solid movement, *and* the people in charge - the people with the power to make the changes we need - are taking climate change seriously. We have Net-Zero Plans, speeches and targets...And yet. And *yet*, there's still this feeling of apathy, maybe? That we can't shake. You know, that we *have* to trust these agreements and declarations, but actually...maybe it's quite hard to really believe that the situation is fully in hand.

One of the reasons Gustave Speth is interesting is because he's been so successful, because of the *presidential* side of his personality, his storied career. But, I wasn't interested in him for that, I

was more interested in why he turned his back on it.

I first heard about Gus from Economist Peter Victor, who I was interviewing for another episode.

Peter He has held some of the most senior positions in environment in his career. Uh, he was the head of the advisor of the US government on many occasions, very senior academic. He became quite radical and this is unusual. People don't tend to go that way...

People don't tend to go that way... and nobody expected it of Gus. When Time Magazine wrote about him, they called him 'The Ultimate Insider' - he was a real establishment figure, the President's man. And then to hear that he had gone rogue... Yeah, tell me that *you* wouldn't be intrigued.

I'll tell you more about what he's up to these days later on in the episode, for now, I want to focus on what he's left behind, and *why*.

After he'd added a few more ground breaking roles to his CV (he founded the World Resources Institute - one of the biggest environmental think tanks in the world and worked for the UN for twenty years) Gus decided to go back to Yale to teach other young idealists how to protect the environment. Who would be better to do that than him, right? He began by collating a history of both his career and the movement in general, going through its various wins, summing up its tactics. But then he stopped dead in his tracks.

The longer he looked at this laudable history, the more he felt that something wasn't right. Here in front of him was a record of victory after victory, secured by him and his colleagues - but, paradoxically, it was also a history of the world on a downward trajectory, barrelling towards environmental catastrophe. He described it as 'being mugged by reality', that 'we were winning the movement but losing the planet'.

Winning the movement and losing the *planet*. Is that true?

Alok Sharma May I just say to all delegates I apologise for the way this process has unfolded and I am deeply sorry.

COP 26 - the next big conference after the Paris Agreement. Held in Glasgow a couple of years ago. Speaking is Alok Sharma, the president of the event. As he makes the closing statements, he's not looking forward, chest pumped, gesticulating - like other speeches that were made.

Instead his head is bowed and he apologises.

Alok Sharma I also understand the deep disappointment but I think as you have noted it is also vital that we now protect this package...[chokes up] [clapping]

Then, he chokes up, and actually has to stop talking.

He was crying because the agreement to phase out coal had failed in the last moments of the meeting. And he was crying, potentially, because despite all the power held in those rooms, we're not on track for 1.5...we're on track for 2.7 degrees. Which will be a disaster. To give you some idea: 2.7 degrees is a fair bit *after* the ice sheets have begun their collapse, *after* 400 million more people will suffer from water scarcity, *after* major equatorial cities will become unlivable... and *just* before southern Europe is in a state of permanent drought and our food security goes up in smoke. So that's not great.

And that all important 1.5 degree limit? We're set to pass it in the next five years. The UK is very much a part of that issue: according to a recent analysis, we're not on track to meet our targets, in fact, only 28% of the necessary policies are confirmed.

So, perhaps that *feeling*, that *worry* that things aren't in hand - is based on something. But why? The environmental movement is stronger than ever, and our *world* leaders have acknowledged the urgency of the situation and have *promised* to make the necessary changes.

So, what's going wrong?

I decided I wanted to put it to the ultimate insider himself. Mr James Gustave Speth... and, he agreed to speak with me.

Tilly Um, and I suppose I'm wondering, what do you think now about the effectiveness of international treaties or multilateral agreements?

Gus Well, I had something to do with some of them, uh, and, um, I, uh, I think it was a, um, we started out with a lot of optimism. Uh, and in my judgement, uh, it's, it's an area, uh, that is so many failed hopes, dominate this field...Uh you know, are they working well? No, no, I don't, I don't think the biodiversity treaty has thus far protected a lot of our biodiversity. I think the climate treaty is obviously, uh, not done a lot.

