

## Episode 235: The Real Culprits of Climate Change

**Lizzy:** Hi, I'm Lizzy Ghedi-Ehrlich

**Lisa:** And I'm Lisa Hernandez.

**Lizzy:** And we are your hosts for Scholars Strategy Network's No Jargon each month. We'll discuss an American policy problem with one of the nation's top researchers without jargon. And this month we're looking at the relationship between class and climate change.

**Lisa:** Hey, and that's an interesting time to look into that relationship, especially with this, um, SCOTUS EPA case, with a decision kind of looming and coming in the summer.

**Lizzy:** That's right, later this summer, uh, we will find out how much power the environmental protection agency has to actually regulate things like climate emissions. and you know, from that how much authority any government agency has to regulate anything, which seems pretty important. Um, but in the context of this conversation that everyone's about to hear it's extra important, because of course that's a big tool.

Our government has to deal with climate change and if we take it away, It's going to all be on us. And the question is who exactly is us?

**Lisa:** Well, maybe it's up to our straw use or individual actions, which I don't foresee us all coming together and creating like one massive plan. That's going to fix all our big societal issues, but Hey, who am I but just a No Jargon cohost.

**Lizzy:** Right. Well, I'll tell ya. I think this conversation with professor Matt Huber will alleviate some of your anxieties and maybe bring new ones to the fore. Um, cause it turns out we can all maybe stand to worry about. Less about our personal straw usage, but there's some other things that we could probably be worrying about instead, let's get into it for this week's episode.

I spoke to Dr. Matt Huber. He's a professor of geography at Syracuse university. Professor Huber's research and teaching focuses on the politics of energy. And of course, climate change. He's the author of a new book titled Climate change aClass War coming out on May 10th. Here's our conversation.

**Lizzy:** Hi Professor Huber. Thanks so much for joining us on No Jargon.

**Matt Huber:** Thanks so much for having me.

**Lizzy:** Uh, you've spent, you know, a lot of your time studying the relationship between class and climate change, or really we should say the relationship between class and our feelings about our understanding of climate change and how we should respond.

Who ultimately is responsible for responding to it. So when the topic of climate change comes up, we know that people exhibit a range of feelings and ideas. a lot of us think of our own personal responsibility, guilt, or maybe we think of our responsibility as a species, you know, like what is humanity to do here?

But not everyone is immediately thinking about class division, right. Or thinking of themselves as a member of a class that is relating to climate change in a certain way. So the, so the question is, what made you direct the focus of your research on this connection between wealth and climate impact and how we're all thinking about it?

**Matt Huber:** Well, I guess I could start that, you know, this came out of a research project where I decided to study the nitrogen fertilizer industry, which is an extremely carbon intensive form of industrial production that involves using tremendous amounts of natural gas to make this nitrogen stuff called ammonia.

And it's, responsible for about two and a half to 3% of global emissions. And I actually was able to get access to a particular facility and learn about how it works. Talk to the managers and the engineers. And really, examining this type of production and examining how, uh, indifferent the managers of these facilities were toward climate change and their climate impacts.

It made me realize that these people are different than you and me and that you were referring to earlier, that kind of guilt we feel, and that anxiety we have about our consumption acts and how we're contributing to climate change, what our carbon footprint is. And, and then I started thinking a lot more about, you know, how do we conceptualize class as concept in social theory and scholarship, but also in our everyday lives.

And, I started to come across a lot of research in the academic world that does look at climate change. And what is often for too is inequality. You know, like the sort of unequal contribution that people have to climate change, depending on their kind of. position in the kind of class and the quality at a global scale, you know, very famous economists like Thomas Pickety have done this research kind of crunching the numbers and showing that, you know, the richest 10% of society contribute like 50% of emissions, et cetera, et cetera.

