Martin Caraher

DANNY LENNON: Without further ado, let me introduce Professor Martin Caraher. Sir Martin carrier, thank you so much for joining me on the podcast. Pleasure to have you

MARTIN CARAHER: Nice to be here Danny. Thank you for having me.

DANNY LENNON: We've got a lot to talk about. I think as I mentioned to you have really been fascinated and intrigued by a lot of your work and I found that very influential, to be honest. And before I get into some of the specifics of that work, just from a broader perspective, I'm interested of what your kind of journey into the particular areas that you are most focused on right now has been and what drew you into this particular area of food policy?

MARTIN CARAHER: Okay, my journey has been quite a long one. I started working as an environmental health officer in the west of Ireland a long, long time ago. And I experienced poverty at firsthand. I was as an environmental health officer, I was doing a mixed bag of work and was working with housing and we were seeing people who is suffering from TB, men, and single men living on their own, the rural conditions, poverty. So the face of poverty was actually very early on in my working career. And then I moved later on to London. And the astonishing thing about London is the cheek by

jowl situation. You've got massive wealth, and you walk two roads down the street, and you've got massive poverty. So I'd be I moved into public health in coming to the UK. And it was the juxtaposition of wealth and poverty that initially, I mean, caught my attention as an academic and fascinated me, but also worried me as a a policymaker and an activist and really wants to do something about that.

DANNY LENNON: To start I wanted to focus on the area of food poverty. And maybe perhaps before I get into anything else, it would be best for listeners if we actually define that. So for people who are maybe just coming across this term that may seem on the surface easily understandable what is some of the nuances of how you would get people to conceptualize exactly what we mean by the term food poverty?

MARTIN CARAHER: Okay, well, I mean, food poverty was kind and defined by a colleague of mine, Liz Dowler, who's now retired and who was at the London School of Hygiene, and then the University of Warwick, and it really it goes beyond just not being able to put a meal on the table, which is the usual definition people think of two things like social issues. So not being able to send your kids on a trip, for example, having to worry about having friends over for a meal, not being able to eat out if you choose to. I mean these are about choices. I think. And we know from the Americas, the Americas used the term hunger mean the war and hunger from the 1960s and they replace that with food insecurity, which is a less emotive term. Now we're seeing a similar thing happen both here in the UK and in Ireland and Europe generally replacement of the term food poverty with this issue of food security, and I've got problems with the term food insecurity or food security, because it misses some of the nuances, the cultural nuances that I've just talked about. And I can talk more about that later on.

DANNY LENNON: Yeah, so yeah, there's a couple of components to that I wanted to ask about. First that kind of distinction that you're very clear to highlight quite often between food poverty as a term and food insecurity. I think that's an important one first to conceptualize. And then second is, many people may be wondering, well is food poverty, just the kind of natural extinction of just wider general

poverty? Or are there some distinctions there that we need to really tease out? So how would you typically frame that in the context of general poverty?

MARTIN CARAHER: Yeah I mean, I think that's a very good question. I mean there are lots of debate about this. I think, to some extent food poverty does depend on wider issues of poverty. If you haven't got an adequate income or an insecure income, well, then you're more likely to be in food poverty. But food poverty itself is worth exploring for a number of reasons because it's hidden. I mean, people don't go around saying I can't afford a meal. I can't afford to feed my kids. I mean we live in a society where food is pretty abundant. So there's a stigma attached to food poverty or food, even food insecurity. So I think there are distinctions about food poverty, which makes it worth looking at different. We've had a recent case here in the UK with the Coronavirus where Marcus Rashford, one of the footballers said I grew up in poverty and without free school meals, I wouldn't have survived. And he's gone further and said we now need to look at this in a broader context, not just within the Coronavirus situation, but afterwards, this is a time to really grab this issue by the neck and really get to grips with it because I mean this is a new. This has been going on. The Coronavirus issue has thrown it into sharp relief with a fivefold increase we think in food poverty in some problems because we don't actually measure it at the moment. But people who are managing are suddenly in our food poverty because they've lost their jobs. They're lost access to credit. So you're right. It goes back to this issue. If you have enough money, if you have income, you will survive. But if that income is precarious, if people are surviving week to week, and with Coronavirus, what we've seen is that week to week survival being put into jeopardy because there is no money coming in next week for people.

DANNY LENNON: One of the really important things that hit me when I've been reading some of your work and also watching some of your lectures has been the discussion around food poverty not just being an issue of access to food or even just an issue of hunger, because people can still actually get food. But it's related to changes in what that typical habitual diet looks like due to some of these other constraints related to poverty. And you mentioned that one of the problems is that when people do have a constraint on their budget, there are

certain costs that are fixed so they cannot be changed. However, food choices can be elastic, and can change. Can you maybe highlight why this becomes such a problem or how this kind of tends to manifest?

