

Ecopolitics Podcast Episode 3.3: How do we Confront Capitalism's Excesses? Between Revolution and Reform.

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Hosts: Ryan Katz-Rosene and Peter Andrée

Guests: Matt Huber and Dianne Saxe.

Summary: "How do we confront capitalism's ecological record?" In today's episode, we tackle this question with help from Dianne Saxe, President of SaxeFacts, and Deputy Leader of the Green Party of Ontario and Matt Huber, Professor in the Department of Geography and the Environment at Syracuse University. From two unique perspectives -- that of an environmental lawyer and a Marxist Geographer -- we dig into the ways in which capitalism is implicated in climate change, and how capitalistic forces might be influenced for the betterment of people and planet.

[00:00:00] **Dianne Saxe:** The students. Well, you've got a lot of advantages. You're articulate, you're well-informed, that's assuming using the university library with the extraordinary amount of information that isn't available to the general public. You've got colleagues with whom you could organize, you've got faculty from whom you can get advice, the universities themselves manage significant parts of money, which gradually are divesting around the world. Lots of opportunities to take action, and the only formula for hope that I know is to be taking action with others and doing it now. So, get to it.

[00:00:36] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Hello and welcome to the Ecopolitics Podcast, mini season three, 'Everyday Ecopolitics.' This is a podcast for university students tackling some of the key questions and challenges in the field of environmental politics today. I'm Ryan Katz-Rosene from the University of Ottawa, and here with me is my co-host Dr. Peter Andrée from Carleton University.

[00:01:00] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** How do we confront capitalism's ecological record? That's the question we're tackling in today's episode. Peter, I think it's safe to say that contemporary global capitalism is, well, a problem. Its current path is clearly not sustainable and its contributed to the climate and biodiversity crises that we're currently facing.

[00:01:22] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** But is capitalism itself the problem? Or is it the particular form and expression of contemporary capitalism that's the problem? Or something else? Could a greener, more inclusive form of capitalism, get us out of this mess? Or do we have to start thinking about building a new political economy that's not capitalist? A post-capitalist world order, if you will, in order to avoid ecological collapse later this century.

[00:01:49] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Moreover, what is our role as everyday eco-citizens in confronting capitalism's ecological record? Should we all go out there and join anti-capitalist movements? Or is there important work to be done within the system to reform capitalism and make it work better for people and planet? These are some of the questions that we're going to be asking about today. We each went out and spoke to two individuals who we

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thought could inform this question from different perspectives. So Peter, who did you interview for this week's episode?

[00:02:21] **Peter Andréé:** I interviewed the former Environmental Commissioner for the province of Ontario, Dianne Saxe.

[00:02:27] **Dianne Saxe:** My name is Dianne Saxe. I am Deputy Leader of the Ontario Green Party. I was the last Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, 2015 to 2019, appointed unanimously by all members of the legislature, and then fired by Doug Ford by special legislation. Other than that, I've been an environmental and energy lawyer for about 45 years. I hold the Law Society medal for exemplary leadership in environmental law, and I've worked on pretty much all environmental law issues in Ontario in one way or another, over the last 45 years.

[00:03:01] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Peter, I noticed she mentioned she was the last Environment Commissioner in Ontario, what's the story there?

[00:03:07] **Peter Andréé:** That's a fair question, Ryan. Let me begin by explaining what the position of the Environmental Commissioner is, or rather was, in Ontario until 2019. This was a position, an office of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to be precise, created by the province in the early 1990s with a mandate to uphold the province's environmental bill of rights or the EBR as it's sometimes called. The EBR is legislation that gives citizens of Ontario, the right to participate in all environmental decision-making that affects them.

[00:03:41] **Peter Andréé:** The commissioner was a non-partisan role, reporting to the provincial legislature itself, and not to the premier or any specific minister. It was intended to ensure that the provincial government actively complies with the EBR. As a Commissioner, Saxe had a staff of about 24 people who reviewed and reported on a wide range of environmental matters from electricity and water use, to the province's efforts to address climate change.