And what I started to realize is that all these ways of thinking about climate change and inequality, conceptualize contributions only from the consumption. And so that all that data that Pickety and others look at it's based on consumption-based carbon footprints. Um, so those of us that may have eaten some bread this morning, uh, you know, that has emissions embedded in its production. And therefore you can calculate how many emissions are wrapped up in the bread you eat, or the fuel you're combusting in your home to keep it warm and, and all

**Lizzy:** Compare that. You're saying to the person who drove 10 miles to eat two steaks for breakfast, then you can say, you know, one,

okay.

**Matt Huber:** But what this way of thinking doesn't look at is where's that person driving to, where do they work? How do they generate them? That allows them to eat two steaks. And to understand that you actually have to understand that what people do in their consumption lives, but what they do to make the money that makes possible the consumption.

And that again, takes you to places like I visited in Louisiana, this huge nitrogen facility where people, you know, own and profit off the production of nitrogen commodities to, um, Make money and their carbon footprint is enormous. This one facility I looked at has the highest emissions in the entire US chemical sector.

they bragged about consuming roughly 9% of Louisiana's gas.

natural gas. And if you know Louisiana, you know, they have lots of chemical facilities that consume lots of natural gas. So again, it came back. If we start to understand class in this way, as who owns and controls production, who's profiting off the production of the commodities that you and I consume.

The sort of calculus of responsibility shifts enormously. It's not so much. I mean, we don't want to let our leave ourselves off the hook for. Driving a Hummer or something, but we should remind ourselves that there's a corporation selling us that Hummer. And they actually profit off that.

Like, I don't know what the emotional stability of a person who buys a Hummer and what they're trying to compensate for. I don't really understand that, but, but the person selling the Hummer, I think should at least get a huge proportion of that responsibility.

**Lizzy:** So, you know, in your book, climate changes, class wars coming out on May 10th and just a few short weeks in that focuses on a lot of this makes these arguments, um, you know, with greater nuance. But let's talk a little bit more about that production. And you've given a couple examples here. You've talked about the nitrogen facility.

Now we have a Hummer. Producer and seller. Um, can you just situate this more to really kind of try to revolve our thinking that, especially for the professional class, if you want to call it that, that you have sort of correctly identified me as your podcast host as being in, just based on one statement about anxiety, which was interesting.

Um, let's think more about these other types of production, just to flesh it out. Can you walk me through kind of a few different types?

**Matt Huber:** Yeah. So there's a lot of different types of material production that, contribute to climate change in a variety of ways. the most obvious one that we want to focus on is the extraction and, sale of fossil fuels. Right? So that's a form of mining and production. Digs up natural gas, oil, and coal from the ground and sells it.

And for good reason, a lot of the climate movement really targets the fossil fuel industry is sort of the primary culprit. but when you start to look at the broader world of material production, from the production of our food, which would involve inputs like the fertilizers I mentioned. You know, everything from the production of aluminum, to clothing, to all these things require tremendous amounts of energy to produce.

but it's actually quite um, simple actually. To look at the emissions profiles of the industrial sector at large. And when you look at that, you find that there's actually only a handful of industries that produce the bulk of emissions. and it's pretty clear that it's, we can talk about three things.

We can talk about steel. It's pretty important to, to our world and the built environment. another crucial, part of, sort of like how our cities and how our lives are built is, uh, cement and concrete. That's another massive, uh, contributor, some estimates say steel and concrete or steel and cement together are responsible for.

I might not have this exactly correct. But somewhere together, like 15 to 20% of emissions, um, of carbon emissions .

**Lizzy:** And so then if most of the power is with people who are in charge of production and not just people in charge of production, but people in charge of production in sort of a select range of things that we produce that are sort of over responsible, for, for admission specifically, where does that leave?

Then we can call it the working class. We could call it. Consumer class, if that makes more sense. Um, or, or maybe it doesn't, I I'd like to invite you to sort of define the non-producers and where we all fit into it. Because of course, I think, you know, I don't want to tell people, drive your Hummer to eat multiple stakes.

Like we know that we're not absolved of responsibility. And yet it seems that there's a different focus here that we need to shift, focus a bit.

**Matt Huber:** Right. Before, uh, I did want to mention one more really important producer, which is electricity and the people, the people that produce electricity from variety of sources, some of

which can be zero carbon, as we know, but the ones that own and control the production of like coal-fired power plants and, um, natural gas fire.