MARTIN CARAHER: Yeah, I mean, you know, modern poverty is to me mean, we still think of poverty about 18th, 19th century. Modern poverty is different. And you're right, I mean, we talk about a poverty premium. So if you're on a low income, you probably pay more for the goods as well. So you pay more for your heating and lighting, for example, and heating and lighting. I mean, electricity and gas may depend on what you cook for example. So typically people here in the UK pay about 20% more for their basic utilities. They're more likely to pay more for the mobile phones because they're probably in pretty crappy deals. And you know, mobile phone I think is necessary in the modern environment. And food is one of the elastic items in the budget. You can cut down on your food bills. We know when the Great Recession took place in 2008 people did change their dietary habits. The shop started shopping and Aldi and Lidl. They started shopping around. Those on low incomes compromised, they were already compromised. And they compromised more 2008 and post 2008. But, and the modern equivalent of poverty is not underweight but obesity, and that's because the processed food is actually cheaper. So people are eating more processed food because it makes requires less time, and less energy to heat up. So they're not paying for bills. So we've had this terrible situation in the UK where people have had to make decisions; do I heat my house or do I cook food? Now you can go down the high street and buy a meal for the equivalent of 199 and feed your kids. Now it's unhealthy. I mean, it's not, it's high, it's not nutrient dense. It's energy dense. It's high in fat, salt and sugar. But it fills your kids. And for many families, that's the important thing. They're interested in filling their kids' bellies. They're not unaware of the issues about nutrition, but they're juggling. I mean, it's a domestic economy situation. On the one hand, do I heat my house and feed my kids or I mean the good thing about takeaways is there's no green insight for parents because there's no arguments over eating healthy food, but it does fill people up. So we're more likely to equate obesity now with overweight and I mean, there are other complicating factors in here as well. So people on low incomes

are probably more likely to work and things like the gig economy. So their income is unsecured. So they don't know whether they're going to have income next week or even a job next week. So it's hard to plan your food intake on that basis. And if your time is money, if you're a delivery driver, for example, you're more likely to eat a takeaway we know because you have less time to sit down and eat and actually no processed food is generally it's cheap per calorie, but it's energy dense, not nutrient dense.

DANNY LENNON: Yeah, it's clear when we track wealth inequality, how that oftentimes maps on to a health inequality for those very reasons that you outline. And so often then, if we're only looking at this from a nutritional science perspective, we can give whatever guidelines we want for a healthy nutritious diet. But if that is considering the context of there's people here having to make a decision of, can I actually turn on my cooker at home today? Or do I have to walk down to the shop to have a ready-made meal that saves me doing that shows that some of these recommendations we can give out have disproportionate effects sometimes?

MARTIN CARAHER: Yeah. I mean, right and we need to be aware of people's social circumstances. We have done a piece of research back in the early 2000s in Scotland, and it was an intervention on cooking and I'm all in favor of cooking. And but if you can't cook, that's not the reason you're in poverty. But if you're in poverty and can't cook, that's a double burden. We have done this intervention with families. It was a nutrition intervention. And we found people weren't cooking. I mean and we went to sit why? Because people said, Well, my baby belling it's only got two rings and one is broke. I haven't got pots and pans. I mean, it was very simple things like that. For some families these are major issues or in shared accommodation, you know, that would be an even greater burden. But I mean, the storage as well. So we simply give people some basic pots and pans, I mean two or three pots and couple of wooden spoons and things and people started cooking. Now, we could have taken the whole nutrition intervention right through to the end and said, people don't cook. We went back and looked at why they were not cooking, and it's why people are not cooking, that we need to preparing food. People generally are not unaware of the health messages I mean, of course we all we can all benefit from more

information. My point is that, not that we shouldn't give people more information, but when I work with five year olds and six year olds, and they can tell me generally what's healthy, and then I asked them what you eat, and the map of their foods suddenly reverses. But they can tell me generally. I mean there's some things they'll get wrong but that's they're put fruit and veggie and is healthy and they will put stuffing is unhealthy. But when I asked them what they actually eat, it suddenly becomes reversed. So it's not always just knowledge. You are right. It's balancing those what I call good domestic economy issues in the home.

DANNY LENNON: I'm wondering, Martin, can we maybe paint the picture of just the scale of this issue? And maybe doing that in two ways. One, looking at statistics, and what sort of prevalence do we currently know about rates of how many people are living in food poverty? And then secondly, at a more, I suppose, visual or emotional level, what it actually means for people to be living in food poverty, like, what are the circumstances they're facing? What do those diets typically end up looking like? So.

MARTIN CARAHER: I mean the extent of food insecurity and food poverty in some countries is unknown. In the UK. We don't currently measure it. We're about to measure it from next year. So we'll have the first statistics and that will give us statistics on Northern Ireland. But what we know from estimates and these are estimates, small scale surveys, people doing work in Pacific areas, probably about 14 million people are in danger of living in poverty here in the UK. And that's about one in six families. Now we reckon the same is true in Ireland. We're talking to the food foundation who done a survey here in the UK but they excluded Northern Ireland. So my colleague in Belfast, Sinead Furey at University of Ulster is talking to them about including a module for Northern Ireland. So we'll get data on Northern Ireland, because we think the extent of poverty in Northern Ireland is probably even greater than south on the island of Ireland, but generally, it's about one in six families. And that's people who are formerly food insecure. I mean, what the Coronavirus situation has shown us is that there's a group of people who are on the margins of food poverty who are coping, just coping. So these are people who rely typically on family and friends or community. They might have said, I'm sure to something this week,

