

The Ecopolitics Podcast - S01E15: Climate Action in and by Canada - ENGO Voices

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Guests: Catherine Abreu (Climate Action Network Canada) and Colleen Thorpe (Équiterre)

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What role do ENGOs, or Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations, play in the Canadian ecopolitical sphere? In this episode, we ask this question of Catherine Abreu, Executive Director of Climate Action Network Canada, and Colleen Thorpe, Executive Director of Équiterre. Together they walk us through the roles that their respective organizations play in fighting for climate policy and shifting the cultural norms of Canadian citizens toward a greener and more just society.

Episode 15: Climate Action in and by Canada - ENGO Voices

Catherine Abreu: *When it comes to confronting the climate crisis, it's not just about technical fixes that help us reduce emissions and switch to clean electricity and clean energy. It's also about, and it must necessarily be about working from a systems perspective to really shift a lot of social economic and political norms so that we're building a more just society that also creates a climate-safe world.*

[00:00:35] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Hello, everyone. And welcome to the Ecopolitics Podcast, a series tackling 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 co-host for the show is Dr Peter Andrée from Carleton University, although he won't be joining us for this episode.

[00:00:56] In today's episode, we are talking about climate action in and by Canada, from the perspective of ENGO voices or ENGOs. And for any listeners, wondering ENGO refers to environmental nongovernmental organizations. So Canadian ecopolitics is very heavily shaped by the work of a wide array of NGOs and advocacy groups from the well-known groups, like the David Suzuki Foundation and Pembina Institute to Canadian chapters of international ENGOs, like Sierra Club and Greenpeace. And of course, two groups like Climate Action Network Canada and Équiterre.

[00:01:38] And it's the latter two organizations who we will be hearing from today through the voices of their executive directors. So joining me from Climate Action Network Canada is Catherine Abreu, who has served as the executive director there since 2016. And from Équiterre we have Colleen Thorpe who has been with that organization since 2008. So Catherine, Colleen, welcome to the Ecopolitics Podcast.

[00:02:07] **Colleen Thorpe:** Hi Ryan.



[00:02:08] **Catherine Abreu:** Hey there. Thanks for having us.

[00:02:10] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** It's very nice to have you guys joining us. And I'm wondering if we can start off with a quick overview of the organizations you each oversee.

[00:02:20] So can you tell us in a nutshell, what kind of work Climate Action Network Canada and Équiterre do, starting with you, Catherine?

[00:02:29] **Catherine Abreu:** Climate Action Network Canada is an umbrella organization for groups in Canada who care about how a changing climate is affecting people, places and wildlife. We now have about 120 member organizations across the country, working coast to coast to coast.

[00:02:46] And our member organizations are really diverse. So we have many environmental organizations, some of which you've named in your introduction, Ryan. I'm proud to say that Équiterre is a member of ours. We also have labor unions, faith groups, health groups, youth groups in our membership, along with international development organizations and humanitarian groups.

[00:03:07] So that makes for a really rich dialogue, where we're able to bring these organizations together, nurture the Canadian climate movement, engage in the government relations that are necessary to push for develop advocate for strong climate policy in Canada. And we are the Canadian arm of Climate Action Network International, which operates in about 120 countries globally and has 1600 members worldwide.

[00:03:36] So we also kind of bridge the domestic with the international. We really sit at that nexus of domestic and international climate action. And then finally I think the thing that helps differentiate Climate Action Network Canada from Climate Action Networks around the rest of the world, is that diversity in our membership. So I think a big part of what we're trying to do is come at climate action in Canada from the perspective of climate justice, and make sure that the work we're doing to push for and mobilize around climate action in Canada is really led by that justice frame.

[00:04:14] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Fantastic. Well, that's a great synopsis. Colleen, how about you? Can you give us the nutshell of what Équiterre work involves?



[00:04:23] **Colleen Thorpe:** Yeah, so Équiterre started off more than 25 years ago, when some young people went off to Rio at the Earth Summit and came back feeling very empowered that it was time to put in place some solutions and it started off as a very grassroots organization that focused on food and building up a sustainable food system. So, linking up farmers with citizens and the citizens would pay for their food baskets and advance, and then they would get them.

