

## The Ecopolitics Podcast - S01E11: Environmental Political Economy

<https://www.ecopoliticspodcast.ca/episode-11-environmental-political-economy-3/>

Hosts: Peter Andrée (Carleton University) and Ryan Katz-Rosene (University of Ottawa)

Guest: Laurie Adkin (University of Alberta)

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*What needs to change in order to truly tackle climate change? In this episode Dr. Laurie Adkin, Professor of Political Science at the University of Alberta, provides us with some answers by looking at the intersections of political, economic and environmental justice. From properly funding a public broadcasting system that is free from corporate power, to understanding the multifaceted reasons why there's so much resistance to greening the economy in places like Alberta, this episode will leave you with a lot to think about!*

### Episode 11: Environmental Political Economy

**Laurie Adkin:** *We are not talking about environmentalism anymore. We are talking about climate justice. And that reflects the convergence of ecological and social justice struggles. There is real momentum behind the just recovery or the Green New Deal movements. I think they provide positive visions, programmatic principles for youth to mobilize around. And that's really important. And electorally, this generation will soon be a force to be reckoned with.*

[00:00:35] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Hello folks. Welcome to the Ecopolitics Podcast. This podcast series tackles some of the big questions in the field of environmental politics for university students in Canada. I'm Ryan Katz-Rosene from the University of Ottawa. And my cohost for the show is Peter Andrée from Carleton University. How are you doing today Peter?

[00:00:56] **Peter Andrée:** I'm doing very well Ryan. Nice to be here, and excited for our conversation with Dr Laurie Adkin.

[00:01:02] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Fantastic. Well, I'm excited too. So maybe I'll go ahead and introduce our guest for this episode. And that is Dr Laurie Adkin, professor of comparative politics in the Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta. And Laurie has been working at the interface of ecology and politics since the 1980s. And she's been a pioneer in the field of ecopolitics in Canada, writing often about democracy and governance alongside resource development in, in particular, the oil and gas sector in Alberta, in numerous books and articles, which we won't list here, but you can check out her bio on our website.

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[00:01:42] And we're quite lucky to have Laurie joining us today to help guide us through a discussion on a theme that we have termed environmental political economy. And one way we want to introduce this was to talk a little bit about that, very briefly about that sort of history of the Canadian economy, as it's tied to environmental exploitation and resources.

[00:02:05] And so Canada of course, has a very unique political economic history, which is tied into resources and which are found across its geographical expanse. And given the central role of resource extraction to the foundations of Canada's economy, during the colonial era and right up until today, we very quickly run into these inescapable political questions about environmental management and justice. So for instance, the production and export of raw commodities, which have enriched the colonial and later the settler state of Canada. From fish and beaver pelts to oil and wheat to uranium and lumber and potash and diamonds. This is all had a pronounced impact, not only on the environment, but the people and communities who have been involved or resided near those resource developments.

[00:03:01] And so environmental political economy in Canada is a very rich field of study because it looks at these intersections of these different spheres. And so I'm sure we'll hear many of these stories from Laurie today. And I'm going to turn it over to Peter in a few minutes to ask the first question, but before I do, let me just welcome you to the show, Laurie, how are you doing?

[00:03:23] **Laurie Adkin:** Hello, Ryan and Peter. I'm really delighted to be here.

[00:03:27] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Fantastic. Peter. Why don't you jump in with your first question?

[00:03:31] **Peter Andr e:** Sure, happy to. So welcome to the show Laurie. I'd like to pick up on this historical legacy of Canada's political economic history and ask you about how and where that has left Canada today. Some political economists argue that Canada's heavy reliance, natural resources makes this country weak and especially vulnerable to market volatility, thanks to fluctuating commodity prices for example. It may also make Canada subservient to more powerful countries or multinational corporations, which can extend control over Canada's political economy through tradecraft. I'm thinking here, for instance of softwood lumber and various clauses in trade agreements that allow foreign governments and corporations to sue Canada for intervening in that resource markets in various ways.