That's a huge. Of emissions. and many of those industrial producers, I mentioned before, uh, steel chemicals, they consume an enormous amount of that, very electricity produced by those people. so that, that does leave the question of where, the rest of us fall. And, the really interesting thing about capitalism is that really.

There's not many of us that have much say democratically over how we produce the energy in our world that we all need. And not just the energy, the steel, the cement, all this stuff tends to be owned and controlled by a very small group of private, Owners, right. Who seek profit off that ownership and seek to grow those profits through reinvesting in that enterprise.

So what that means is for the vast majority of us, all we do have control over is our lives and, and how we provision our lives. When we get home from work, which means we consume these, you know, food, commodities, energy, commodities, and. And I do think because capitalism gives us no democratic control over production.

It's very much an undemocratic system. We do feel some semblance of freedom in the market when we go and make these choices about food, about energy, about solar panels on our roofs, things like that. So it's, it's no, we shouldn't feel bad about trying to sort of express our agency and that. the only problem with that is if we only focus on that realm, we sort of forget that the challenge with climate change really requires a literal revolution and how we produce energy, and how we produce those, key kind of bedrock commodities that underlie sort of the modern built industrial environment like cement and to, to really transform that in the way at the, at the scale and speed.

The IPC or there, sorry, the intergovernmental panel on climate change

**Lizzy:** Thank you.

**Matt Huber:** says we have, you know, We have to get net, zero emissions by 2050 to, you know, very not revolutionary climate scientists have have said that that requires a, material revolution. And in our industrial and energy system, we need a massive, fast energy transition.

And that has to start, it has to happen from where we produce. And since the majority of us don't really have much control over. Those production decisions. It does lead us to feel, oftentimes anxious and also somewhat helpless as the world continues. Burn. and that's not great.

So we do want to exercise the agency. We do have in those consumption realms, But. one of the things I worry about is people sort of think that's everything. And if everyone kind of pitches in and transforms their consumption in these ways, it's going to solve the problem.

But. One of the points I'm trying to make in the book is that to really solve the problem, we actually have to confront the power of the people that control production. And, you know, right now we're seeing evidence of that all around. I mean, both the oil, gas and the coal industry right now are having the highest profits they've seen in about a decade.

the coal industry. Just booming right now. And we continue to kind of just say, well, oh, the market's up, you know, the stock prices for oil and gas firms have been skyrocketing in the last year or so. And we're just sort of gonna say, well, I guess we can't control that. That's just the market. Right. that's the helplessness feeling because, you know, these firms that control everything are continuing to make money off this thing.

That's going to make the planet really uninhabitable within a century or whatever you want to say, whatever doom, story you want to attach to. It's really dire. and we can't kind of just keep seeding this realm of energy production to these small minority of people seeking profits.

**Lizzy:** When you say we, who are you imagining? What are the differences between those levels of all the folks who are not the producers? How do you see them as being.

separate or divided, what are their kind of dividing interests. And are there ways that you are thinking of maybe making them not so divided? I suppose.

**Matt Huber:** yeah, so, the way I conceptualize it in the book is basically. Three classes, the capitalist class controls production, the professional class. it's tough to pin down. Exactly. But I, I basically talk about people that are marshaling credentials to get an advantage in the labor market. And that can be everything from.

Degrees licenses, whatever, type of, sort of professional accreditation that you can kind of marshal to gain. You know, it's very common for, for people to talk about just at a very basic level, like a bachelor's degree gives people the so-called college wage premium, and that's eroding a bit with time, But obviously even people with more advanced degrees, I mean, essentially these, degrees, and this is what we do in higher education as is trying to give, people advantages in a somewhat, dire, uh, and increasingly unequal labor market.

So what I started to notice when I started to really get involved with climate politics and the discourse around it, is that pretty much. Most of the people that are invested in climate policy debates and political activism and, and, so forth, tend to be in this professional class and talking about journalists, I'm talking about people like me like academics.