I spoke to Gus over zoom while he was on his family's farm in Texas. He still has the wholesome, All-American quality of the boy who got in trouble for fighting Bobby Stokes: wearing a tie-dye t-shirt and cap during our conversation, I could picture him turning frankfurters on a barbeque or mowing his lawn. But if Gus's outfit was relaxed, then his mood was contrite - these agreements, that we all rely on, that he 'had something to do with': *aren't cutting it*.

Gus You know, we just have to accept that and blame it on people like me who have worked on these issues, uh, since the Carter administration in 1980 and have so darn little to show for it.

Gus, the guy who was instrumental in the conception of our modern environmental movement has decided it doesn't work.

Gus Um, and we had a very high hopes that things could be fixed, be addressed, uh, and by working within the system. And that sense that we could work within the system to get the job done was strengthened by two of the most powerful laws that the United States has ever enacted: The Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act. And that had a great effect of getting a lot of the early job done. I mean, the air got better. The water got better. Uh, so it, it really, it incentivized us to play ball within the system and we did, we did, and for some years it really worked.

Do you remember what Gus said in that interview with Harry Krisler? Let me refresh your memory: he said 'we believed that we could use the government as an instrument to change the world'. So, that's what he did. And, to begin with, it worked! It felt like they were changing the system, which is exactly what Simon (the economist in the good jumper) said we need to do.

But what Gus slowly realised...the wins that were available whilst playing ball within the system...didn't equal changing it. More like *tweaking* it: trying to get it to take the environment into account *just enough* to avoid catastrophe. This became the standard approach across the majority of the environmental sector - with its lawyers, charities and policy specialists - if you wanted to win at all, you had to go for small victories, and campaign for *gradual* change.

So that's what happened, because like with Tolmeia and her conscious consumerism, in a situation as vast and as complex as this - you do what is within your power, you go for the wins that feel obtainable.

Gus The problem is that we didn't realize that we kind of had hit the wall and that we'd done...the system had pretty much done what it could do for us. And we needed to start

matching action within the system with action to change the system. And we didn't do that.

Gus and Tolemeia may be worlds apart; in their fashion sense, ages, and - most importantly - power and influence. But they face the same issue: they're trying *desperately* to change the world and it feels like a lot of hard work is getting them nowhere. And that's because it turns out that it doesn't matter *HOW* much power you have - you can even have all the world leaders sitting around a mahogany table - it doesn't matter if you're taking the wrong approach.

Which is kind of what we're doing. We're relying on conscious consumerism and hoping that the professional environmental sector will take care of everything else.

And it's not working, because both approaches are only *tweaking* the system, and we need to change it.

PART 3: EFFECT AND CAUSE

So what do we do? How do we understand the difference between tweaking the system and *changing* it? Well, talking to Gus, it's like finally something clicked into place...

It struck me that if our society, our system, was a person - then we would say that it was behaving self-destructively. Maybe you've had a self-destructive friend: one who drinks too much, or dates terrible, controlling people, or just routinely behaves in a way that makes them depressed, puts their health or even their life at risk. A friend who is maybe high-functioning, and many people say that they're *fine*, that's just *them*, but you're getting worried: you can see that they're heading for a breakdown, or worse.

Now, if you *have* had a friend like this, then you'll already know what it's like to try and help them. At first it's alright - maybe it's even kind of satisfying. You stay up late listening to them complain about their toxic relationship. You go over to their house and tidy it up. You help them draw up a timetable to organise their week, and you make them throw out their booze and drugs. And for a while it feels like you're making progress. Small wins.

But after a while it becomes exhausting, dispiriting. Your friend isn't sticking to any of the resolutions you agreed on together, they always end up back where they started, in the same old patterns. It becomes apparent that there is just something in your friend, somewhere deep down where neither you nor them can see, that pushes them to do these things, to hurt themselves and those around them.

And if that happens, you know that, in order to really get anywhere, in order to *change* - they would need to address what is really going on, maybe go to therapy. Enough of dealing with the symptoms - it's time to deal with the root cause. And this is the key.

Tilly Would you, would you say that it's fair then to conceptualise maybe the Environmental movement previously as trying to deal with the symptoms of a disease rather than the cause?