[00:04:20] However, there's also a counter narrative which emerged, especially during the Harper years, Canada, as a resource superpower. In 2006, for instance, Stephen Harper announced to the world that

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Canada was an emerging energy superpower. We're curious to hear how you see Canada's natural resource endowment. Is it a curse, or a source of political and economic power, or perhaps a little bit of both?

[00:04:47] **Laurie Adkin:** Well, I think first Canadians are extremely fortunate to be citizens of a country whose territory has so much arable land, forest, and fresh water. These are the basis of life and they are, I think, going to become more and more precious and sought after in the future. As the effects of climate destabilization unravel, we are going to see growing problems around the world in terms of the ability to produce food. And Canada's resources will allow it not only to produce food, but to preserve some of the planet's remaining habitat for other species, which is really critical and not often talked about as something that we have to look into in the future in terms of consequences of climate change and biodiversity loss.

[00:05:35] And having a reliable supply of fresh water, I think will also become more and more precious. I personally have no doubt that water is more precious than oil. And if you look at the kind of climate change modeling that has emerged in the last 10 years around what the planet will look like, if we surpass 1.5 or 2 degrees or even higher levels of global warming, we will see in a large swaths of the earth becoming uninhabitable and their areas of food production collapsing. So Canada, again, will be one of them, the regions that still able to produce food, but we will of course be contending with many other problems that are related to the destabilized climate.

[00:06:19] So in the context of global warming, do we continue to see the possession of such resources as sources of political and economic power. I mean, this is a whole way of thinking, which might be where Stephen Harper comes from when he talks about Canada as an energy superpower. But I personally am much more interested in thinking and talking about resources as a basis of survival and as linked to our role in the world, in relation to other people.

[00:06:53] Along with the destabilization of the global climate will come millions of climate refugees. We know already since 2001 that the advanced capitalist countries have not really been able to manage the Syrian refugee crisis. You can see the consequences in Europe of the influx of refugees, especially since 2015. And you know, we have to ask ourselves what is going to happen by mid century when, and as it seems now, there may be hundreds of millions of climate refugees trying to escape natural catastrophes and famines.

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[00:07:28] I think Canada will be transformed one way or the other by the migration of millions of people to the North. Our cities, our human footprint on the landscape, our demand for water, all of this will be transformed. So how will Canada use this, if you like, power, if you use the term power, which is embedded in territorial possession of these resources, and what kind of power will it have in such a future?

[00:08:01] Look at what's happening in the United States right now. We have desertification in the West, increasing frequency of massive fires, contamination of drinking water by fracking in the Midwest, devastating hurricanes. So all of this to me, raises a question about whether, you know, let alone talking about our future power as a result of having these resources, in the context of climate change, will Canada be possible in a four degrees warmer world, given our relationship and our closeness to the United States?

[00:08:33] Now there's a second answer to your question about the value of - the value to Canada its national resource endowment, which of course includes fossil fuels and minerals, as well as land and water.

[00:08:45] We've associated economic wealth and power in the past with the export of oil, gas, lumber, uranium pulp, as well as food crops and animal products, particularly in Alberta. Now, these exports are exchanged for the low wage consumer goods that we import from the global South. These circuits of long-distance trade are ecologically and socially unsustainable. And the extraction of unconventional oil and gas and of coal has to end because it's fueling climate destabilization and delaying the switch to alternative sources of energy. The first question that neoclassical economist asks when faced with the assertion that Alberta must stop exporting oil and gas is, What will we export instead?

[00:09:36] Right. Now, this I think is because they cannot imagine an economy that is centered on reproduction and self-sufficiency rather than export earnings. But the only ecologically sustainable economy at this point in human history is one of shrinking, not expanding, consumption. Back in the 1980s, the American economist, Herman Daly introduced the term 'steady state economy' and asserted that sustainable growth was an oxymoron.

[00:10:12] In the 1970s, going back even further, the French political economist, André Gorz argued that we should be expanding free time, since technologies had so radically increased labour productivity. And then other French thinkers who have really focused a lot on the questions of reduction of work time, like

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the French economist Alain Lipietz have linked increased leisure time to decreased consumption of things, which has huge implications for ecological sustainability.