[00:04:11] **Peter Andréé:** They wrote reports that were submitted to legislature and made available to people of Ontario, and this gives you a sense of what Premier Doug Ford saw as the problem here. I think Dianne was really good at her job, what Plato might call a political gadfly, speaking truth to power. From my conversation with Dianne, I was really struck by how transformational of a career change it was for her to take up the Commissioner's role.

[00:04:42] **Peter Andréé:** She essentially gave up her entire legal practice and took on this new role with an intention of holding the Ontario government to account, to truly make a difference, and she expected to spend the rest of her working years in that portfolio.

[00:04:59] **Dianne Saxe:** By the time I took office, I was the third permanent Environmental Commissioner of Ontario with legislated protection of the term of at least five years. To take that job, I gave up everything I built for 40 years. I gave up my practice, my clients, and my

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staff, all my writing contracts, and all my board positions. I dismantled everything I had built in 40 years in order to take this position. With the expectation that I would spend the rest of my working life as Commissioner. The previous Commissioner served for 15 years.

[00:05:33] **Dianne Saxe:** My concept was that I would make the job matter, and I did make it matter. By the time Mr. Ford used special legislation to break my contract and destroy my office, the majority of people in Ontario, when polled, recognized that Ontario would be worse off without us.

[00:05:52] **Dianne Saxe:** That was a lot to achieve, I think, in three and a half years. I delivered 17 reports to the Speaker of the House, through him to the Members of Legislature, and through them to the people of Ontario on a wide range of energy, environment, and climate topics.

[00:06:12] **Peter André:** As you can hear Ryan, this experience that Dianne had as both the Environmental Commissioner and then the way that position, which she had put so much energy into in which she felt so passionate about, came to an end has really shaped her interpretation of the democratic process. Tied in with that, her understanding of how to affect change in the contemporary political economic system. She is now the Deputy Leader of the Green Party of Ontario, actively taking on a political position and running against in the next election the Ford government. That's all context for Dianne's perspective, but Ryan, tell me, who did you speak to for this episode?

[00:06:56] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Thanks, Peter. Dianne's story is super interesting, and I'm looking forward to hearing more about that. I spoke to a Professor at Syracuse University in New York state for my interview, and his name is Matt Huber.

[00:07:09] **Matt Huber:** I'm Matt Huber, Professor of Geography and the Environment at Syracuse University, author of a book called *Lifeblood: Oil, Freedom, and the Forces of Capital* that came out in 2013. And I have a book coming out in May 2022 from Verso Books called *Climate Change as Class War: Building Socialism on a Warming Planet*.

[00:07:32] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Matt is a really well-known name in energy and environment circles, and he's really playing a key role in shaping these debates about socialist perspectives of ecological political economy. We heard a bit about Dianne's background and how that shapes her perspective on key themes in today's episode, I asked Matt how he would label his own eco-political worldview.

[00:07:55] **Matt Huber:** I guess I'd call myself an Eco-Marxist. I worked with a student of James O'Connor in my master's. I got a master's in sociology. Really, from the start of grad school I was kind of steeped in Ecological Marxism out of that tradition. Particularly, my advisor, he's a guy named Danny Faber, and he was really involved in the journal *Capitalism Nature Socialism*. But then I exited sociology to do a PhD in geography and got kind of embedded with the whole kind of Marxist Geography conversations with David Harvey and

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many, many others. But ultimately, I've always been someone that is interested in a Marxist critique of Capitalism from an environmental perspective.

[00:08:42] **Peter Andrée:** Interesting. So we have Dianne Saxe who worked as a lawyer, and then got involved within the system as an environmental auditor of sorts, and is now going to become a political candidate. And we have Matt who's a geographer, and really brings an academic perspective that's critical of the capitalist system's ecological protection.