Gus Yeah, I think that's a very fair characterization. And the deeper you probe those underlying issues, the more you realise that they're embedded in the system. You know we would try to block a [mumbles - please cut] forest destruction, uh, without dealing with what's motivating the destruction of the forest, what are the underlying issues and the deeper you probe those underlying issues. Uh, the more you, you realize that they're embedded in the system, that the system of political economy that we live and work in, uh-is an impediment to making progress. We have to work *so hard*, to make effective steps forward. And what we really need is a new political economy, a new system of political economy, where we're doing the right thing for people and planet and place is the natural outcome! The easy outcome! Not the most difficult possible outcome.

The problem with our approach is that we're not dealing with the root causes of climate change. We're not addressing the way our system is set up: our economic model, our political ideology, our guiding philosophies and power structures; the mechanisms that drive our behaviour on a systemic level. That's system change!

We could leave the problem of deforestation to, I don't know, forest wardens and tree-charities, but then we'd probably end up having a *very* small amount of brilliantly managed *dwindling* forests. Because the motivation to chop down the trees is still there. You haven't addressed the root cause, and if you do - say, you change the way that nature is valued within the economy - then, bingo, suddenly it's not such an uphill struggle to stop deforestation. It won't feel like a lot of hard work is getting us nowhere.

So the good news is that there *are* actually solutions that would work.. But because they're not apolitical tweaks restricted to the environmental sector - they're not David Attenborough, plastic pollution and hydrogen cars - we don't think to look at them when talking about climate change.

Here is Gus again -

Gus So let's look at it this way, you know, what is an environmental issue? Most people (including me) for a long time would say, well, you know, biodiversity, uh, climate change, uh, et cetera. And that's true, that is an environmental agenda. But what if you answer the question this way, what if you say: an environmental agenda certainly includes those major aspects of the system you're working in, that *war* against effective environmental action.

We also don't look at these real solutions, because we're told not to. Despite the fact that they're the things we need to look at in order to avert catastrophe, they're also *so deeply embedded* in the construction of our society that changing them, triggers a lot of resistance.

We see this *tension* in our own government - of wanting to deal with the symptoms of climate change without addressing the root causes. There's this push-pull of wanting to solve the climate crisis, but refusing to look at changes necessary to do so. One minute Alok Sharma is crying about the failures of a coal ban at COP 26, and the next his political party - the Conservatives - is announcing the opening of a *new coal mine* in Cumbria! The government says it wants to solve climate change, but it likes the system *as it is*, in fact they're *ideologically* opposed to changing it.

And I'd say that's pretty reminiscent of that repetitive, contradictory behaviour you might see in a self-destructive friend. It's kind of like they're happy to go as far as acknowledging that 'yeah, maybe there's some stuff I could work on, but I don't *actually* have a *problem*, I'm certainly not going to go to *therapy* to talk to some old *quack*'. And if you push the issue, if you suggest some of the work they'll *actually* have to do to *change*, they get pissed, lash out, and even try to make you sound crazy.

When I first heard Peter Victor describe Gus as a 'radical', someone who'd gone 'rogue', I think I was picturing a long-bearded extremist wearing a hemp poncho, holed up in a cave somewhere, writing his manifesto in the blood of squirrels. But it turns out that, to be considered a radical environmentalist these days, you just have to be willing to really get to grips with the problem, to grasp it at its root...

Earlier on, I promised that I'd let you know what Gus is up to now...if you thought his regretful tone during our interview meant that he's sitting around all day feeling sorry for himself, you'd be wrong. These days, Mr James Gustave Speth is leaning into the *rebellious* side of his personality.

Sounds of protest chanting -

Gus has been arrested outside The White House and thrown in jail for a short stint, for protesting the Keystone XL Pipeline.

Sounds from a trial at court -

He's also been called as an expert witness in the *Juliana vs. United States* case. A *massive* court case in which 21 young plaintiffs are suing the US federal government for endangering their lives through inaction on climate change. Gus has written, pro bono, a searing indictment of this inaction, to be presented in court. It's now also been published as a book, called: 'They Knew'.