I'm talking about scientists, and people that work at non-governmental organizations, NGOs, advocacy, organizations, people that work in government regulatory. All these people sort of share this background of, you know, whatever sort of professional expertise they have gives them a window into the, again, very dire, climate science and so forth.

And so, if I can quickly kind of like isolate a couple of things that characterizes this class as climate politics, it would be first that it's because these people are highly educated. the political narratives tend to focus a lot on knowledge, right? It tends to focus a lot on believing the science about, believing climate change is real about not denying the science and so forth.

uh, and, and ee, we see examples of this, you know, when Trump was in office, he was seen as a very rightly like having a war on facts, a war on science. And so, you know, we saw like a March for science in DC and, and, and I think you sort of could see that as a mass, March of this kind of professional class politics of knowledge, I could talk many different aspects, but the second thing I would, I would mention is that because their whole class project is about using these, credentials to gain advantages that not universally, but they tend to be able to cobble together a relatively. Modest middle-class comfortable lifestyle.

Right. and so it's that relative material affluence that leads to exactly this type of, I hate to say it, but somewhat I've been through it, you know, I've gone. Ah, I should go to therapy for some of it, but it's, it's like this narcissistic real focus on your own lifestyle, your own consumption as a driver, as the.

Of the climate breakdown. And then when you start thinking this way, you sort of like go around in the world, you go to a mall or something and you're like, everyone's doing this. And you feel like it's just this you're part of the system. That's, um, that, that is literally the core driver, of climate breakdown.

And so therefore the politics. of that side of things tends to focus a lot on how we need to lower our carbon footprint. We need to reduce consumption. We need to scale down. We need to de-grow. We need to do all this kind of what I call politics of less. And so that really. What I argue is it doesn't have a real good chance democratically, speaking of speaking to the vast majority of society who I would say is the working class. And when I say we it's a very you're right. It's a very complicated question. Who is we? But in ultimately I think what I'm trying to argue in the book is that we have to meet. A democratic collective, polity.

And we have to, you know, if we're going to overcome the power of these fossil fuel industrial producers, we got to, we got to really build a mass coalition. We've gotta really build and mass, democratic mature Tarion, uh, movement. and so. At a very sort of very crude level. You can just look at the United States and you would notice that about, I think it's now like 62, 63% of the adult population does not have a bachelor's degree, does not have a college degree.

And for that majority of society, which tends to work in, you know, the low wage sector, very precarious types of employment. A lot of people in this class have to cobble together two to three jobs. They're drowning in credit card debt and so forth. And this is obviously, you know, this is what we've seen.

over the last four decades of capitalism, it's gotten way more on equal. We've seen the shrinking of the middle class and the pushing more and more people into this kind of, precarious, low wage sector. and so for that majority of people who are really struggling to get by who are really suffering in this honey equal capitalist system, I think, Uh, we can't, you know, making it all about knowledge and knowing the science. That's also not going to speak to people's everyday needs or desire or material kind of struggles, but also we certainly can't make it about, you need to consume less. You need to watch what your, carbon footprint is. You need to do this and that.

**Lizzy:** Yes. The last thing that someone with precarious employment, who's trying to piece together childcare who has no health insurance needs to hear in order to join a mass movement is have you thought about putting solar panels on your house? How well, you know, what, what, what, what luxuries are you skipping in order to, you know, not over-consume and save up to buy an electric vehicle that.

does not seem like a winning message or.

**Matt Huber:** Which is by the way, what Pete Buddha judges said people should do. If they're worried about gas prices, they

**Lizzy:** Oh, I missed that, but

I mean, maybe he.

**Matt Huber:** car.

**Lizzy:** Well, maybe he meant it as a joke.

**Matt Huber:** No, I'm afraid not

**Lizzy:** Well, we'll get here's. Okay. Great transition. Let's focus on government for a second. So we've defined, we have this, we have most, and most meaning the vast majority of the people living in America do not belong to the production class. We are not all the people who. Own the fracking equipment or the nitrogen plant.