[00:04:56] And from there it grew and it grew to tackle on other issues like mobility and then energy, and then became one of the first groups in Canada to really take on the climate issue. We have 25,000 members, we're members-based, and we get half of our financing through our members. And what we try to do is to influence to change policy, mobilize and mobilize citizens to push for policy change. But also to change social norms. Because we work both at changing policy, but changing social norms because they go hand in hand. If you don't change the social norm you can't expect policy change. And sometimes policy change brings change in social norms.

[00:05:46] And then we also do a lot of demonstration as well, to show that the ecological transition is possible to bring us to live within planetary boundaries. And we feel that fundamental to that transition is to be fair or equitable as in our name, Équiterre. Over the years, we've touched on issues like fair trade, sustainable farming, mobility, responsible consumption, and energy issues.

[00:06:13] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** That's another great summary. Thank you both for that. You know, you both mentioned a number of different types of work. So from networking to advocacy work to, you know, you had mentioned Colleen focusing on trying to change norms. And you also talked about demonstration. So how do you define the type of ENGO you represent? And does that kind of shape the work that the organization does or doesn't take on? Catherine, how about you?

[00:06:43] **Catherine Abreu:** So Climate Action Network, as I said, we're an umbrella organization. And that means that for a lot of our work we're movement-facing rather than public facing. So I often say that one of the core pillars of the work that we do is nurturing the network and that means providing services to the incredible organizations who are working on climate change in Canada. To help them understand certain policies that are being unrolled by various governments in Canada or abroad. To come together in strategic moments on certain important interventions so that we can have the power,



the full thrust of the Canadian climate movement behind us, when we all need to be speaking with one voice.

[00:07:34] We also provide different kinds of services to different members. So some of our member organizations like Équiterre or Environmental Defense or Pembina Institute have their own kind of policy or on the ground expertise when it comes to climate solutions. And other member organizations like Canadian Labour Congress or Oxfam are working on really important elements of the equation that are not very specific to climate policies.

[00:08:01] And so Canadian Labour Congress is working to figure out how to support workers in transitioning their workplaces to be more environmentally friendly and safe. And so they're not necessarily going to be the people who come out as policy experts on methane regulations for instance, but they do perhaps want to know what's going on in the world of that policy development. And so we are able to translate some of that work so that they can pick it up and have it inform the important work that they're doing.

[00:08:35] We also do some really I think essential convening in a country as big as Canada, with so much going on, and with very different kinds of communities that are passionate about taking action on climate change and have very different tactics to do. We form a kind of pretty important bridging functions. So we make sure that organizations who are working on energy efficiency in Nova Scotia are able to hook up with organizations working on energy efficiency in Manitoba so that they're sharing resources, talking about best practices and ideal strategies to kind of get their work done.

[00:09:16] I would say that when it comes to the work that the Climate Action Network Secretariat does, because we have both functions - we provide those services to our members and allies, but we also do advocacy work ourselves. We really try to focus our advocacy work on areas that our members are not already leading on and where we think our intervention can benefit the Canadian climate movement as a whole. And on that front, we tend to advocate for those kind of high-level policies that can then set the stage for other policies and ground level work to come in and be successful.

[00:09:57] So for instance, a key campaign of ours in recent years has been around Canadian climate accountability. This country has been setting targets since the early 1990s and has missed every climate target we've ever set. And so we, for the last few years, have been looking at examples from other

jurisdictions around the world and saying, What can we learn from how other places do climate action so that we in Canada can make the legislative institutional changes we need to make sure we never miss another climate target. And that's the kind of work that really benefits the rest of the movement and that we can lead on in partnership with our members.

[00:10:31] The thing that we don't do a whole lot of, because we are that convening body for the Canadian climate movement, is the grass roots mobilization work. You know, we're sitting here, we're a remote workplace. So I'm here on unceded Algonquin Anishnabeg territories and what's also known as Ottawa, and have staff in other parts of the country. And we tend to work at that national level rather than at the community level. That community level work is absolutely essential and actually creating the political space for change to happen. And that's the place where our members lead, not where we lead. And we really seek to lift up and in whatever way we can support the work of that mobilization, grassroots community-based work that our members are doing.