[00:10:42] And today ecological economists are advancing the idea of degrowth, a concept that is anathema, clearly, to both neoliberals and social Democrats, who have not yet grasped that there are ecological limits to growth, and we are now in serious deficit.

[00:11:03] So coming back to your question, my view is that we should stop thinking about political and economic power being linked to the export of natural resources and start thinking about how we can minimize resource use, radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce work time, redistribute wealth, and provide income security.

[00:11:27] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Well, Holy smokes. That's a detailed answer to that question. And you got into the question of growth, which is fantastic as we were going to ask you about that. And I'm glad you gave us a taste of your thoughts on this question of green growth and agrowth and degrowth, which is a theme we have come to a couple of times in this podcast series.

[00:11:49] But I want to pick up on something you said, which I wrote down here in my notes in quotation marks, you said that it has to end, essentially the production and export of, you know, these fossil fuel resources, oil and gas. And so I'm going to frame this question in a more of a personal light, because you know, you are based in Edmonton and, you know, I imagine you've grown accustomed to calls for governments to put all its eggs into supporting the oil and gas sector. And this is support that can manifest in many ways. We're talking about subsidies, reduced royalty rates, weakening environmental regulations, purchasing and nationalizing pipelines, negotiating trade agreements, creating more attractive investment climates and so on.

[00:12:38] So being in the belly of the beast, so to speak, you've long been a part of a group of vocal critics of Alberta's oil and gas sector. And so I'm wondering how you navigate that on a personal level and as an academic, you know, a critical academic who's researching and writing on this stuff. What do you say to, to fellow Albertans? How do you explain to them, or Canadians for that matter, who don't understand why you would want to see this industry close up shop?

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[00:13:11] **Laurie Adkin:** Well, for a full answer to the first question, you'll have to wait for the memoirs. You know, how I cope personally with being an enemy of the people. In the Henrik Ibsen sense, not the Jason Kenney sense.

[00:13:29] Really the answer to that is, it has to do with psychology, the temperament I was born with I think - year of the dog - intellectual mentorship, friendship, family support, and the protection of a university position, which is obviously important. In fact, I do struggle often with the feeling that other academics are not speaking publicly about the rotten state of our democracy or the urgency of the climate crisis.

[00:14:02] And these are not times to shelter behind privilege. I do understand that many people have excellent reasons for having limited capacity to engage in public life and public debate. But at the same time, I often do find that frustrating. I also find the quiescence of university leaders faced with governments and corporate forces that are shaping university research and investments very frustrating. I think we're reaping the fruits of their strategy now in Alberta as the United Conservative Party government gleefully dismantles postsecondary education.

[00:14:39] So let me focus on the second question. One of the things that we try to do here is to push back against some of the propaganda of the oil and gas sector that comes from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, the Kenney government's Energy Center and Postmedia, which is really a platform for these organizations and these interests and disseminates the messaging.

[00:15:11] So we need to look at how much revenue governments actually get from these industries, once we deduct the massive subsidies that governments dispensed to them, once we deduct the future environmental costs, that will likely be dumped on generations of citizens to come, not only in Alberta. And We need to ask ourselves whether the same companies, that are demanding government investments and tax breaks and credit facilities and the suspension of environmental monitoring and the suspension of the carbon tax during the COVID-19 pandemic, are going to be sticking around to pay for the cost of cleaning up the abandoned oil and gas wells and the pipelines and the tailings ponds.

[00:15:57] And then we would also want to look at the question, and their claims around how many jobs are dependent are dependent on fossil fuel extraction processing and transportation, and ask how many jobs we could create by investing in other sectors of the economy instead of oil and gas. You know, let's look at what's going on in the global political economy with regard to the supply of oil, the demand for

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oil, the decision is being made by major investment and pension funds, the divestment of some of the oil majors from high cost, high risk reservoirs, like the oil sands. So I think the writing on the wall is getting larger by the day and the future of this industry is anything but dependable.

[00:16:42] This means that it's not dependable for workers and their communities. It cannot offer security even in the medium term. And there are many other problems and costs associated with the carbon extractive economy, such as its gender inequality and its destruction of the environmental conditions for Indigenous cultures to flourish in the area of the oil sands and downstream.