We are a variety of people falling within a big pool of folks with different perspectives, uh, earning different incomes, having different degrees and having different orientations towards



this large problem that we maybe need to figure out how to solve together. What's government's role specifically here.

Of course, the U S government. this is a loaded topic right now in particular. There's a lot going on, but there's a lot going on about energy. Independence, um, climate change and our ways to mitigate it. Can you share some examples of ways that our, government has been part of the problem or, and, or working against the problem or, you know, what's, what's going on with that?

We haven't talked about our actual governing apparatus yet in this.

**Matt Huber:** Yeah, no, that's really great question because ultimately, if it's, if it's about democracy, you're going to try to push or the state or the government to do something about this. And for me personally, it's pretty clear that if we're going to decarbonize at the speed necessary, it's going to require the only institution that has the kind of power.

Resources to pull that off. It has to be at least part of it has to be really driven by government. So, um, The problem is we have, again, lived in this, I guess, four or five decade, long period of capitalism, where everyone says the government shouldn't be doing anything in this realm. We call the market or the economy.

And so unfortunately, what we've seen in the climate policy space for really decades now is an attempt to take that premise that the government should stay out of things and, and try to kind of create these really nifty, logical, smart policy, fixes for the.

Issue like carbon taxes or cap and trade schemes that try to channel market prices, channel the profit motive to kind of nudge these producers towards the correct decisions. and, those have just simply, um, not only are they not really at the scale required, but they've, proven not particularly popular, you know, the very liberal, I would say, you know, environmentally friendly state of Washington tried to pass a carbon tax in 2016 and 2018. It failed by voter referendum twice. you saw in France what happened when McKaren tried to pass a kind of climate based fuel tax and how that went over.

so That's one problem. The other problem is all of these policy ideas tend to, again, sort of assume that the government can't take control of this crisis and start doing the investing and production itself, which, a lot of people like myself and others who were calling for agreements.

thought that we could really channel what the original new deal did, which, and also I had mentioned a lot of people take inspiration from world war II where the government really, it didn't, it didn't try to create a market incentive for people to produce enough bonds and planes to defeat the Nazis.

It took control of the, of a whole industries and gave them quotas. You must produce this. You must produce that.

**Lizzy:** Right. Essentially making government jobs, um, government funded programs that.

we're making people work in producing.

**Matt Huber:** Exactly and the new deal, like what I find so inspiring about it is it actually ton of what the new deal did was all about energy, all about transforming our energy system in 1934. Something like 10% of farms had electricity by 1950, it was 90%. So they electrified the entire countryside with government investment things like the Tennessee valley authority with slogans that I would say sound really good and popular, like electricity for all, that was sort of their slogan.

They hired Woody Guthrie to sing songs about rivers, doing work for the people and you know, really inspiring kind of populist. Plan that really was about bringing energy to poor people who needed it. But the core thing we need to do is actually have government control over the investment over, building out all this new, clean energy production that we need. And I was actually looking at this, um, but because. Renewable production right now is basically incentivized by these tax credit policies that only allow private developers to develop renewables cause only private developers can only get these tax credits.

So if you're a public utility like TVA, Tennessee valley authority, you cannot take advantage of these tax credits. So at a policy level, we're basically inhibiting the public sector or the government to even take. Bull by the horns and really start investing, start building, start building this new energy system we so desperately need.

And unfortunately, with all the energy around Alexandria, Ocasio, Cortez, the green new deal, 2019, with Biden and power, they've basically. gone back to this idea that John Kerry keeps saying all the time, which is that if we're going to solve climate change, it's going to be the private sector that does it.

And we got to wait for them to do it. And we got to hope they're going to invest. And it's just it's for me. It's 2022. The latest science is saying, we can't just keep waiting for the private sector to do this. We have to take control of this and that. And the in a capitalist system, governments, the only large scale investment vehicle that can do that.