[00:11:17] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Wow. So that's quite a list. I was keeping track of some of these key terms here. You know, we talked about convening and bridging and movement facing, sharing best practices, advocacy work, and campaigning. And it's an interesting distinction that you make between that sort of the whole, the many categories of work that Climate Action Network is involved in, and what you're not doing directly but supporting, in terms of your supporting your memberships with grassroots mobilization.

[00:11:51] I'm gonna turn to you Colleen, how do you define the type of ENGO that you represent and how does that shape the work of Équiterre?

[00:12:01] **Colleen Thorpe:** Well, it's such a good question. And we keep asking it ourselves internally because our challenge has been to say, You know, do we do just one thing or do we do lots of different things? And I guess it depends on what your tactics are, or the lingo sometimes used is what your theory of change is. And depending on the topic that you're going to broach, then maybe you would be doing more advocacy work or more grassroots work.

[00:12:30] So I think what we try to do is to look at what our end goals are, and what are the best tactics to achieve that on a given topic. Some topics are not very well known in the greater public. And the first example I had given with regards to the food baskets is a good example.



[00:12:52] If you go back 25 years, this community shared agriculture, as it's known, this linking up farmers with citizens didn't really exist. So we built a network and it came into play. And if you look 25 years later, well it's very popular and it's growing. And at the time we were not doing any advocacy work in terms of political change, we were just doing something that was a demonstration project.

[00:13:24] But then if you look at the pesticide issue, which we worked on quite a bit in the past few years, then we've taken an approach where we actually pursue the federal government in court for not respecting its review of pesticides as required by legislation. And that we take a very different approach and it becomes very legalese.

[00:13:51] So we are an activist organization because sometimes we mobilize, we actually often mobilize against infrastructure for fossil fuels. Sometimes we provide environmental services because for example on the food issue we're sometimes in schools and that's actually the government who's quite happy to fund us to do awareness on food issues, or even on electric vehicles, which we're doing right now also with funding from the provincial government.

[00:14:31] Sometimes we work as a policy think tank because we put our heads together with other policymakers and groups and all the convening that Catherine was talking about, we're often part of it. And then we try to decide, you know, Where is the added value of Équiterre to be in those discussions? And sometimes it is on the think tank aspect. So I would say we're all of that.

[00:14:56] What sometimes concerns me about these labels is that when you talk about advocacy groups, I looked on Wikipedia just to think, okay, what is an advocacy group? And it says that it's a special interest group that's looking to influence public opinion and ultimately policy. But it says motives for action may be based on political, religious, moral, or commercial positions. And I looked at that and I thought, Oh, I don't really recognize what our group does in that description, because actually it's not politically motivated, religious nor moral or nor commercial. It's actually providing the basis for human life on this planet, is to be an advocate for the environment. And that all individuals be able to benefit from a clean environment that provides us the basis of living on this planet.

[00:15:57] So, yes, we are an advocacy group, often the way it's defined commonly, but there's a danger in saying that because of course, people who don't agree with our message say that we're lobbying for special interests, which is not the case.



[00:16:14] **Ryan Katz-Rosene**: Well, thanks for that. And that's a very interesting point about or clarification on advocacy work and what that entails. And I think it's just useful for the listeners to hear about all the different types of work that both Climate Action Network and Équiterre are involved in. And I really liked the idea of this marriage of tactics and end goals with an underlying theory of change that's kind of driving the work that the organization does. I mean, that makes pretty good logistical sense.

[00:16:47] I'm going to follow up with a question to you Colleen about the, sort of the state of ENGOs across the country. So as I mentioned at the outset, there are you know, quite a few well-known ENGOs in Canada, including the organizations you and Catherine oversee, but others as well. And, you know, Catherine for instance mentioned some 120 members of the Climate Action Network, of course not all of these were ENGOs, but many of them are, and there are presumably other ENGOs that may not be a member of that network. But suffice it to say that this is one of the-- I don't know, there seems to be a reputation out there that Canada has this very strong, robust, burgeoning ENGO sector. And maybe I'm wrong about that. But I would love to hear your thoughts on why that's the case. I mean, is that a reflection of Canadians' interest in protecting the environment and how important environment is and climate change action specifically is to Canadians, or is this more sinisterly, is this a sign that there are a wide range of environmental problems in Canada that need urgent attention and need the work of whether it's advocacy or other types of work from ENGOs. Is that why we have such a robust sector?