[00:09:04] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Yeah, that's right. As you'll hear in this clip, Matt had a nuanced answer about capitalism's ecological potential and the differences between capitalism in theory and capitalism in practice. So in this clip, you're going to hear me first asking him about this and I wanted to play that part because his initial response was quite interesting.

[00:09:27] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** My big question is it theoretically possible to have a sustainable version of capitalism. I'm assuming you're going to say no, and if you say no, what is it specifically? What is the specific dynamic about capitalism that makes it incompatible with sustainability?

[00:09:49] **Matt Huber:** Well you threw me there, because I actually was going to say theoretical, yes.

[00:09:56] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Okay. Well, let's go back to the first: is it theoretically possible to have a sustainable version of capitalism?

[00:10:03] **Matt Huber:** Capitalism to me is really amoral, it's basically a system where production is about investing money into commodities, and then coming out of the process with more money or profit or surplus value. Capitalists are seeking profit and I think it's extremely unlikely, but it's theoretically possible, that there could be a way in which capitalists find environmentally sustainable production processes that are profitable. If that were to happen, then we would possibly be able to have a sustainable capitalism.

[00:10:39] **Matt Huber:** I think from a more realistic, and historical, empirical, reality perspective. You look at what capitalism actually does and you see, for the most part, it tends to find profitable things that are quite destructive to the ecological systems, which we all depend upon. And so therefore the evidence points to it not really being likely, even if it's possible, in the sort of most abstract theoretical sense.

[00:11:12] **Peter Andrée:** That's an important nuance in what I just heard from Matt. I'm glad you played that opening part, Ryan, I find it quite fascinating. I mean, Dianne also had tentative things to say about capitalism's potential, and even democracy's potential for that matter, whether it can be sustainable in the context of today's climate crisis and the transformations, a response to that crisis demands, in the next two or three decades.

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[00:11:37] **Dianne Saxe:** There is no question that, to me, both capitalism and democracy are hard to reconcile with the scale and speed of the transformation that we need to make. The consequences of the warming we are already at, which is not much more than one degree, and we're likely to blow past 1.5° not very many years from now. After that, the consequences start getting much more severe really quickly.

[00:12:07] **Dianne Saxe:** If we're going to make the remaining carbon budget last for the rest of the century, we need enormous, drastic, changes and we need them fast. Democracy's not good, usually, at big changes fast and in the capitalist system, there are many, many incentives for taking short-term advantage and very poor incentives for paying attention to the longer term. Even if by the longer term, we're only talking about decades.

[00:12:40] **Peter André:** And to illustrate this point, Dianne went to talk about how more autocratic regimes have more leverage or capacity to affect rapid change for the sake of the environment. Though importantly, she pointed out that it's not just autocratic governments that can take such action. Sometimes democracies can take bold action when they're faced with emergencies, as Western powers did during World War II.

[00:13:05] **Dianne Saxe:** It's easier to see how China, with a completely authoritarian system, can simply make an announcement, as they did, for example that they're cutting meat consumption. They did not even make an announcement, they spent \$50 billion, trying to take over the world's solar manufacturing. So, they can do things by fit that are really difficult to do in a democracy. I don't know whether we are going to collectively decide to make the kind of changes we need to make.

[00:13:37] **Dianne Saxe:** Seth Klein's book *A Good War* made, I think, the absolutely correct argument that Canada showed in the second World War our ability to reconfigure our economy, our political approach, in order to fight that war and to do so successfully from basically a standing start with only 11 million people. So it is possible, but the window in which it's technically possible is becoming extremely narrow. We're not yet seeing anything like the kind of political mobilization that an attack from Hitler created.

[00:14:16] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** That's super interesting. I think I heard echoes of similarities between our two guests and what they have to say, but I think we're also hearing now some of the ways that their worldviews might differ. So for Dianne, there seems to be this sort of window of opportunity for contemporary democracies to take action. That democracy is not particularly good at swift decision-making except under extreme duress, and she notes that capitalism kind of always encourages these shortcuts. And in Matt's view, drawing on Marx, it's the capitalist system that fundamentally delimits how much control a government might have over the system as a whole.