[00:17:08] But how do I explain to Albertans? Or how could anyone explain to Albertans that their future is not safe and secure in the hands of the oil and gas industry? Or that a better future possible? Well, obviously as a researcher and a citizen, I do what I can to think through the policy options and to advocate, in whatever forums are available to me, for the policies that I believe will advance ecological sustainability and a good life. I do this and in many ways. But effectively challenge the status quo, one has to have not only a program of alternatives that's concrete, in the sense that people can see the steps and the destination, but we need to have means to communicate these. Right.

[00:17:55] So I think what you're really asking is a political question. What will make it politically possible? For there to be a rapid transition to a green economy, what I would like to call a solidaristic green economy. And political economists generally answer a question like that by starting with the obstacles, right? And you start analyzing the obstacles, you start looking, you start to understand what the solutions might be.

[00:18:20] This is the work that the Corporate Mapping Project has been doing. The group of researchers led by William Carroll, the sociologist at the University of Victoria. And clearly in Alberta, there are deeply entrenched obstacles to change, which have long roots. So, if I were to list these, I would say - I'm going back again to the ownership of mainstream media outlets, which is a huge political obstacle to change.

[00:18:49] Then there's the effective fusion of the oil and gas industry with the state. So I think the state isn't just captured, in this context, it has actually actively rendered itself dependent on the private sector for data, expertise, regulatory, design, monitoring, and political support. Then we would look at the decades of indoctrination of Albertans by industry and governments, as well as conservative mass media, using the enormous means at their disposal. And this is combined with tactical repression of

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dissent, when it dares to raise its head, something that we have seen over and over, and that I have been involved in responding to over the past 30 years in various ways.

[00:19:38] And then I would have to also mention as an obstacle to being able to make this case for an alternative society and economy being possible, is the nature of our democratic political institutions, which I would say are, are very weakly democratic - severely anemic might be more accurate.

[00:20:00] And some of these institutions are federal, they're not only provincial. So, I'm thinking of the first-past-the-post electoral system. A party funding system that allows wealthy people to shape outcomes. The lack of institutionalized environmental rights. The nature of public consultation processes, that are in my view, no more than legitimization exercises for governments.

[00:20:31] And we could look at a list of other problems as well, that are serious obstacles. And actually one that often I think is left out of discussions and environmental studies and environmental politics is the importance of having a well-funded public broadcasting system. People go, what is that got to do with the environment? Well, you know We need critical, independent investigative journalism to expose and reveal and explain and communicate these relationships to people.

[00:21:01] If all we have is a commercial media and social media, and all that it's prone to, then we are setting ourselves up for exactly what we're seeing today, which is a kind of epistemological populism, where we no longer know who to believe experts are distrusted, science is rejected, governments conceal. We have problems of access to information, governments finance, actively, propaganda - we're seeing this in Alberta, a huge amount of spending on public information campaigns and the Canadian Energy Center and the inquiries, you know, McCarthy-type inquiries into, you know, to just persuade people that we're somehow subject to an international conspiracy against our energy industry.

[00:21:50] So it's critically important that we have public broadcasting because civil society needs access to these platforms. People who don't have the money to buy advertising and pay for campaigns still need to have public spaces in which to be heard. And we need public broadcasting for that too.

[00:22:08] So, none of this is to deny that there is a material reality in Alberta in which the labour market has been structured by the extractive industries. During the booms, it's been a get-rich-quick economy for young men with high school education, many of whom come from rural areas. Women



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predominate in the low-paid service sectors. And as elsewhere, of course, in the public sector, in human services and administration.

[00:22:43] So, you know, when we start looking at kind of the way that the labour force has been structured historically here, and people's relationship to the oil and gas industry, there's obviously a lot to unpack and more than we have time for today, but maybe one thing I would highlight about the current conditions for making this case for an alternative green economy is that it's particularly - there's a particular resistance coming from the men who were employed in the oil and gas sector and who are now very insecurely employed, or have been laid off.