[00:18:18] **Colleen Thorpe**: Well, I think you've, you know, you've brought in both elements of the answer. So for sure that the fact that there's so many groups is a reflection of civil society's concern about what's happening to the environment. And of course, as we go along more problems emerge and that creates more groups. And if you go back to the the Earth Summit in 1992, or even prior Earth Summits, you know, this was the beginning of the movements, and this has just accelerated over time. So you have some very established groups, like the Suzuki Foundation and Pembina, you know, Équiterre is in that category, Greenpeace of course. But what we've seen over time is just new groups coming on. And some of them are not ENGOs, but they behave like ENGOs, and you know, they have difficulty perhaps getting funding, but they are, I consider them environmental groups as well. And these are all the citizen-led groups and the grassroots groups that were mentioned before.



[00:19:32] So we've seen this sort of growing move, which is also mirrored internationally, you know, Canada may be in a better position than, than some other countries where there's not as much public space for demonstrations or just public discussion on these important issues. But if you look at what's happening in Europe, you also see this move and what it tells us is that we're in trouble. We need these different groups to address the complexity of the problems that we've created. And from an environmental perspective, and then even broader from a social justice perspective, these issues are linked, but they also need some tailored answers. So you have groups working specifically on water issues, on agricultural issues, on fossil fuels. And it's a good sign, but it makes it a difficult job actually for Catherine, because she has to get people on the same page and bring them to advocate for some priorities. And, you know, how do you list priorities when you have so many different issues to deal with and different groups asking for it.

[00:20:54] But I think we're coming along quite well on the convening aspect and more and more coming together to say, okay, we want-- at the bottom, we have so many different groups, but the big problem is that, you know, we put profit before planet and people, and this is a common message carried by most groups. And then when we're pushing for change, if we have that in the background, then we could sort of come together with a common message.

[00:21:25] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Thanks for that. So I want to let Catherine have a chance at this. It kind of seems like the current Liberal government is maybe more sympathetic, at least in word to the ENGO sector than the Harper government was, the Harper conservatives. Do you get the sense that the landscape, Canadian political landscape right now is more open to the ENGO, more collaborative, more cooperative with the ENGO sector or is that not the case?

[00:21:55] **Catherine Abreu:** So I would say that in recent months, in particular, we have seen the ENGO sector in Canada have a fairly impressive amount of influence on the ways in which the Canadian government is talking about rebuilding the economy on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic. So, many of us have come together over the course of the last eight months through what we've called the just recovery campaign. And this is a campaign based on the development of six principles for a juster recovery, where hundreds of civil society organizations across both English and French speaking Canada came together to articulate these kind of high level shared goals that we felt should guide all of the policy and investment decisions being made by Canadian governments as they kind of build back from

the pandemic. And I think that work has had tremendous influence, so much so that we saw much of the language of the just recovery campaign reflected, for instance, in the recent speech from the throne.

[00:23:15] And I think this points to the kind of cross-sectorial collaboration that has really grown in the Canadian climate movement over the course of the last few years that Colleen was talking about. And that is really the bedrock of the just recovery campaign. It's about these 550 organizations that have endorsed these principles, all doing that very important, detailed work of presenting solutions that Colleen was talking about in their own areas of expertise, but then also kind of crossing through the silos that often separate our work so that we can be proposing shared solutions that have co-benefits for climate communities and social justice.

[00:24:00] So I think that is a huge element of campaigns that we're seeing right now, particularly articulated in things like the Green New Deal. And I think increasingly the environmental movement is being challenged to confront some of the internal biases that we've had over the years that I think has constrained our ability to have success including, you know improving our relationships with Indigenous communities and our ability to work in real allyship with Indigenous communities and, and take their leadership on environmental issues. In confronting the fact that the Canadian environmental movement is a very white looking movement. And and that does not reflect the reality of the Canadian communities that we work in. And figuring out how to, how to work better with communities of color, with Black and Indigenous people, with new Canadians.