[00:14:59] **Matt Huber:** For me, one of the most powerful things about particularly Marx's critique of capitalism and sort of the value form under capitalism, is that he really is critiquing a system that is fundamentally out of our control. He really critiques the market

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system as this sort of anarchic system of competition that really eludes collective democratic social control.

[00:15:24] **Matt Huber:** We're sort of dominated by this market system that no one in particular can plan or control. It seems clear to me that if we want to have a chance at creating something called a sustainable society or economy. We need more control over the economic system, we need to actually start planning our relationship with nature in a more coordinated and conscious and social and collective way. And so in that sense, again, it's because of capitalism sort of anarchic uncontrollable tendencies, it's really hard to create this sustainable relationship that we absolutely have to do.

[00:16:05] **Peter Andrée:** Both Dianne and Matt are cautious about the potential limitations of democracy and capitalism, but in slightly different ways, or at least they see the interconnections between democracy and capitalism differently.

[00:16:18] **Peter Andrée:** So I'm curious, Ryan, since Matt had mentioned the theoretical possibility of making profits in a kind of a green way, what does he believe is holding back that process?

[00:16:29] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Well, when I asked him this, he mentioned that it's like there's this whole cottage industry of economists and entrepreneurs and other thinkers that, especially since the 1980s when we saw the rise of neoliberal thinking, have really tried to argue that we can just make green profitable. But he just doesn't see the evidence pointing to that happening.

[00:16:52] **Matt Huber:** One of the foremost thinkers, and I remember reading this book in the nineties when I was trying to make sense of all this, has been Paul Hawkin, who wrote a book called the *Ecology of Commerce*. He basically had all these ideas about how to shift the economic incentives in a way that actually makes more resource efficiency, more energy efficiency, these types of green practices, make it so that capitalists can actually see that on their balance sheets. But again, despite all that boosterism and promotion from economists and policy people, it's just not happening

[00:17:30] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** He went on to elaborate why it's often not happening. I think one of the real keys to Matt's lexicon here is the central role of profit itself. So, if there's a more profitable path, capitalists will usually seek that path.

[00:17:47] **Matt Huber:** It is obviously more profitable for a dirty power plant to keep emitting carbon emissions for free, then install scrubbers and all sorts of pollution abatement technology that would actually, at least, lessen the pollution there they're dumping into the air. So a lot of times being green does involve costs, and a lot of times that's why it's taken something like state regulation to force companies to abide by a certain pollution control or technologies that would lessen pollution because it's just a lot cheaper to not install those things. So again, there's overwhelming evidence that if capitalists are left

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to their own devices, they're just going to keep trying to make money and ignore the ecological repercussions.

[00:18:39] **Matt Huber:** The thing economists are right about is that a lot of what matters in the environment is not even captured in market prices. So again, you dump pollution into the air if it's free for you to do. We all sort of take advantage of these ecological services that are, as Marx called them, free gifts of nature that aren't even priced in a market system like a barrel of oil is, or like a bushel of wheat is. It's almost baked into the money system, to the commodity system, that it's going to be economically unprofitable to ignore the ecological systems on which we all depend.

[00:19:19] **Peter André:** Okay. I see where he's coming from. To recap, one way to put it is there's a theoretical world in which capitalism can be green if profits can be achieved in that green way. But in the real world, it just tends not to be the case because green is often less profitable. I think it's also notable, though, that Matt seems to be suggesting that the state can play a role here in forcing companies to take the greener path. I think that's the point of agreement with Saxe that we can come back to later.