can you give me this? I mean, it might be extended family with grandparents feeding the kids two days a week, or they're relying on loans and credit cards. We saw an immediate problem here in the UK, not during the COVID crisis where one of the major credit card companies shut down all credit. And a number of people had no access to credit. And those combined here in the UK we went, are the numbers in poverty increased fivefold, because of those people who around them carry the precariat. We call them the precariat. They're on the margins. They are precarious but they were managing, they were managing, but the COVID crisis pushed him in. What we reckon in people use food banks as an indicator of poverty, or food poverty and what we reckon is for every two to three users of the food bank there are seven to eight potential people who are in poverty and food poverty. And they're coping in some ways. They're coping as best they can. So this is an enormous problem. It's 167 million people across the European Union are in food poverty is the estimate. That's it's worse in some of these in European countries. But it's also pretty bad in some of the Southern European countries. In the Americas. It's even worse. I mean, the Americas do have data, they collect a lot of data on food insecurity. And the figures there are one one in every two children is born into food poverty, and they rely on welfare systems such as SNAP and WIC, Women, Infants and Children and welfare policies. So this is a universal problem, and I'm a global nortex but I don't the global south has its own problems, the double burdens of nutrition, under nutrition and over nutrition, but that's not necessarily my area. I really know more more about the global north emerging and developing economies rather than poor economies. So this is I mean, it's an enormous problem which is hidden because of the stigma attached to food poverty. But the solution have been charity, which I'm sure you're going to ask me some questions about in a couple of moments. But what we've seen in the last couple of years is a move from state intervention around poverty and food poverty, to charitable interventions around poverty. Now I think in the states, there's an interesting contradiction with SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition AAction Program and WIC, which is the Women Infant and Children program, being the largest welfare programs in the world. And here's an economy which doesn't

believe in welfare with the largest welfare programs in the world because the extent of poverty in the U.S. is so enormous.

DANNY LENNON: There are definitely things that we're going to explore. And I think incredibly important points to tease out. Just before getting to charity work, food banks and some of the issues we've just raised I'm interested to maybe think about that what that day to day reality looks like for someone that's living in food poverty, because maybe sometimes it's difficult for some people to conceptualize what that means. Does it mean people are just hungry now and again? Or if to make some of these compromises? But what the reality can often look like?

MARTIN CARAHER: Okay, the reality of day to day poverty. There's a great couple of really nice Irish reports from Safe Food, which deal with the whole of the island of Ireland and their qualitative work. So they portray, I can draw on those as examples. I mean, the first thing to say is largely because of the nature of food provisioning, it's women who suffer. So women will often make decisions on behalf of the family and they will go without themselves. So they will feed the kids or feed partners and women are the ones that go out. And I mean, all the data shows women are still largely the bread, or still largely the food providers into home. Now, of course, single men. I mean, I'm not saying there are not people in it, but largely it's women. So women make these decisions. The reality is they think about spending. I mean why the discounters, things like Aldi and Lidl have become so popular is because they remove the risk of temptation walking down the aisles. When people talk about this, they say I plan my shopping in something like like Aldi or Lidl because I am not tempted by X and Y. The children don't see other things on sale. I mean, there this stock is limited. So people plan their week. People say well, I buy 10 pizzas in Aldi, and Lidl in front of bargain pack. And I plan to have so people do plan. All the evidence shows people plan their week ahead and people, again, mainly women, this is mainly women and it falls back on. They will go it out, but they will make compromises on food. They will. It's a bit like people say why do people in poverty buy branded goods? Well, why did people in food poverty buy and eat out because they don't want to deprive their kids socially. So they will often go to McDonald's even if it they know it costs slightly more. So the kids

don't feel left out. A bit like buying sneakers same principle. So people really struggle. People talk about at the end of the week, not having enough money to buy fresh food. The other consequence of this is people on low end incomes tend not to buy fresh food or buy limited amounts of fresh food for two reasons. One is they put out a bunch of apples and the kids eat them. And there's nothing left for the end of the week. The second thing is that the kids don't eat them, they go off. So you're taking a risk. But we've done some work in Liverpool with a group called Can Cook and we looked at people's cupboards. We took we took pictures of people's covered pre-intervention and post-intervention. And the cupboards were full of dried goods, and I suppose you might call them free and reheated material, just things you would add water to. We asked and we done the intervention to cooking and afterwards people were did change some of their behaviors. But the cupboards pretty much look the same. And we said Why? And they said because these things keep, I can buy some pot noodles and they keep. If I buy apples they are eaten, and I have nothing for the end of the week or at the end of the month. So this is the reality of people's lives. They're making these really really tough decisions interspersed with treats around food because we use food as a treat. And we all do, you know, I have a good day at work. I eat some Cadbury's Irish chocolate. I have a bad day at work I eat Cadbury's Irish chocolate. Food is a reward. We use it to reward ourselves. weuse it to fill ourselves up. It's also a way of coping with tension. So people in poverty are under enormous tension, enormous stress. So the other thing that's happening is not some of the epigenetic work is telling us the people in poverty tend to when they have money, because it's not that people don't have money all the time. They may have periods where they have some money, especially if you're in the economy, and then you have less money because it's a less busy week next week or you're not called into work, people tend. the body tends to tell us in an epigenetic sense stuck up, because you may not have food next week. So people eat energy dense food, because that's what the body is telling them to do. And that contributes to the obesity effect. So it's a combination of individual choice, social circumstances, social structure, but also epigenetics we now know part of the issue. But people really struggle. People make hard decisions. And people suffer. People do go without food. There is

hunger. Although in most instances, the hunger will not transfer to kids, people will go to enormous lengths not to have kids hungry, and their parents will under feed themselves.