[00:23:18] The kinds of jobs that they had in the oil and gas sector were very high income jobs, right. And the kinds of jobs that they're being offered or that are associated with the green economy are jobs that don't pay as much as the jobs they're losing. So we're thinking about renewables, energy efficiency, environmental remediation, maybe public transportation as areas where people who had those skills might shift into green economy. Well, You know, that kind of shift for them is a loss of consumer power. It's a loss of breadwinner status. It's a loss of the compensation for self-esteem issues. It's loss of a particular masculine identity that was associated with the ownership of certain objects - the big trucks, the holidays to Las Vegas - and with economic and social power.

[00:24:16] So the kinds of labour, just to kind of put this in a different way, the kinds of labour that are valorized in programs like Just Recovery, the Green New Deal have to do with care relationships. And these have been associated with feminine labour. So I think it's not surprising that we see misogyny directed toward women environmentalists, women academics, women politicians who are associated by these men with threats to the continuing dominance of the oil and gas industry.

[00:24:50] There is a strong case to be made that in the post-carbon economy, we will gain much more than we will lose. But the playing field for this argument to be heard is not level, right. It's very hard to present the case without the means to counter the mass media messages of Alberta governments and the oil and gas corporations.

[00:25:15] And those of us who are trying to do this are really very much overstretched because we already have, you know, full time jobs and obligations. So it is challenging. But I think we have the pillars, we have a basic grasp of what we need to do, where we need to invest. I think we can put together an attractive vision. I'm actually personally planning to devote my future years of research to try to refine

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this in a more fine-grained way, how to get from high-level principles to more fine-grain policy proposals for green transition in Canada. And it's just a constant struggle to be - to find ways of being heard. So that would be how I would answer that question.

[00:26:02] **Peter Andréé:** Your answer is impressive in terms of the depth and its breadth. And you really are making a lot of connections for me and for listeners that I think are really valuable. For example, in the response to the Green New Deal and a certain understandings of masculinity, I think it's it's brilliant that you're taking us there.

[00:26:23] I do want to ask a really big question, and it really comes forward in your analysis of say the Alberta state and who calls the shots there. Given the dependence - it's more than dependence, you know, on the the resource extraction sector. And that's really a question about capitalism.

[00:26:48] Is ultimately, is it this form of political economic organization that is the problem? And if it is capitalism per se then what are the alternatives? And you know, and then you've already been speaking a bit to how we might get there, but how is it - do we need some kind of revolution or is there some kind of incrementalism that is the more realistic path forward from where we are here? So I know those are really big questions, but I'm really curious to hear your thoughts on all of that.

[00:27:26] **Laurie Adkin:** Well, one person's revolution is another person's common sense, mere recognition of necessity. The speed and scale of what we need to do to bring global greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050, earlier would be better, is necessarily revolutionary now, because we have delayed action for so long. What will be required to make that happen is a challenge to corporate power and capitalist ideology like nothing we have seen before. At this point, I think they are more attached to the project of carbon capitalism than they are to climate justice goals.

[00:28:11] The think tanks, the economists, the politicians that are pushing carbon pricing clean technologies as a solution to the climate crisis are I believe misleading people to think that we can get out of this crisis with no major structural and social change. You know, at the same time, they're still talking about economic growth, global competition for technology markets, you know, making Canada, getting Canada part of the global market share for technologies. And they're talking about green consumerism. It's as if this insane economy can continue while its ecosystems collapse. So if it's revolutionary to fight for a livable planet for the future of our children, then I will gladly wear that.

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[00:29:01] But I think we should also ask if it is an extremism to seek short term profit and to allow social wealth to be concentrated in the hands of a global oligarchy - including in Canada, we are not, you know, free of this trend of income-wealth polarization, but to allow this to happen even as the planet burns.

[00:29:23] **Peter Andréé:** So perhaps if I can just cut in, Laurie, I didn't mean revolutionary in some kind of derogatory sense, but more in the sense of how deeply the structures have to change, which again, this relates to this question of this capitalist organization, about how money is organized right now to do things and the role that the state plays in relation to that. Yeah, maybe some listeners might be wondering, are you a socialist, where are you coming from in your political vision?