[00:24:57] So I think all of that is going to be essential to our success moving forward. And it has been a really important evolution of the climate movement and, and has been a big part of our recent success in getting the Canadian government to be more responsive to our demands. But you know, you said it well, Ryan, in your question, you asked at least we're seeing that they're more amenable in word, but are they really more amenable in action?

[00:25:24] And on that front, it's a bit of a mixed bag. We have heard the Canadian federal government say some really important things about the kind of action they're going to take on climate change. And we've seen some of that action play out in the delivery of the Pan-Canadian Framework on Climate Change and Clean Growth, for instance, which is probably the most comprehensive climate plan we've ever seen in Canada, which was delivered in 2016. But the policies, the 50-plus policies that are outlined



in that plan are consistently undermined by the fact that the Canadian government continues to invest in and prioritize the oil and gas industry in this country, which is the largest and growing source of emissions in Canada and also in the world. And where we, we can't continue to invest if we're going to take climate change seriously.

[00:26:15] So I think we're, we still have our work cut out for us. But perhaps the kind of lesson that we've learned, from an environmental perspective over the course of the environmental movement's history in Canada, is that we can't work alone. It's all about figuring out how we can partner with other elements of the movement for progressive change in this country. And together build a more just society.

[00:26:41] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Well, thanks, Catherine. And I want to let Colleen pick up on that in a minute, but something you just said makes me think of something I've been meaning to ask you for a few weeks. I noted a rather exasperated Twitter thread that you wrote a few weeks ago which started with the phrase "I'M SO TIRED" in all caps and it appeared to be expressing frustration with the liberal government's failure to turn this ambitious plan into action and it's something you were, you were just kind of alluding to. So I'm wondering if you can elaborate. Why are you so tired with the Trudeau government's approach to climate action? And you know, doesn't the federal government and the Trudeau government specifically have a very strong reputation internationally on climate change?

[00:27:34] **Catherine Abreu:** Yeah, I was having a hard day that day and I had just kind of reached a breaking point because our Minister for Environment and Climate Change gave an interview to CBC where he spoke simultaneously about these ambitious climate policies that he and his department continue to be committed to, while also saying we have energy resources in this country that we of course are going to continue to develop for decades to come, and the revenue from those energy resources will pay for us building the clean economy that we need. And this line from the Trudeau government is something we've heard year over year, time and time again. And it doesn't make any sense. It's like someone saying I'm going to quit smoking, and so I better buy up all the cigarettes I can and smoke them until I don't have any more cigarettes to smoke, and then I'll finally quit.

[00:28:40] Like that's not how change works. And it's this attempt to, as climate hero, Bill McKibben said, have our cake and burn it too, that is a source of constant frustration, I think, for many



environmentalist in Canada. Because yes, we finally have a government that has been really talking the talk when it comes to climate, particularly on the international stage. And that has actually been more than essential over the last few years, as we've seen a kind of unpredictability and volatility enter into the world of multi-lateralism, as global governments have been shifting toward more right-wing and in some cases populist and fascist regime. It's been really important to have a country like Canada using some of its political capital to defend climate action and the Paris Agreement on the world stage.

[00:29:41] And I would say on an international front, Canada is one of the very few countries that is willing to do that, at this point internationally and that is critical. Yet we're not consistent with that message in terms of the action we're taking here at home. And that's because while this government does lay out some very important climate policies that it is moving on, the success those policies are able to have, the changes those policies are actually going to be able to make, will be constrained and in many cases undermined, if we're not able to imagine, to have the courage to imagine what our economy looks like if we manage the decline of the fossil fuel industry, take care of workers and communities, and really build a clean economy right here at home.

[00:30:35] So that was the frustration that I was expressing of this constant kind of incoherence in Canada's approach. We hear the right thing and sometimes we see them do the right thing, but then we often see them do just the opposite. And I think maybe we can put a little bit of a frame on that where, you know, Colleen was talking about the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. At that summit, we saw Canada play an essential leadership role. And I actually think that that in part explains some of the wealth in environmental-- in the space of environmental actors in Canada. Cause like back in the day in the late eighties and early nineties, when a lot of these international environmental organizations were shaping up, Canada-- the Canadian government was playing a huge leadership role in making that happen. And therefore it made sense for a lot of those organizations to start here in Canada.