DANNY LENNON: To me it's just even more compelling evidence around the problem with the personal responsibility narrative that's often painted with health and how it's not only wholly unhelpful, but it's also typically inaccurate a lot of the time. And so it doesn't really get us to the center of the bull's eye which we need to. One of the important issues that you've already mentioned, Martin, and that I think you also may have some issues with is people using the prevalence of food banks as either a measure of not only the issue, but even of success, and there can be issues with that. So when we talk about food banks, I think in one of the articles of yours that I read, there was like a startling statistic of back in 2001, maybe there was only one Food Bank in the whole of the UK. And now we're up to well over 1000 I think, at least at the time of that article that you wrote. So can you maybe first for people who are unfamiliar, what exactly we're talking about with food banks? Well, there's a typical setup, what is the service they provide, and then maybe we can from there, move into how that fits in this wider discussion.

MARTIN CARAHER: Okay. I mean Food Banks originated probably in the U.S. but Food Banks in the U.S. are slightly different food banks. When we talk about food banks in the U.S. they're generally the wholesale end of the equation. And they talk about food pantries, which we talked about as food banks here. So these are places that take food, they access food in two ways. And they give it to people who have been referred to them usually by someone like a doctor, a nurse, a teacher, a guard or a police person, somebody like that. They usually give them the model varies, but the model is giving them three days supply of food to tie them, or hold them over. Now the way in which food banks in the UK originated was they originated from the surface food movement, and that's great, rather than sending food to landfill, let's use it. Let's feed people whetted and in the initial stages these food banks were used to supply food to breakfast clubs to charities such as HIV charities. In 2000, you're right. Some of our research showed, I mean, when newspapers mentioned food banks, they had to say, like in the U.S. or in New Zealand, because people here was so unfamiliar with them. I think

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there's always food banks, but there were individual. I worked on the docks in Dublin 70s. And there were merchants see one of the charities that had food bank, but there were individual. They weren't, the problem what's happened from 2001 here in the UK and in Ireland, is that the growth of food banks has become enormous and they've become the default position for food aid. So rather than the government supplying inadequate income, you go to what's called the universal credit here you go to get your payment. I haven't got enough for food, they send you to the food bank, they refer you to the food bank. I mean, they don't have to give you money to buy food. So food banks have become the preferred option. Now, the way food banks operate here in the UK, and I think it's pretty similar in two ways. One is they take surplus from the food industry itself. And that's distributors among them. So, Tesco and all the majors will give their food which is about to go out of date or surplus to requirements to the food banks for redistribution to the poor. The other one is you go into supermarket and they've got a basket, they're saying please donate the following to the local food bank. So you go in as a customer. I've seen this in the west of Ireland, some of the small spar shops. You take out a packet of biscuits and you put it in the basket that goes to the local food bank. So there's two ways food banks are sourced. Both are precarious because the surplus food from the industry depends on what surplus this week. I once worked in the West Australia, where on a Friday evening we've got some, I think was seven tonnes of cheese. What had happened was the lorry had broken down. The refrigeration was still working but the lorry had broken down on the way to West Australia, which is the part which is the most remote city in the world. And the next lorry had overtaken it. So the seven tonnes which now what do we do at the food bank with seven tons of cheese, I mean. So we had loads of cheese that week, and none the next week. So the supply is dependent on what surplus are about to go out of date, or its overstocked in that individual week. Donations generally take the form when you're putting it into a basket of processed food because a lot of food banks have pretty small operations. There are some big ones. In Dublin there big ones. And in the City of London, there are big ones. But most of them operate out the back of a community hall or a church and don't have storage facilities for ambient food. So they really want

packaged goods. So this leads to a situation where people are getting food, which probably isn't always nutrient appropriate. And this isn't the blame food banks themselves. My problem isn't with individual food banks. My problem is with the system of what I call food banking, and that this has become the default position rather than us holding government to account. Now I realize this is difficult. We're in the middle of a crisis now. In London. our numbers have jumped fivefold and food banks have supplying food and I think that's great. But this is not a long term solution. What happens when we returned to whatever the new normal is and the football earlier on because Richard has actually said we need to thank beyond the COVID crisis. What happens? We need to be feeding people appropriately because there's a cost here. The cost in our NHS, the costs in our social care system to inadequate feeding. We're actually picking up later on. Food banks have become the default position rather than welfare. I mean I'm a huge supporter of the NHS in the UK. And I think food banks actually undermine the principle of the NHS and the welfare state by saying well, it's okay we can solve this problem by providing the camp. The camp will always provide the right types of food or the appropriate types of food. And there's an indignity and relying on charity. I'm sorry, all the research shows people don't feel if you don't feel good about having to go and take charity. Now that's not to demean the work of food banks and I have less problem with the banks are delivering to their own communities. But we're now, the extent of poverty is so great people not just delivering to their member community, that people are having to come from outside those communities and rely on food banks for their food.