[00:19:54] **Peter André:** Matt's thought on this theoretical world where capitalism is forced to be green by the very marketplace corporations functioning reminds me of the exchange I had with Dianne about trying to make the fossil fuel sector less profitable, or at least trying to take away the fossil fuel sector's access to capital, which they need to turn a profit in the first place. Dianne pointed out that fossil fuel companies are deeply reliant on financing. So here, she saw an opportunity for trying to sway financial institutions and banks to divest from fossil fuels, or invest in greener alternatives. One way to do that is to be vocal at your own bank.

[00:20:36] **Dianne Saxe:** One of the most powerful and prescient articles in the last couple of years was as usual Bill McKibben and his piece in the *New Yorker* in September, 2019 "Money is the Oxygen On Which the Fire of Global Warming Burns." What he pointed out is that it's much more useful now to put pressure on financial institutions than to try to put pressure on the fossil fuel companies directly. That the fossil fuel companies' lifeblood is cheap access to money from financial institutions.

[00:21:15] **Dianne Saxe:** The financial institution can do without the fossil fuel companies, but the fossil fuel companies cannot do without the financial institutions. So that's a really great thing. If you've got a bank account at a bank, have you talked to the bank manager and asked them about what they're doing on climate? Because by and large Canadian banks are pretty bad. But they need to hear it from people, and students are among the ones they're trying to court, that this matters to you, and that you're going to put your money where your mouth is.

[00:21:46] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** I think we're hearing from Dianne here, a potential opening for these institutions, which uphold the capitalist system to maybe change their behavior. Does that sound right to you? I think some might be skeptical that the banks themselves

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would be willing to do this if they themselves saw that as a potential loss to profitability. But I guess on the flip side Dianne views that by being vocal and active banks might reconsider the costs of not listening to their own customers. Am I getting that right, Peter?

[00:22:18] **Peter André:** Yeah, I think so, Ryan. She gave me another example about divestment in a pension plan to demonstrate how these institutions are not necessarily fixed into fossil fuel investments. So there's evidence that banks can be compelled to change their perspective towards polluting industries.

[00:22:35] **Dianne Saxe:** Those who get to the point of being able to pay into a pension can make a huge impact by demanding action from their pension plans. In Australia, a young man graduated from school, got a job at the city of Brisbane, started paying into the pension plan, realized that it was using his money to invest in coal and other things that destroyed the teacher and successfully brought litigation which has changed the way the pension plans in Australia are required to operate.

[00:23:09] **Dianne Saxe:** That is another place where the capitalist system is really open to influence. Look at that little company *Engine No. 1* who was able to orchestrate a vote that changed part of the board of *Exxon*, to put three climate conscious directors on the board of *Exxon* against the ferocious opposition of management. So there are fantastic opportunities for activism, for influence, and for impact.

[00:23:39] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** For those who are wondering about the *Engine No. 1* reference, that's a shareholder activist group that kind of went out and bought a bunch of shares in *Exxon* to try and force the company to change from within. I'm really interested to hear her talk about the ways the capitalist system is open to influence in some respects. I think Matt Huber is really skeptical about this potential for influencing capitalism and kind of centers of analysis on how capitalism is influencing us.

[00:24:11] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** One reason is, as I played before, revolves around this profit motive and underlying the profit motive is what Matt referred to as the hidden abode of production. So this is a space where firms essentially exploit workers, and one might add nature, in order to make money.

[00:24:29] **Matt Huber:** Well, to me, a Marxist perspective really centers production. From Marx's most materialist writings he really wants to understand: how do societies produce their lending and their livelihood? Of course Marx was interested in commodity circulation and exchange and consumption, but he really prioritized that none of that is really possible unless you have a system, or a mode of production that produces everything a society needs.

[00:25:00] **Matt Huber:** To take it a step further, even in his analysis of capitalism, really highlighted what he called the 'hidden abode of production' as the source of exploitation and surplus value production. Where actually capitalists employ wage workers, and extract this surplus value through basically exploiting them by forcing them to work longer hours, or

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employing technology to get more out of them in less time, and all sorts of things. He really prioritized production as the site of exploitation.