Because, he's been inside The White House, and he knows: the kind of changes we need to see enacted? The topics that actually need to be wrestled with? They're not going to do it willingly. There was something else Peter said about Gus -

Peter And he concluded late in his life that you can't change the system from within. He became quite radical and this is unusual. People don't tend to go that way...

He's decided you can't change the system from within. That's what his long career has taught him: when you want change on a deep level, pressure has to be applied *eternally*.

So that means that our second approach: rely on the professionalised environmental movement, and those in power...isn't going to work.

But it *also* means there is a role for us - that actually *could* work. We may not be in a position to literally enact policies, laws and new infrastructure - but we can force issues into the spotlight, apply pressure And doing that - engaging in political activism, campaigning and organising - is something that, actually, needs a relatively small amount of people, and it can change things *fast*. Which is why the ultimate insider feels he's more useful on the *outside*.

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Tolmeia They're actually Ikea shelves that I was supposed to put up in my flat, but then like had real struggles with like, putting them into the walls, like the brackets didn't work and stuff like that. So I was like, what am I gonna do with these? So I

just ended up painting on them and they are two pieces and it says we deserve more than this across both of them

Three years after I first met her, I'm with Tolmeia Gregory in her small studio in Cheltenham. She's now a resident artist at The Wilson, an art museum and gallery space. She's showing me her art and talking me through what she's doing. Her art's become more expansive and her activism more focused. Perhaps because she's stopped thinking of herself as first and foremost a consumer, and more as a citizen. She tells me about her work as part of Clean Creatives, a group who challenge the advertising industry for their work with fossil fuel companies.

She seems different now, happier, less frantic, more...grounded.

Tolmeia And it's also like this belief of I have this, uh, piece of art, which is actually where we're recording. It's in my studio, which says, we deserve more than this. And that kind of comes from this idea of like...we can ask for more, whether that is like having more time in our lives just kind of exists as humans, or whether it is, you know, we're very fortunate that we have something like the NHS that exists, but actually we should have an NHS that is freakin' thriving or, you know, we should just have clean air and not have pollution in our towns, in our cities. How like, whoa. That's a mad thought, isn't it?

I think it's that change feels more possible to her now. An approach that doesn't work, which frames the issue as technical and removed from our lives - *that* engenders apathy and boredom, frustration. But if we take a second, to look at the root causes... it suddenly feels more directly relevant to us, more *interesting* and, perhaps, *more possible*.

Tolmeia I think like everything, every part of society came from someone's imagination, and so we have to start using our brains to think something different up and put that into play... that's, that's not against the rules. Like, we're allowed to think that the world can be very different!

If you don't understand the way your system works, it's really easy to think you can't change it. And that's the *thing* about living within a particular system all your life: it can be hard to see it for what it is. You just don't have any perspective. It's all around you, the element that supports you, *the water you swim in*. It just... *is*. But once you *understand* it better, you can decide for yourself whether changing it is really as radical as they say.

So that's what this series investigates: 'the water we swim in'. How our system's been built, why

it's not working for us, and how we might change it. This introductory episode has been exploring our frustrations with our *current approach*, so it may have covered stuff you kind of already know. But the rest of the series will, almost certainly, surprise you - because we're looking at the familiar from a whole new perspective.

...asking questions like: How does a plane with broken engines help us think about fixing our economy? Why is an 11-foot tall girl key in understanding political polarisation? And, most importantly, what can the Martin Luther King papers teach us about affecting *real* change?

In upcoming episodes we're going to be talking to world-leading academics, activists and journalists - people who can see the problem...and have the *solutions*. And in doing that...we start to uncover a story. The story of a project that shaped our world both with its successes and failures, and which continues to shape our lives today.

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You've been listening to *The Water We Swim In*. Next week, we're looking at the philosophical roots of our scientific model and finding out why soil will change the way we see the world.

If you're keen to learn more about what we discussed today, head on over to our website waterweswimin.co.uk, there's a lot of extra cool stuff there.

If you enjoyed the episode, please rate and review on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. We'd really appreciate it.

Producing this episode was me, Tilly Robinson. Co-writing was Matthew Robinson. Mixing by Naked Productions, and original music by Drew McFarlane.