[00:31:32] And at the time, guess what? We had a conservative government, we had Prime Minister Brian Mulrooney, his environment minister, Jean Charest and Maurice Strong really setting up some of the key international instruments that have since shaped the world of environmental biodiversity and climate protection. However, we then unfortunately moved into a space in Canada where climate and environmental issues became highly polarized and where unfortunately I think we're still struggling to see climate as a nonpartisan issue and see leadership on the climate file from every single political party

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in Canada. And I think a lot of that has to do with the influence of the fossil fuel industry. So we kind of need to be evolving past that if we're gonna take the actions that we need to.

[00:32:30] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Yeah. There's a lot there and I want to turn to Colleen and get her thoughts on that. I mean, do you share, Colleen, that frustration with the-- incoherence, I think is the word that Catherine used-- On the sort of like dual headed beast of saying the right things on the international stage, but maybe not always following up with that in action. Do you share that frustration?

[00:32:56] **Colleen Thorpe:** Oh for sure. Frustrated, with capitals as well. I listened to a webinar last week by. Seth Klein was being interviewed for, he had just published the book, 'A Good War: Mobilizing Canada for the climate emergency'. And he talked about the new climate deniers. And he said that they're not the people who deny the science, but rather those who acknowledge and then adopt policy that's contrary to climate protection.

[00:33:23] So this speaking out of both sides of your mouth, this incoherence does a lot of damage to the climate movement. And it does damage because it polarizes, it creates a lot of cynicism and, you know, cynicism is really what prevents us from doing any type of action. So of course, if you're advocating for climate action, and then you have governments that are saying one thing and doing the contrary, then the person who's not doing anything at all feels justified in continuing not doing something, because it's easy to be cynical, right? The politicians will never make good on their promises. And the cynicism is the biggest danger to us all.

[00:34:11] And it creates also polarization. So very concretely example of that is-- you know, I look in Quebec, the different players and when the government becomes incoherent, speaks out of both sides of its mouth, then you polarize the debate. And then when you polarize the debate, when the government actually does a good action for mitigating climate change, then the tendency is to criticize and be in a critical mode. And groups that would perhaps commend the government on doing something good will be criticized in turn to being favourable to a government that is incoherent. So it creates, at a very basic level among groups, a lot of heated debate and sometimes division on what the best approach to take is. You know, should we congratulate when a government makes a, a good step, but then at a bigger level, they're doing things that they shouldn't be doing, like funding fossil fuel and

continuing to fund it, and buying pipelines and then indebting Canadians forever in the gas infrastructure. So it is a huge problem, and if you are to, to come out of this war, we have to make sure that this is not happening anymore.

[00:35:39] And then I just wanted to bounce back on, on something that Catherine said, that I thought very interesting about the evolution of the climate movement. And I do agree with her that we've evolved in leaps and bounds. And we've evolved certainly to be more sensitive about the diversity and the social movement and that when we have gains on the climate front, we also have gains on the social front. And even within the movement you look at the groups and you had biodiversity groups and climate groups. And now we see these two groups working together because it is the same problem. The climate crisis and the biodiversity crisis is intimately related. So you know, I just wanted to respond to that because I, look at it how I identify Équiterre and you know, where we don't work on biodiversity issues per se, but it's there and all a reflection on, on climate. So we create these boxes and sometimes we're stuck in the boxes and now we're getting out of the boxes to have a more inclusive movement.

[00:36:53] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Well, thank you for adding that, Colleen and I want to take this discussion towards the role of Équiterre in Quebec, because you did mention that and you know, listeners may know that Équiterre has a very strong following in Quebec. And you know, we haven't really talked much about Quebec-Canada relations or political relations on this podcast, although it does make an important part of Canadian politics more broadly.

[00:37:21] But there's a couple of interesting themes there that I think I'm wondering if you can touch on. One is that Quebec really seems to have very high voter interest in climate action. In fact, some by some polls, the highest interest amongst the electorate in terms of framing or seeing climate change as a really important issue. And I think we've also, as you kind of just alluded, there's maybe a little bit more of a cooperative relationship between the governments of Quebec and Canada when it comes to climate change policy. So why do you think climate change is such an important issue in, in, in a political issue in Quebec specifically?