DANNY LENNON: And that's the crucial thing that it's at a surface level, there can be very good work being done. But as your work has highlighted, that it's not addressing the actual issue. There's this symptom of this wider issue that people need emergency food aid which it can help with, but it's not actually stopping anyone being in poverty or food poverty. And like you said I think at a broader level, this issue that it draws in is if there's, it's almost a victim of its own success that as these food banks become better, get more donations, have more operational power to be able to reach more people and help more people, the better they become in that sense. It almost gives governments easy way out to kind of distanced themselves from it

and leave it to charities to do a job that they should be probably doing.

MARTIN CARAHER: Great. Yeah. I mean and we've seen some of the weaknesses of the system with the COVID crisis, COVID-19 crisis where the charities themselves were put under pressure because a lot of their volunteers were all the people probably at risk, social distancing, traveled to food banks, they are wreck, I mean, nobody would turns out in the UK, nobody had a complete record of doors address because often people will go to food banks not give their full details that may give a general postcode. So when the crisis came, we didn't have a complete list of people to go out to and approach and say, do you need help in different ways? It is a crisis at the moment. I think that something needs to be done. When we wrote a piece of work saying the problem is it's very hard to criticize charities. I mean, I'm not very popular for saying charity is not a response in certain circles and I still hold it out I don't think charity is an appropriate response to a wider systemic problem of poverty and food poverty. But I mean we wrote a piece called food banks have what we call successful failures. Their success because they do something they're failures because they're not attacking what you just said underlying issues of food poverty, and they can't. I mean, it's not their business to, again, I go back and say, individually, I support food banks. But as a system, the problem is it's growing. It's stumbling forward. And I think the current crisis, what we'll see is, we'll see a re emergence of food banks, albeit in a modified form, but they'll stumble forward.

DANNY LENNON: Yeah, that's, it's this paradox of as the operational power that they have, the more access they have in terms of the more people are helping. If we look at as that number increases, rather than that's being viewed as a good thing, sure, on a surface of a more people are being helped, but it just shows that the issue isn't going in the right direction. If there was no poverty the number would go down. So we have this strange kind of paradox of how to attack that. One of the things I wanted to bring up, actually, I want to actually pull up a quote from an article of yours that I read, and it was quite profound, and I think it gets to some of this discussion. So I just like to read that quote, and then maybe ask for you to expand on it and actually relates to some of the stuff we've just brought up. So in that

article, you said, “The causes of food poverty include insufficient income, benefit delays, benefit changes, debt, and increasing housing and utility bills. All this is exacerbated by a low tax low welfare economy where the agenda is to keep voters happy by keeping taxes low and penalizing and demonizing those on low incomes. The narrative in political and media discourses is often around the “undeserving poor.” And so with that, can you maybe just expand on that idea for for people.

MARTIN CARAHER: Like in the current crisis to Victorian and indeed Elizabethan crisis were endorsed in 16th century and 18th, 19th centuries. The poor last saw the poor as two distinct groups, the deserving and the undeserving poor. And I think we're back to that current situation. The welfare system treats some people as deserving and some people as undeserving and we demonize the poor. We say, well, if only if, I mean, I'm a huge supporter of cooking skills. I spent a lot of my working career support and cooking skills, but cooking skills are very often just put forward as the answer and people who are in poverty They're because they can't cook. Well, I'm sorry that for me, that's not true. As I said earlier, if you can't cook, it's a drop a burden. But you're not in poverty because you can't cook. That's not the issue. I mean actually the people who can't cook are people in high incomes, that's when we look at the data, it's more likely you're more likely to be less skilled if you're a high income than on the low income around cooking. So we demonize the poor. We reduce this to the level of individual skills or individual knowledge rather than structural issues. The governments generally have an investment in low tax and a low income base. So the heroes of the COVID crisis have been food workers, either in supermarkets and in those hospitality sectors that remained open to some extent during the crisis. Yet they're among the lowest paid with the worst working conditions, insecure employment. It's great that we're recognizing NHS staff and care workers. But these workers I mean, look what's happening in factories at the moment. We're seeing up. I mean, there's another outbreak in the west of Ireland. I see some today in a factory. Food factories are probably pretty poor places to work. And here's the irony is it's people working near food that are getting COVID I mean, getting infected with the virus, I mean, because of poor working conditions, but they're also poorly paid. I mean, if they were at least adequately paid, you could not you could justify

them getting infected. That's not my point. But they're poorly paid and poor working conditions. So it's just the whole system is a disaster. Governments want to keep wages low, particularly among low income groupings. I mean places like New Zealand, for example of banned zero hour contracts or the gig economy, on the basis that it's bad for social life, because people can't eat healthily, plan a healthy life, plan their social life, we need to see more countries doing that protecting low income workers, giving them a living wage, not a minimum wage, but a living wage which may vary what it takes to live in London is different from what it takes to live maybe in the north of England. There are regional variations on that. I think that's true. And there's some work being done on that, indeed, Northern Ireland did some work about how the the setting of a living wage for Northern Ireland and Scotland, because it's different than the UK average. It may be less and more in some instances.