[00:25:33] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** And Matt really grounded this concept in research that he's done on the fertilizer industry. So, it's a longer clip, but I think it nicely explains the focus on production and profits and how that all kind of comes at the expense of exploited workers and exploited ecologies.

[00:25:51] **Matt Huber:** This really hit home to me when I was researching recently the chemical fertilizer industry. This is a very carbon intensive industry. I was interested in asking them to what extent they care about climate change, to what extent they think about their responsibility for climate change, and when you go into this hidden abode of production, you find that they have incredible indifference to the ecological consequences of climate change.

[00:26:16] **Matt Huber:** They're only concerned about how can they process this natural gas and this nitrogen from the atmosphere, and how can they process this, and these boilers and heat systems, to produce ammonia, which is the fertilizer product. They actually were kind of boasting about how they had recently, weathered this kind of storm of high, natural gas prices, which is their primary cost; their primary input is natural gas, it's like 70% of their costs. In the sort of knots, they were dealing with really high natural gas prices, and a lot of fertilizer companies went out of business. They said that they were on the verge of shifting from natural gas as their main input to shift to coal or petcoke, which is this extremely dirty, heavy substance that comes out of the oil refining process.

[00:27:07] **Matt Huber:** Both of those options would have been way more carbon intensive than even natural gas, and led to way more climate emissions. One conclusion that came out of this research is that people that organize production are not like you and me; they're not worried about their carbon footprint, they're not worried about being good ecological citizens. They're worried about ,basically organizing materials, energy, towards the making of money. And the system is almost structurally designed to force them to only care about that one narrow criteria of money, invested to make more money.

[00:27:43] **Peter Andr e:** Okay. So, that's a really useful example that Matt draws on from his research in the fertilizer sector. I'm curious, what's the end game here? What does Matt say we should be working towards? Is it a socialist revolution to overthrow capitalism? Would that solve our ecological woes?

[00:28:02] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Well, I did ask him something along those lines and he really brought the question back to, believe it or not, democracy.

[00:28:10] **Matt Huber:** It might sound counterintuitive, but in my view, socialism is at its core democratizing our systems of production to take into account other criteria like social and human needs and also ecological sustainability. The wager is that if we were just able to subject production to this wider criteria, it would lead to better outcomes. But again,

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democracy has to be about actual struggle between different factions and interested groups over what is just, and what is right, and what is the best way to run a society. So, you can't say ahead of time that it would definitely be better, or it would definitely be more sustainable, but I'd like to say it's highly likely it would be more sustainable when compared to this, again, extremely narrow profit oriented organization of production.

[00:29:08] **Peter Andréé:** Okay. That's interesting, Ryan. So we're back to democracy and this really encapsulates our two guests' unique perspectives. I get the sense Dianne wants to leverage democracy to positively influence capitalism, to shape through legislation and regulations the space corporations can operate in to make their profits. Matt, on the other hand, wants to ditch capitalism so that it can no longer negatively influence democracy. Is that right?

[00:29:39] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** I suppose that's one succinct way of putting it.

[00:29:42] **Peter Andréé:** You know, when I asked Dianne about how to affect change. Her response also centered on forms of political and democratic engagement as the key way to bring about the kinds of changes that she thinks we need to bring about.

[00:29:56] **Dianne Saxe:** I reached the point of saying I left climate leaders. Individual action is important. It's a great place to start, it's a terrible place to stop. The big problems that we face are collective problems, they require collective solutions. That's why we invented government. Government is for pooling our collective forces to deal with large issues together that we can't deal with individually. So, getting involved in politics, which to a lot of people feels very un-Canadian and rather unpleasant, is incredibly important.