[00:38:09] **Colleen Thorpe:** Well, I think we have to go back to the Quiet Revolution in the sixties when, when Quebec decided to modernize and invest in a whole bunch of public institutions, including Hydro-Quebec and Hydro-Quebec became this nationalistic symbol and it allowed to take control of

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their economy. And then fast forward to climate and the climate emergency that surfaced, it also gave them an edge in fighting greenhouse gas emissions. So we're a step ahead of other provinces because we have a clean source of energy. And you know that if you look at where our greenhouse gas budget goes to it, it goes to more into transport and less into the heating houses. So this is sort of made Quebecers a bit proud I believe.

[00:39:10] And because there's that dynamic between Quebec and Canada, then it could always be played up according to whoever wants to take on this issue and sort of presented as some type of nationalism. And then I would say that it also pushed the energy debate quite a bit further in this province because when there was in the early 2000s that the idea that we would-- that Hydro-Quebec wanted to build a gas-powered station in a region in Quebec. And this is when groups started to mobilize and say, No, we don't agree with this. And you know, we have hydro-power and it's not necessary to move towards gas power. And they had to back down because the opposition was so strong and then this opposition continued over time and we saw the opposition to shale gas. We saw the rise of the citizen movement and the citizen movements became very colourful, even the names of these organizations: Oil Stain, or Rail Bomb, just very diverse groups opposing shale gas.

[00:40:31] And then when TransCanada wanted to build the Energy East pipeline, the grassroots movements to oppose it was all in place and went into action. So that gave us really the foundation to be activists. And you know, at the same time we're creating awareness and we're creating acceptance for policy change. So in 2007, Quebec became the first jurisdiction in North America to implement a carbon tax and the tax was phased out in 2014, as we switched to a cap-and-trade system.

[00:41:11] So there's acceptance to a certain extent that the government should be intervening. And this is probably a bigger picture of Quebec society that the collective good requires government intention-- intervention rather. And if you think of daycares in Quebec, for example, it's the same type of philosophy that there's some collective cost-- some individual costs to pay, to have a collective good happen. And then of course, there's this whole social dialogue and because Quebec is a smaller society and to a certain extent, a homogenous society that has made-- and that was true back then, it's not certainly isn't true now-- but it's made dialogue happen a bit more easily. And then I would say even just this culture of going into the streets and being vocal is strong in other realms, not just as the

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environment, if you recall the student movement in Quebec was extremely strong, a few years back. And Quebecers take to the street when they want to have a public debate on something.

[00:42:33] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Well, Colleen you're making me realize that we probably should have done a whole episode on that because there's so many different threads there. I really found it interesting. You know, I think you're right this idea of like a pride in Hydro-Quebec serving as this sort of foundation for a broader national-- you know, Quebec national interest in clean energy and driving that interest in climate change.

[00:42:58] I mean, you see a little bit of the opposite in Alberta, although there are some really promising stories there in terms of clean technologies, whether it's hydrogen or these solar powered towns that are popping up in parts of rural Alberta, and maybe that'll galvanize a new interest in climate change from that province. We are very short on time. So I'm gonna move to one final question and it's to Catherine and I've been really lucky to have Catherine join some of my former classes pre-COVID when we actually met in person and Catherine you've often shared your experience, your personal experience, attending UNFCCC meetings, or the conference of the parties of the UN process for dealing with-- the framework for dealing with climate change.

[00:43:50] Can you just quickly share what it's like to be at these international meetings and from the point of view of an ENGO, I imagine it's equally frustrating to attend some of these events where maybe it seems like the international community is not exactly progressing on climate change mitigation, but I think you've also mentioned that it's a really inspiring and really great opportunity to network for ENGOs. Can you take us out in this episode by telling us a little bit about your experience there?

[00:44:26] **Catherine Abreu:** Sure. Maybe I'll try to take us out and then bring us back home. So you know, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has been hosting Conferences of the Parties, COPs, to meetings, to discuss climate for over 30 years now. And at first, those meetings were very much just about governments coming together with their negotiators to talk about how to take collective action on the issue of climate change. But over the years, the presence of civil society has become really one of the most defining features of those spaces. And thousands of members of civil society from every corner of the globe show up to COPs now to push their governments to have a way more ambitious approach to climate change.