DANNY LENNON: It actually as you were speaking reminded me of another really impactful point that I read in some of your work that relates to this idea of not only do we have governments trying to portray themselves in one way on the surface in terms of what they're doing that may be different to actually putting in policies that are really useful to people. But when we think about the welfare system that is in place, and obviously you're mainly looking at this through the lens of the UK, but it extends to other countries as well, that rather than it being a welfare system in terms of it actually is set out to help the welfare and health of people it instead a welfare system based purely on the premise of how do we incentivize people to go seek work again and everything is built around that as opposed to really caring about their welfare per se. So it's almost a misnomer in some respects.

MARTIN CARAHER: Yeah. That's true. When I worked in the west of Ireland back in the 70s. I mean, we had debates about this about what employment and at the time the Common Agricultural Policy has been used to subsidize I would say probably on economic farms but there was I mean, maybe the government turned a blind eye. It was now how the money was supposed to be used. But there was a recognition that this was about social life. And you may decide to subsidize certain things, not because of their economic impact, but because of

their social impact. We had discussions about how do you recognize volunteer work. How do people working on adult literacy schemes in the west of Ireland should they be recognized as working giving a living minimum wage or minimum income? These debates are coming again. The old living wage, minimum income, guaranteed minimum income in some of the Scandinavian countries, they're running pilots saying, you can have this income, here's a minimum income. If you want to work, you can go work on top of that. It's up to you. I mean most western economies don't do that. It is a return to work surface. We're completely obsessed with. Many people may not return to work. And one of the things we do with a model like that is we neglect the social impact that people have. So is it always best parents returned to work? Maybe it's better they stay at home and look after the kids. Society might benefit more if we recognize that as a social good, who paid for that, rather than saying, no, no, you've got to get back to work. We penalize you. I mean, that's the problem is not just getting back to work. In many instances, there isn't a work. But if they don't succeed in getting work, we penalize them and it's not just them, the adults that suffers, families that suffer and it's the health of children. And again, there's no what we call true cost accounting on this. So those kids will suffer not just nutrition problems, probably but other problems. And we pick up the cost later down the line in our taxes. And we haven't introduced the complete model of what's called while some areas called true cost accounting or social accounting. I mean it's just, I mean it there are models out there already. But governments think of GDP, the gold standard measure is GDP, which is hides absolute inequalities. That's the problem.

DANNY LENNON: In terms of the potential issues here, because so much of it is political. And all this discourse does come down to political discussions of what is the way forward. I'm just wondering from your perspective of when you have voiced some of these concerns, along with your colleagues, and try to put out these ideas that are rooted in look, here's this issue, here's a path forward, how much resistance comes from people who are already bought onto a particular political ideology that makes it inflexible to be able to take on board some of these particular arguments and I'm just wondering how much of the political ideology and dogmatism can sometimes hamper health policy.

MARTIN CARAHER: Yeah. I mean I think you are absolutely right. The problem here is not one of evidence. It's one of political ideology and beliefs. And that leads to people's beliefs. The classic example was we had report a couple of years ago by the House of Commons on poverty. And along with other people, I give evidence to it. On the day they launched a report, one of the members of the committee publicly stood up and said, well, the only people who would cook their own porridge there would be fine. Going back to this individual beliefs or people's beliefs override some of the evidence sometimes. I think that's right. And people see poverty as an individual failing rather than as a structural failing. And if you believe that it's very hard to get your head around some of the issues around structural inequalities. I mean I think even the academic world is guilty of this. I mean I work with a lot of activists, some very critical activists. And I mean, I realize it's difficult for young researchers. You've got to make a career, you've got to bring in money nowadays. But I hear people saying food banks are not the answer. And then all the research is on food banks. Well, I want to know what is the answer? I don't want to know I mean, we've got enough that we never have enough, but we've got sufficient data on food banks to show that they're not really working, if not worked in 20 years, 30 years in the U.S. and Canada. Things have got worse food banks have grown. So what should we be doing? I think the Scottish Government offers some hope. I mean, again, the COVID crisis has put a lot of these things on hold, but pre-COVID the Scottish government have a report called just fare and what they're saying in the future is that their success will be measured by reduction in the level of referrals the food banks and no new opening of food banks. So it's not saying food banks will disappear. It's just saying this will not grow. And we want people to have adequate income so they can afford to make their own decisions around food. I think that's a brave decision. We need to see we need to follow that true. I think we've seen initiatives in other parts of the world. I mean I do think Brazil, maybe pre- the current president, but they had a lot of initiatives going on there, which were joined up. The nice thing about the Brazilian movement was they had food banks, but there were government food banks. I think there's, I mean, for me, there's a difference about how food banks operate and who the member, if they're run by community, that seems to me to be different than if they're faith based. I've got a