[00:29:56] **Laurie Adkin:** Well, I don't know if they would understand the term, but I would say I am a Post-Marxist. Which means I am an intersectional theorist. And obviously I think the logic of capitalist accumulation and the drive of capitalism to incessantly accumulate more wealth and generate and produce more commodities and expand markets and create new consumer needs and you know, operate on a very short term horizon is profoundly anti-ecological and anti-democratic.

[00:30:28] But all of our problems are not really reduceable to capitalism alone. Right? We have patriarchal and racist structures as well. We have the legacies of colonialism. And these are all part of what underpins the way we relate to nature. The relationship we have, which is one of instrumentalism and exploitation and speciesism and domination. So these things are not, as I say, reduceable to capitalism, but they are certainly interwoven with capitalism and not at all inconsistent or in conflict with the logic of capitalism.

[00:31:16] So we have multiple fronts on which to do battle here in order to protect and preserve a livable planet and to counter these relationships of domination, which we see all around us. I'm not sure if where you're headed is maybe, How do we do this? Like, what are the steps? What has to happen?

[00:31:43] **Peter Andréé:** Of course, that would be, those would be the next questions. What does resistance to that intersectional nature of this exploitation look like for you? Maybe to put it in a positive way, where do you take inspiration from?

[00:32:02] **Laurie Adkin:** Well, I must say that the two biggest sources of hope for me in the last 10 years have been first of all, Idle No More. And in fact, the whole global rise of Indigenous movements for

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sovereignty and protection of the earth. They're interconnected. Their survival is at stake. They're on the front lines. They are challenging cultural norms that are deeply rooted in modern Western culture. They are trying to put up obstacles of all kinds to the bulldozer-like progress of what we think about as development, which entails mostly extraction and the dumping of wastes.

[00:32:52] So I think I take a lot of hope from the emergence of the Idle No More movement, groups like the Indigenous Climate Action, the Indigenous Environmental Network. These decolonization struggles are profoundly challenging to capitalism and fueled by the ecological crisis.

[00:33:21] I also take a lot of hope from the youth-led climate strikes and particularly from the political savvy of their leaders. I was so impressed at how quickly they grasp the connections between the climate struggle and decolonization struggles and from there to state violence and the Black Lives Matter movement.

[00:33:46] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** I'm going to jump in there, Laurie, because that last comment gets to the last big theme we wanted to ask you about, which was democracy. This is something you've written a lot about, thought a lot about, you've written, you've edited a book called Environmental Conflict and Democracy in Canada. And, you know, given what we've been talking about, regarding the Canadian resource-based political economy, we're kind of wondering how you understand democracy, both the democratic regimes that we have now, which always seem to be falling back into this role of enabling capitalist overexploitation, and maybe the type of democracy that you envision, which may, you know, have a better chance of achieving a longterm vision in keeping with, you know, the imperatives of ecological survival.

[00:34:38] So you've already talked a little bit about, you know, the importance of a free press, about moderating corporate power, but what else is part of your view of democracy and what do you do about this difficult thing about democracy, which is that it doesn't always work out the way, you know, the majority view doesn't always shape out the way that a vocal minority might want it to play out?

[00:35:02] **Laurie Adkin:** Okay. Small questions here. You know, I have argued for years that democratization is a precondition for ecological survival, essentially. Although perhaps I didn't put it in terms of survival until more recently. But certainly in terms of making headway in environmental and social struggles. Without political democratization, we are kind of stuck in a loop where we're playing on a very unequal terrain where hegemonic interests have more resources, more access to the state, more

control over legal outcomes and it goes on and on. So there are all kinds of ways in which we need to democratize our political institutions.

[00:35:57] And I think about democratization in a kind of layered way as having political, social, and environmental layers to it. So, you know, we start with thinking, Canada's political institutions are an inheritance of 18th and 19th century England. You know, I mean, just stop for a minute and think about what that means in 2020, right?