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[00:45:19] I think a very powerful element of being in those spaces is that they level the playing field between very privileged governments from rich parts of the world and governments from parts of the world that have fewer resources, that are perhaps just in the midst of industrializing or are often on the very front lines of climate change. And it puts leaders of those nations on the same stage. And that is critical because we need the president of the Marshall Islands to be telling the president of the United States face-to-face that your activities in your country are rising sea levels and drowning the islands that my people call home and have called home for centuries.

[00:46:08] So that element of the meetings I think is really powerful and important. It's also an amazing space to see the ecosystem of civil society at work, because you have those policy wonks who are in the negotiations, who are taking secret information and trying to work backroom deals and trying to get countries that aren't talking to each other, talking to each other, to make things happen. You also have those organizations that are very public facing, that are good storytellers, that are trying to bring the rest of the world into those spaces and expose what's going on there and bring media pressure to bear. And you have grassroots mobilizations groups who are getting people into the streets, who are bringing bringing sit-ins to the meetings.

[00:47:05] Most recently at CoP 25 in Madrid, we had probably the most effective collective action within the grounds of the COP center that actually resulted in some vicious arrests. And that made for a powerful conversation about the role of civil society in those spaces and the need for collective action.

[00:47:32] So for that reason they are exciting spaces, but ultimately those spaces are just a reflection of what's happening back at home. I often say that I don't go to COPs because I just want to nerd out on international treaties. I go to COPs because I know what happens there will set the stage for the action that I can take back home in Canada. And it's really the Paris Agreement that compelled the creation of the Pan-Canadian framework. And it's some of the civil society action that we see there that helps encourage that civil society action back at home, and they really create a feedback loop. So it's like the 500,000 people on the streets of Montreal in 2019 laid the groundwork for COP 25 in Madrid. And we saw a similar spirit of mobilization take the conference center that year.

[00:48:24] And I really want to end our conversation by saying it's that ecosystem of the civil society movement that is important. We need diversity of tactics. We need every element, every tier of the

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movement to be working together, to make change real. And sometimes in Canada, I think we find that the grassroots and community-level mobilization is really under invested in. And that's something that I feel really committed to changing because it's that it's right there in the streets where we build the power that we need to make change and where we start those communications at the community level that bring people into the movement.

[00:49:09] And so figuring out how to nurture that ecosystem, I think is a big part of my work and Colleen's work. And something that I would invite anyone who's thinking about taking action on climate change or other environmental issues in Canada to put a lot of thought into, because it's really only with a healthy ecosystem that employs a diversity of tactics that we're going to get this huge job done.

[00:49:35] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Well, thank you for sharing that, Catherine. I think it's really useful for students to hear about that practical side of these international agreements. To kind of help contextualize that the academic literature they're reading about climate governance or governance failures for that matter.

[00:49:50] I really wish we could keep going and I do apologize that we've run out of time, but I think there's so much to learn from this discussion. So we'll have to do a second season of this podcast and pick up this discussion there. But we do, we should end it there. So thank you both so much for joining us. It's been really fascinating to hear about all these different threads. Any final, quick reflections starting with you Colleen before we say goodbye?

[00:50:20] So thanks for the opportunity. Yes, I would just quickly say that after saying Quebecers are so willing for policy change, what we notice is that in terms of their individual actions, they're the same as all the other Canadians. So I would just suggest that we really have to make sure that we're working always on both fronts. So create a narrative where we're empowering individuals to make change in their lives and that they want to make change so that they accept the policy change, which we really need to accomplish.

[00:50:53] Well, thank you for adding that point in, and Catherine any final, quick reflections?

[00:50:59] **Catherine Abreu:** No I've said enough already. Thanks so much for the interview.

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[00:51:03] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Well, thank you guys. That does conclude the episode for this week on the Ecopolitics Podcast. So for listeners out there, don't forget to check out the other episodes that are part of the series at our website, ecopoliticspodcast.ca or on any podcast player of your choice. And don't forget to give us a shout on Twitter. Our handle is [@ecopoliticsP](https://twitter.com/ecopoliticsP) and we'd love to hear from anyone out there who's listening. So thanks again to our guests and to the audience for tuning in and we'll chat in the next episode. .