particular problem with faith based charities. Again not to say they shouldn't help their own members. It's when they become the default position for people outside of that community is the problem for me and they undermine a welfare system. So you've got. I mean I'll give you an example of beliefs. I'm a huge Springsteen fan. So I'm getting Springsteen in here and back in 1984 he had done a concert in Newcastle time of the miners strike, he contributed 50,000 pounds to a local food bank. The Tories went mad. He was pilloried in Parliament. So he's actually Springsteen was mentioned in Hansard here, saying “why was he giving money to criminals and food banks shouldn't exist”. Now the Tories embrace food banks like they invented them. And the origin of the word Tories it's an Irish word [tóraidhe or tóraí] meaning “rapparee” or “robber”. So there you go. But this is about you, right goes back to this issue of beliefs and values. And I think one of the ways out of that is to highlight people's experiences. What the question you asked me earlier on not just facts and figures There's a movement in the U.S. where the experts are actually the people who live in poverty themselves. So it's not people like me. It's people, and they go along to hearings and say, no, this is what it's like. So I think there's a combination of people like me, along with voices of people themselves and what is actually like living in food poverty. As to the challenge and tackle those beliefs that people have or it's just an individual issue.

DANNY LENNON: So to think about how we envision the path forward from here I think quite clearly based on the case that you've made Martin, the path forward is not to say, how many more people can we try and reach with something like a food bank to feed the path forward is how do we reduce food poverty ideally to the point where it is zero and there is zero poverty that we don't need these things to exist. And so in terms of that path forward, I'm going to ask maybe about maybe three layers to this question. One is the obvious one around the governmental level at a policy level. Two then either alongside that or in lieu of that something that maybe could be done at a community level. And then I'm sure there's many people listening here who are very bought into trying to be part of the solution that maybe want to see what they can do on an individual level. So to start with at a governmental policy level, this is obviously probably the most complex and it can be very difficult to know, I'm sure

there's no easy answers here. So instead, I'll ask about how radical or not do you think some of the policy changes and reforms would need to be? For example, I know there's being in different countries discussion around are we getting to a point where something like a universal basic income would be useful that people are given a certain amount of money per month with no means tested, with no requirement to spend it in a certain area, but that's going at least push those people above a certain poverty line. There's obviously strong opponents of that. To you what does that policy change in the in the future look like? How radical or different does it need to be from where we are now? And do you have any optimism that that can be achieved in the future?

DANNY LENNON: I mean I once worked with Marion Nestle, who said, and I said to Marion Marian, you are glass half full and I am glass half empty. So we balanced one another. So I'm a pessimist, I think. I think there is opportunity. I know you've had my colleague Corinna Hawkes on; I think there is a way a policy level of integrating policies. The problem is we treat food poverty in one sector. We treat nutrition in another and we treat obesity in another and we treat inequality under another. They're actually pretty much as faced the same problem but the policies don't talk to one another. So we've got pillars of poverty. Pillars of policy poverty, pillars of nutrition policy, pillars of obesity policy and pillars of income policy. If we tackled all of those by talking across policy sectors government, that would be good. I mean, Corinna is much more an advocate of this than I am. But it would seem to me that one way forward. So not just seeing, obesity has got strong roots in inequality and food poverty. It very rarely addresses, but we've got huge amounts being spent on obesity prevention. So let's join it up. I think, I mean, the universal basic income, it would be great. I would think that what we need to do with food poverty is set a minimum standard for that, within that how much needs to be spent on food to guarantee a nutritional outcome. I mean, this is always hypothetical. If you because it's a bad choice, but if you want to could you afford to eat a healthy diet on this and I think there are regional variations. I was quite shocked by some work that was done in Scotland showing differences in food basket prices within a region, a rural region of up to eight or nine pounds. So I think we need not, we need to have regional universal basic income does show meaning maybe because

in rural areas people have to travel, traveling is that issue, but these were actually branches of the same supermarket. So in one it was £8 more than other. I mean and if you went on the website, it just says one price, but that didn't prove to be true. So I think integrated policy is one way of seeing going back to the basics. I think we have to tackle inequality. I think inequality for me is the key issue here. And food inequality within that is I think important. But one of the things that we know, I mean, the current policies are based on a trickle down effect. So you make the rich richer and there's a trickle down. The problem with that is the rich get richer and the poor never catch up. So the gap increases between the rich and the poor. So the poor get better. They never catch up. And we know the best countries in the world, whether income equality or equality of however you measure, maybe income equality isn't the only measure is less are more healthy societies. So the Scandinavian countries stand out again and again, because they've got, they tax as much as anywhere else, but they redistribute out to ensure a fairer society. And they've got policies like if you go to court and you find you can't find you below a level that would bring you below food insecurity level. I mean we need integrated policies like that. But I think governments are obsessed, I mean, the food is industry is a money making industry for lots of countries and its exports. So we're also. I am going to introduce another topic now. We're introducing new inequalities. So you take the island of Ireland, agricultural economy, what it's currently doing is exporting infant feed substitutes to Africa but mainly to the far East. When I was in Hong Kong two years ago, I mean, organic infant feed was all over the place. People were coming from Mainland China and buying crate loads of it. So we can do something for our own populations. But we've got to be aware of a global situation with this. There's no point just making ourselves healthier if we're simply exporting chronic disease to Africa, and to Southeast Asia. I mean, that doesn't seem to me to make any sense because we're creating new food inequalities by doing that. But do you think Integration policy. I mean, Brazil is the shining example where they've, at least up until now been. It's not perfect. I wouldn't I don't think they would claim it's perfect. But they've managed to integrate policy. They've managed to get commitment. As I said, I mean, pre-the current administration, but most of that's held steady. It hasn't dismantled

it and what policies are hasn't dismantled situations there and they're continuing to deliver and they've got the double problem of under and over nutrition, massive undernutrition, and massive offer and nutrition often in the same populations; a difference in their time.