[00:30:32] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Peter, we've previously interviewed guests on this show who have problematized growth as the fundamental dynamic in capitalism that makes it unsustainable. We actually have a whole episode about growth and the response, what is known as degrowth, in season two when we spoke to Susan Paulson and Bengi Akbulut. In this episode, we're talking about capitalism and sustainability. Did Growth come up at all in your discussion with Dianne?

[00:31:01] **Peter Andréé:** Well, it did. And I think you'll hear some echoes of our conversation with Susan and Bengi here in this clip.

[00:31:08] **Dianne Saxe:** We know for certain that infinite growth is not possible on a finite planet, at least not growth in the sense of using more stuff. It's possible to have infinite growth in poetry, in thought, in love, but it's not possible for that infinite growth in consumption of the resources of the world.

[00:31:30] **Dianne Saxe:** One of the things that I think is really important is to come up with an alternative, a good alternative, to GDP. GDP is a very coarse measurement of a lot of the wrong things. When that is the primary measurement of success of a government, we will

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continue to do wrong things. If you cut down the forest, GDP goes up because the forest was valued at nothing, and the cutdown bits are valued as something.

[00:31:57] **Dianne Saxe:** The clean air isn't valued, the water isn't valued, the species aren't valued, the resilience to climate change isn't valued. GDP measures the wrong things. Certainly when it comes to the fundamental question of growth. Two key parts of that, one is can we keep growing the human population? The second part is can we keep growing what the human population consumes out of the natural world? I think the answer to both of those is no.

[00:32:22] **Peter André:** So, you can hear a pretty definitive answer here about growth and how it is problematic, especially when it comes to how governments measure it. I'm curious, what did Matt have to say about growth?

[00:32:35] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Well, Peter, I was really keen to speak to Matt about this because he's been a fairly outspoken critic of the degrowth movement on Twitter, especially. So I asked him what his main beef was with degrowth, and as you'll hear one of his main concerns was kind of at a strategic or a rhetorical level.

[00:32:55] **Matt Huber:** A lot of it comes down to just the strategic critique and rhetorical critique of just the fact that degrowth in itself just implies less. In fact, if you look up the prefix *de* it means like less or privation. You know, I understand that capitalism has this ideology of growth, in particular GDP growth, and it's something politicians, culture, and the press are obsessed with and it's a real problem. But growth also has so many positive connotations. In a world of so much scarcity and poverty and material deprivation, it just seems to me strategically problematic to focus on this slogan of degrowth, of living better with less, and all this kind of stuff.

[00:33:50] **Matt Huber:** When, to be honest, there needs to be so much growth, again, for the masses of people in most capitalist societies. That means most people are really struggling economically and they need to see growth in their access to the basics of human existence, even in the United States. I just saw a recent poll two thirds of people in the U.S are struggling to access enough healthcare, they can't pay for basic healthcare. You go around into the global south and hundreds of millions of people don't even have access to electricity. Then you look at the climate crisis and we need to have growth of all this clean energy infrastructure.

[00:34:33] **Matt Huber:** So to me, a more class struggle perspective, doesn't make these monolithic statements about growth or not growth. We actually need to degrow the rich, the power of capital, so that the rest of us can grow so that we can have actual material improvements in the lives of the masses of people.

[00:34:54] **Peter André:** That's really interesting. To begin with, Matt actually makes some similar points to Dianne on the problems of GDP as a metric and on the possibility for growth of what we might call good things. But like you said, he has a strategic concern about

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the language of degrowth. When so many people are struggling to get by and objectively want more in their lives, even need more of some things like clean energy or better healthcare.

[00:35:23] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** I feel bad because I wanted to tease that out much more in our interview. Mostly because, at least in my reading of the degrowth literature, much of it actually agrees with the need for more of the good stuff. But anyway, we were over time in our interview so I had to cut our conversation short. Hopefully someday I can have a more complete discussion about it with Matt, as I'm sure he has much more to say about that.

