

ECOPOLITICS PODCAST EPISODE 3.4: What does a just transition really entail?

From green jobs to decolonization.

Additional Pedagogical Resources

Summary:

Climate change and its impacts on the economy, the planet, and, of course, us, is top of mind for a lot of folks these days. One potential solution that merges economic and climate needs is the transition away from fossil fuels as an energy source, to greener options. But with so many people relying on the fossil fuel industry for their livelihoods, how do we ensure a transition to a whole new energy source is just? This is one of the many questions we touch on in today's episode. Our guests, Luisa Da Silva, Executive Director of Iron and Earth, and Heather Milton-Lightening, a long-time Indigenous climate activist and current student, share with us their different views on just transition, and what we need to consider if we're really going to make it work.

Key Takeaways

- There are various definitions for “just transition.” Some see it primarily referring to the need to retrain and integrate fossil fuel workers into new roles that support the green economy. Others see it as a fundamental change to our economy and values, placing the right to ‘justice’ of diverse groups of people, even the Earth itself, above profits.
- The lived experience of individuals informs their relationships with the land (and vice versa). For example, many Indigenous communities have a relations-based connection to the land. Similarly, farmers may be deeply connected to changes in the environment through their lived experience. Such relationships inform how individuals view terms like “net zero economy” and “just transition.”
- Economic transitions are not always equitable. Previous changes to local, regional, and global economies have often left workers and the communities who depend on their incomes behind. As Luisa Da Silva shares: entire communities in Atlantic Canada were left behind when the cod fisheries collapsed in the 1990s (13:36-14:37).
- Community organizers believe it is important to define the parameters of ‘community’, including who may be missing from internal community discussions.. The identity of a community matters to activists looking to adapt to climate change in a just way. As Heather Milton-Lightening notes, “the challenge is really thinking about: if climate change is coming, we know it's coming, and there's impacts, how do we adapt to that? Are there ways to adapt that are just?” (9:47-10:28).

Discussion Questions

1. How do you think your own lived experience shapes your understanding of a just transition?
2. How do you define your own community/communities? Is it tied to a sense of identity, to work, or to a specific place?
3. Do you think there is a balance between meeting the needs of the planet and the needs of workers in our current economy?
4. Do you see “net zero” as an important collective goal, or as a concept that has been co-opted by businesses to support their profit-making objectives?

Learn more about our Guests

Heather Milton-Lightening

- Read Heather’s blog at <https://heathermiltonlightening.wordpress.com>
- Follow Heather on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/inktomilady>

Read more about Heather’s work in community organizing and activism

- Morin, Brandi. “Grassroots Team Creating Indigenous-based Climate Plan across Canada.” *CBC News*. June 25 2017. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/grassroots-team-creating-indigenous-based-climate-plan-1.4175261>
- Martin, Lukacs. “The Long Road to this Winter of Protests.” *The Tyee*. March 27 2020. <https://thetyee.ca/Analysis/2020/03/27/The-Long-Road-This-Winter-Protests/>
- For the Wild. “**Heather Milton-Lightening** on Reframing Direct Action/89.” *Youtube*. December 20 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GeDUmasycQA>

Luisa Da Silva

- Learn more about Iron and Earth at <https://www.ironandearth.org>
- Follow the Iron and Earth on twitter at <https://twitter.com/ironandearth>

Select Interviews with Luisa around the Just Transition:

- Roy, Inori. “Election 2021: Canada Needs to spend \$10b to Retain Oil and Gas Workers.” *The Narwhal*. August 23, 2021. <https://thenarwhal.ca/federal-election-2021-iron-earth/>
- Bulowski, Natasha. “Fossil Fuel Workers ready for a Just Transition, Poll Finds.” *Toronto Star*. July 14 2021. <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2021/07/14/fossil-fuel-workers-ready-for-a-just-transition-poll-finds.html>

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Explore resources mentioned in these episodes:

- *The White House* “Executive Order on Catalyzing Clean Energy Industries Through Federal Sustainability.” December 2021.
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/12/08/executive-order-on-catalyzing-clean-energy-industries-and-jobs-through-federal-sustainability/>
- Government of Canada. “Just Transition | National Resources Canada.”
<https://www.rncanengagenrcan.ca/en/collections/just-transition> Accessed December 2021.
- Government of Canada. “People-centred Just Transition: Discussion Paper.” July 2021.
https://www.rncanengagenrcan.ca/sites/default/files/pictures/home/just_transition_discussion_paper_-_en_-_july_15.pdf Accessed December 2021.
- Government of Canada. “A Just and Fair Transition for Canadian Coal Power Workers and Communities.” December 2018.
https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2019/eccc/En4-361-2019-eng.pdf
- Government of Canada. “What We Heard from Canadian Coal Power Workers and Communities.” December 2018.
https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2019/eccc/En4-362-2019-eng.pdf
- Djuric, Mickey. “Cowessess Unveils New Solar Project, Aiming to Become Greenest First Nation in Canada.” *CBC News*. July 14 2021.
www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/cowessess-first-nation-solar-energy-1.6102512
- Ecopolitics Podcast episode 1.8 “Indigenous Environmental Knowledge and Politics”
www.ecopoliticspodcast.ca/episode-8-indigenous-environmental-knowledge-and-politics-2/
- Ecopolitics Podcast episode 1.10 “Treaty Relations and Environmental Politics in Canada”
www.ecopoliticspodcast.ca/episode-10-treaty-relations-and-environmental-politics-in-canada-3/
- Ecopolitics Podcast episode 2.8 “Environmental Justice and the Anthropocene”
www.ecopoliticspodcast.ca/episode-2-8-environmental-justice-and-the-anthropocene/
- Ecopolitics Podcast episode 2.9 “Indigenous Environmental Rights: The Maya of Belize”
www.ecopoliticspodcast.ca/episode-2-9-indigenous-environmental-rights-the-maya-of-belize/
- Iron and Earth. “The Prosperous Transition Plan: Fossil Fuel Workers Calling for a Green Recovery.” n.d
https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/ironandearth/pages/1585/attachments/original/1610746247/Iron_Earth_-_Prosperous_Transition_Plan_-_Policy_Brief.pdf?1610746247 Accessed December 13 2021.
- Learn more about Treaty 4 and Indigenous land at <https://native-land.ca>
- Learn more about Pasqua First Nation at <https://www.pasquafn.ca>
- Learn more about UNFCCC COP meetings at <https://unfccc.int/process/bodies/supreme-bodies/conference-of-the-parties-cop>
- Learn more about the Canadian Indigenous Tar Sands Campaign
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/215875949026/>

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- Learn more about the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
<https://www.unep.org>
- Learn more about the RenuWell Project in Taber Alberta
<https://www.mdtaber.ab.ca/p/renuwell-project>
- Learn more about the Council of Canadians <https://canadians.org>

Learn more about Indigenous Eco Worldviews and perspectives:

- McGregor, Deborah. 2019. "All Our Relations: Indigenous Perspectives on Environmental Issues in Canada." In Gina Starblanket and David Long (eds.). *Visions of the Heart: Issues Involving Indigenous Peoples in Canada*. Oxford University Press (5th edition).
- Stiegman, Martha. & Pictou, Sherry. 2016. "Resource Privatization, Treaty Rights Recognition, and Community Resistance in Maritime Canada." In *Aboriginal History: A Reader*. 2nd Edition. Burnett, K. & Read, G. (Eds.) Oxford University Press.
- Simpson, Leanne. 2008. Looking after Gdoo-naaganinaa: Precolonial Nishnaabeg Diplomatic and Treaty Relationships. *Wicazo Sa Review* 23 (2): 29-42
- Whyte, Kyle. 2018. "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice." *Environment and Society*. 9, no. 1: 125–144.

Learn more about Community-led Development and Diverse Economies:

- Adkin, Laurie E. "Crossroads in Alberta: Climate Capitalism or Ecological Democracy." *Socialist Studies*. vol. 12, no. 1 (Spring 2017), 2-31.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K., and Kelly Dombroski. *The Handbook of Diverse Economies*. Cheltenham, UK : Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020.
- Roseland, Mark. *Toward Sustainable Communities Resources for Citizens and Their Governments*. Rev. ed. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2005.

Read more Perspectives on a Just Transition

- International Journal of Labour Research Climate Change and Labour. *The Need for a "Just Transition."* Geneva: International Labour Office, 2010.
- Mertins-Kirkwood, Hadrian and Clay Dunclafe. "Roadmap to a Canadian Just Transition Act: a Path to a Clean and Inclusive Economy." *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives*. April 2021.
<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2021/04/Roadmap%20to%20a%20Canadian%20just%20transition%20act.pdf>
- Krawchenko, Tamara and Megan Gordon. *How Can We Manage a Just Transition? A Comparative Review of Policies to Support a Just Transition from Carbon Intensive Industries*. Institute for Integrated Energy Systems, University of Victoria. 2021.
<https://www.uvic.ca/hsd/publicadmin/assets/docs/just-transitions-report-sshrc-report-2021.pdf>