DANNY LENNON: Brilliant and very insightful. And I think I would probably put myself more in the pessimism side of things like yourself too when I consider who is in charge oftentimes of making some of these decisions. So with that mind, I'll leave you on this final thing. Like I said, I'm sure there's lots of people listening who do care about this issue, who have either maybe just been exposed to thinking more about this, who want to see, is there anything that we can do in lieu of waiting for policy changes. For people that that care about this idea or want to learn more what would you advise people of either how they could help in some way on an individual level, how they could learn more? How could they be part of something that may be beneficial to addressing this issue, if that's possible?

MARTIN CARAHER: Wow. That's a good question. I think I would read some of the classic material, I would go and read Liz Dowler. I mean, if you just type Liz into Google, she'll come up. She's now retired but still active. I would read Graham Riches from Canada, his book, it's poverty and Graham Riches and Tiina Silvasti book but 2016 I think now, but it's Poverty Re-examined, and it's just looking about things of how things have got slightly worse with some success stories. I would read some of the classic literature. I think become active, ask the questions, whether that be of your local food bank, why are you doing this? What are you doing? What are your long term plans? There's a wonderful movement in Toronto in Canada, of food bank workers, saying we want to retire by the age of 90, you know, 70, we want to end food banks. We realize this is not the solution. So what are we going to do? I think we've got to be questioning about this. If you're I mean, we've seen food bank volunteers and food, people who run food banks question the very nature of food banks. I think you can do that while you continue to offer a service by thinking long term. So what do I really want this food bank to be here in five years time? Do I certainly question do you want the bigger I mean, would be a no, no, in my mind, but whats the long term solution people working in the sector I think

we've got to challenge the notion that simply providing food to people is just a logistical problem. It's more than that. This is a social problem. And charity probably questioned the basis of charity. Now, again, I'm not hitting individual charities or individual food banks if they are serving to their own members, I think that's fine. It's when they become the default position for society that I'm worried about. So I think we should question all of those things.

DANNY LENNON: One thing related to that I think I probably do have some degree of optimism about that springs in is actually related to the unfortunate circumstances of how 2020 is unfolded. And I think because of the overlap of not only the pandemic, but a lot of the social unrest that's happened around the world and how the issues that we've talked about today, for example, food poverty have been highlighted in a more mainstream way. It's given me maybe some hope that maybe hopefully people will no longer stand for in the same way that there's now more attention that can be placed on it that can be highlighted and maybe hopefully people don't forget about that once this particular period of time passes. And given that there's so much upheaval at a political level now, and there's so many changes going on to deal with this crisis, now is almost like a good time to make wholesale changes afterwards, as opposed to reverting back. So hopefully, there's a glimmer of hope within that. Just for people who want to catch more of your work in particular, or find any of your information on the Internet or even find you on social media, those types of things, where can they track down you and your work?

MARTIN CARAHER: The best place is to go www.city.ac.uk just look for Staff type in my name and my page will come up with most of my publications and contact details. I'm happy for people to contact me individually. It would be great if they mentioned your program. That it's come through this. This would help me always contextualize what I've said and maybe they're asking me something. So that would be good. But go to my home page on the city.ac.uk. And just type in my name and it's Caraher a he or it's an unusual spelling of Caraher And it will come up, and all my contact details, my publications, bit about my past history, all of those things will be there. That's probably the best thing to do.

DANNY LENNON: Alright. So Martin I am going to end on the very final question I always end the podcast on and it can be either related or unrelated to what we've discussed today. And it's simply if you could advise people to do one thing each day that would have a positive impact on any area of their life what might that one thing?

MARTIN CARAHER: Oh, wow, God is sneaky. Cook. I'm a passionate cooker. And I don't care whether that's just assembling. I mean, I'm not necessarily even talking about cooking from basics. I think engagement with food is important. I think food is important. I think socially foods important, but I also think is good for us individually. I would say just prepare some food or cook from. I mean you want to cook from basics fine or you want to bake a cake whatever your poison is, in terms of cooking, just do it. And don't feel guilty about it. That's the other thing.

DANNY LENNON: With that, Martin, let me say thank you so much, not only for your time and for the wonderful information today, but also the work you've been doing for a long period of time. Like I said at outset, it's been tremendously informative and influential for me. So thank you for that. And thank you for this conversation today.

MARTIN CARAHER: Thank you Danny I mean, talking like this always puts you on the spot makes you think about your own value. So thank you. It's very