[00:36:24] And in general, liberal democracies are proving and capable, everywhere, of making real progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Now, do we want to replace them with the populist far right and authoritarian regimes? Obviously not, right? We want to defend the legacies of liberal democracy that are critical. We want to defend individual rights and freedom, civil and political rights, universal rights, concept of universal rights, which is anathema to the nationalist far right. We want to defend pluralism, protections of minorities. These are important legacies of liberalism that are actually in danger now, that are they're under threat.

[00:37:04] But to defend those, we also have to think about the conditions that are necessary for citizens to be able to meaningfully exercise these political rights. And then that takes us into the realm of social rights, social democratic governments in the post-World War II era, for a number of decades, began this process of advancing social rights, social entitlements, creating a kind of patchwork of welfare states through Western and Northern Europe and North America. Now, as we know, those gains have been eroded under neoliberalism. And at this point we need to renovate, I think, completely, our thinking and our programs in regard to income security, care relationships, and wellbeing. And we have to do this within the framework of ecological limits and imperatives and decolonization.

[00:37:59] So here, as you say, there are profound questions of justice that underpin decisions about how are we going to allocate the remaining portions of the carbon budget? Right. How are we going to finance environmental remediation? How should we repay ecological debt? How can we ensure income security for all citizens? What are the conditions for decolonization? These are questions that take us directly into justice - and injustice of course.

[00:38:30] So I could talk a lot about those reforms that I don't know how much time there is. So I'll just move to the third element for me, which is the third element of democracy and democratization that we should be incorporating into our programs of change. And that is ecological rights.

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[00:38:46] So to start with in Canada, a few provinces have environmental bills of rights. These have not proven to be very effective vehicles for actualizing environmental rights or gains. There are no environmental rights in the Canadian constitution. While constitutional rights are no guarantee of anything, I mean, just ask First Nations about that, they do provide a means of challenging state power.

[00:39:17] So if we think about this, what if Canadians had the right to sue government agencies for failing to protect environmental rights through effective regulation and enforcement of laws? What if young Canadians could sue their government for doing too little to protect them from climate destabilization, as children in the Netherlands have done? What if the pesticides management and regulatory authority were required to abide by the precautionary principle in its decisions to approve new chemical products? What if provincial ministers of environment were obligated by law to establish public hearings on all development applications with significant environmental impacts?

[00:40:00] So these are ways in which we can start thinking about rights as giving resources and power to citizens and civil society. Just to start countering - form a kind of counter power, if you like, to corporate power and corporate interest. The institutionalization of environmental rights is just like one dimension of ecological damage democracy.

[00:40:23] And I would want to go further than the institutionalization of environmental rights, although they are important in themselves. I would want to think about how an ecocentric perspective starts to change our thinking about rights and obligations and responsibilities. What about, you know, the rights of other species to flourish on this planet? Could we institutionalize procedures for taking into consideration the conditions of life for other species, for rivers or for ecosystems when we make policy decisions? Can we institutionalize that? I think we can. I don't think it's impossible. I think it's a culture shift away from speciesism anthropocentrism, to think about, to incorporate in our decision making the interests, the needs and the rights of other species.

[00:41:21] And then lastly, we could integrate the rights of future generations and a duty of care for non-Canadians who may be affected by decisions taken by Canadian governments. And if we were to do that, we will have to think seriously about the implications of extracting bitumen, upgrading it, shipping it to refineries in the American Midwest or down on the Gulf Coast where the upgrading and the further refining of it is poisoning racialized communities. And then the coke is exported to India, where it's burned as a cheap fuel, which then further poisons people in India. Like there are moral, ethical

implications of what we base our economy on. And those extend in a chain all the way from the point of production, to the point where these products are being combusted and consumed.

[00:42:19] And so I know that this sounds extremely ambitious, but this is the, these are the general directions in which I would want to open up our thinking about rights and responsibilities and institutionalizing those. I've been somewhat involved with the efforts to put together these proposals around Just Recovery, Green New Deal for Canada, especially in the context of the COVID crisis and the possibilities that have been opened up here by the crisis for restructuring the economy and social policy.

[00:42:53] And I find that I have to keep trying to insert these democratic reforms into the programs, right. Because I believe that citizens need - they need institutional resources and opportunities to organize collective action. And they need the material conditions in which to do so, to mobilize counter power. And as I said before, without these, the centralized, well-organized, moneyed interests in our economy always have a huge advantage.