[00:35:48] **Peter André:** We have one more theme to explore in today's episode and that brings it back really to our core theme of season three, which is 'Everyday Ecopolitics.' We both made a point of asking our interviewees questions about what people can do, and specifically what university students can do, as everyday eco-political actors. When I asked Dianne about this, she brought back the discussion to this question of influencing politics.

[00:36:20] **Dianne Saxe:** Absolutely, there are other opportunities for young people. There are many opportunities for young people to influence what's happening in the world, getting together with other people in organizing and paying attention to the Overton Windows, right? When are there opportunities to influence policy? So for example, the city of Sudbury, I believe is one of the ones where council passed the climate emergent declaration. Because a group of people showed up for the council meeting in person to show their support, which was something that really influenced the council.

[00:36:59] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** That's a good tangible example, just show up at the council meeting and affect policy, right? But as you mentioned, I asked a similar question to Matt and I was curious to hear what he'd say. Because I know he's been quite critical of lifestyle and consumer actions, and in a way, his answer wasn't that different from Dianne's. Ultimately it's about steering students towards political forms of action.

[00:37:26] **Matt Huber:** You know, if you want to make a lifestyle change, the most helpful thing you can do is to organize in your life on a weekly, daily, basis in a political organization that is trying to build the kind of power to take on, again who I believe are the real culprits in this crisis, which are the fossil fuel industry and also a whole wider spectrum of financial capital and industrial capital. That is still, to this day, basically profiting off of this ecological and climate breakdown, and we need to build power against them. So, that's actually something that all of us can try to do in our lives, and it comes through organization, political organization.

[00:38:12] **Peter André:** I like Matt's emphasis on collective forms of political action, these ones that are invoked by organizing. That really lines up with one more clip that I want to play from my interview with Dianne Saxe. I asked her about what gives her hope, she calls for taking action with others and gives a stark warning for the consequences of not taking action.

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[00:38:35] **Dianne Saxe:** For myself, I, like many climate activists, walk on a knife edge between hope and despair. The only recipe for hope that I know is to start with knowledge, and then to take action with others. University students are astonishing to me in their indifference and their failure to vote in so many cases, given that this is their future we're talking about. So, University students who just sit back and don't take action. Well, their gambling with their own lives and those of everybody they love. If they stand up and fight, if everybody stands up and fights, we still have a chance and that's the only place I see hope.

[00:39:20] **Peter André:** I think this point of Dianne's about the need to take a collective stand, it's a great place to end this discussion.

[00:39:28] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Agreed.

[00:39:29] **Peter André:** So Ryan, Matt mentioned some books at the outset, but you've mentioned that he's got an active social media presence. Where can people find out more about him and his work?

[00:39:38] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** That's right. So, as I said, he's quite outspoken on Twitter. Often commenting on questions of energy, environment, growth, and technology, and so on. People should definitely follow him, he's @MattHuber78. But how about Dianne? Where can people follow her?

[00:39:56] **Peter André:** Well, rather than social media, she directed people to her podcast, which is called *Green Economy Heroes Climate Podcast*. That can be found on her website Saxefacts.com. At the latest count, she had 64 interviews on there, mostly with entrepreneurs doing all kinds of innovative things to contribute to the net zero economy of the future. So if you're looking for some hope, I find this series is really inspiring.

[00:40:29] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Great. So, what do you think here, listener? How should we confront capitalism's ecological record? Get in touch, let us know what you think on the issues we've discussed in today's episode and make sure to follow us on Twitter at @EcoPoliticsP. Check out all the incredible artwork and additional resources we have, we have transcripts and pedagogical materials posted on our website for each and every episode. So that's at [ecopoliticspodcast.ca](https://www.ecopoliticspodcast.ca). You have really got to check this out if you haven't already.

[00:41:05] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** This episode was produced by Nicole Bedford, support with transcription and captioning for season three is provided by Ashley Fearnall, and Adam Gibbord helps us with artistic design and digital support. The podcast is made available under Creative Commons Licensed 2.0 Canada. And thank you all for listening.