[00:43:30] They have greater ability to shape public opinion, to control the policy agenda, to influence governments. And this is a form of structural power that needs to be countered with institutional political rights and resources for citizens. And this is where liberal democracies have failed spectacularly and probably intentionally to provide the conditions for politics to be conducted on a level playing field.

[00:43:54] **Peter André:** I think you've done a really good job Laurie in responding to Ryan's question about democracy by making the case that democratization is such a rich and multilayered exercise. And that what we currently know as liberal democracy is, you know, a veneer on top of, or within what could be a much richer form of Engagement and a set of rights for citizens, for the environment. I really liked the way you laid that out in terms of political, social, and ecological layers to democratization.

[00:44:35] And I'm glad we asked you this question. I know it's a really big one. But I think your work on this, and I would specifically say some of the chapters you wrote in that book on Environmental Conflict and Democracy in Canada are so rich and I really encourage students who want to pick up on what you've just been saying to dig into that book, and in particular to your opening and closing chapters, to get a really a great overview of what are complex questions, about how to reorganize a society. But I think you lay out a pathway that's doable, and we already have a number of pieces of that.

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[00:45:17] I wanted to give you a chance, Laurie, before we close off, just to see if there's anything else you wanted to add, knowing that this is being listened to by students of environmental politics, some of whom are wrapping their heads around some of these big issues for the first time, some of whom are very familiar with the territory. Where would you want to send students to kind of inspire them as they take their next steps in their studies and careers?

[00:45:45] **Laurie Adkin:** Well, if they're in university - If there are opportunities to take courses that deal with environmental politics clearly that's a place where you will learn more about possibilities to change the world and maybe find a group of people that they can offer you support and solidarity as you deal with these crises. These are extraordinarily hard times. It is a constant effort to find stamina, motivation, hope, courage in dealing with everything that's coming at us at the same time - the rise of authoritarianism around the world, which is the other area I teach in, you can see how lovely and delightful my daily life is. So, I mean, I deal with ecological crisis and authoritarianism and the populist far right, those are the predominant areas I work in. And they have converged. In the most terrifying fashion, in a number of ways. And that's just a new emerging area of research as well. What are the positions of the populist far right parties with regard to climate change and environmental, other environmental issues, and that we see the consequences of this in the United States, which are catastrophic for the entire world.

[00:47:19] But that's not offering, you know, good direction and hope and enthusiasm and inspiration to young people, is it? That's just me bemoaning their times. So, I mean, I don't want to sugarcoat things. I personally find it difficult. What keeps me going is keeping going. I mean, what keeps me going is the sense that there's so much work to do.

[00:47:40] And I don't have the privilege. I don't - I have the privilege, but I don't have the right to stop. To do nothing. And it helps to cope to feel that one can act, it helps to have the solidarity of others and not to feel alone and knowledge is empowering. So study and learn what you can, but stay involved with people who care, people who care about what's happening to the world.

[00:48:14] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** I like that. In particular, your adage. There's so much work to do, and we don't have the right to stop. We can reformulate it in some way. End up on a tee shirt, maybe the Ecopolitics Podcast t-shirt.



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[00:48:27] But anyway, we probably should leave it there. It has been a really rich discussion and we appreciate your ability to handle our, you know, these massive questions that we've lobbed at you with such ease. It speaks volumes of your expertise and wisdom and experience in the field. So thank you so much for sharing that with us. And we'll leave it there.

[00:48:50] So that ends this episode of the Ecopolitics Podcast. For listeners out there, don't forget to check out the other episodes in the series at [ecopoliticspodcast.ca](http://ecopoliticspodcast.ca).

[00:49:00] We also have a Twitter account, so check us out, our Twitter handle is [@ecopoliticsP](https://twitter.com/ecopoliticsP). And thanks again to all our listeners. And thanks to you, Laurie, for joining us.

[00:49:14] **Laurie Adkin:** It was a great pleasure. Thank you.

[00:49:16] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** We'll chat next time.