**Lizzy:** So let's talk a bit then about, what the current government is trying to do or has tried to do and then maybe compare to. that.

a little bit with the green new deal, you can explain, um, why that legislation package was sort of put together as it was. I think you have a really good understanding of how those different pieces work together and what the vision for it was regardless of how feasible any of it is.

but what about the climate portion in Biden's build back better plan, uh, you know, TBD on what is actually going to happen with that legislation, but can you, can you just briefly give us a little bit of context about like what that entails and what the impact would be.

**Matt Huber:** Right. it was going to be in most of the activists, uh, that were, I hate to talk about this in the past tense, but it does feel that this is in the past tense, but,

um, there's still, people are holding onto hope that parts of this could still go. but basically. It was going to be in there.

You want to give them credit, what's going to be in money terms, the largest investment in climate, investment in all of history. So it was going to be significant from a pure kind of, I think the number of people kept promoting was a \$600 billion or something like that. And that's great. And we do need huge numbers and we need all that.

But the problem. Again, that I saw with it was that a huge proportion of that money was simply going to be tax credits again, tax credits to incentivize the Private sector to make these investments. I have learned a little, little wonky details that they actually would have changed the tax credit structure so that public utilities could take advantage.

but again, like that's great and I would love that, but, but I would be more, uh, excited by, you know, Bernie Sanders, sorry to bring up the old, old, uh, battles. But Bernie Sanders is a. His climate plan, really involved, massive expansion of the TVA and all these other, what are called federal, marketing, power authority.

I forget what they're called exactly, but there are these federally owned, entities that own generation of electricity, and the idea was. Make them expand massively. And that's that again? That's to me more of the proactive stance, whereas tax credits are just like, here's these incentives. We hope you take them.

**Lizzy:** And from a capitalist perspective, you will take them if they are the root to your making more money and you won't, if they're not, would be my basic understanding.

**Matt Huber:** And boy, oh boy, I can direct you to, um, one of my colleagues wrote a paper about who actually takes advantage of these renewable energy tax credits. Her name is Sarah Newth and. you know, these tax credits have a long history that really emerged in the 1970s to incentivize renewable production. And right now the biggest entities that they're called tax equity investors.

And they are very extremely wealthy people who are seeking to lower their tax burden. And, essentially, yeah. Renewable energy tax credits are a great way to do that. So Warren buffet has been saying, the only reason to build these windmills is to get the tax credit. That's the only reason they wouldn't be built.

And Berkshire Hathaway's a huge investor in renewables. Goldman Sachs another one bank of America. Some of the wealthiest corporations on earth are gobbling up these tax credits and they're basically become tax shelters for the richest people in our society. So. That's another weird, consequence of this tax credit based policy that really doesn't direct anyone to do anything, but just tries to create the right incentives and so forth.

so build back better, like from a size perspective was big and exciting, but from a content perspective, really, I found disappointing. I also have to say, I found it disappointing that a lot of the. advocacy community, really. put a lot of their eggs in this basket that they called the clean electricity performance program, which was a pretty complicated policy that was going to, force utilities, electric utilities to really, decarbonize at a fast speed and penalize the ones that don't.

And it was, it had. Great ambition to really rapidly clean up the electricity sector, which is what I think is everyone agrees is the sort of starting point of decarbonization, but it had no sort of clear. popular, uh, material benefit that people can easily understand. Like when people heard clean electricity performance program, it's not clear to them that that would mean cheaper electricity to the third of Americans who struggle to pay their utility bills.

It's not clear what it was doing other than cleaning up the electricity sector. So. I would've preferred. If the Build Back Better, had a very clear kind of, material improvement that people could see, would improve their lives. like the, something like the child tax credit that did But, um,

but

**Lizzy:** away too with it. That makes you feel any better,

**Matt Huber:** exactly.

**Lizzy:** So. Leaving us then with this excellent dissection of all of these problems here, he would definitely as usually happens on no jargon. Uh, and whenever we're talking to researchers, we do a great job picking apart what the actual problem is and what we've got to solve. And then we try to sort of get to a place where maybe you can use some of your research and expertise to.

Uh, some possible paths forward or, you know, things that folks who are interested can at least explore on their own. So, you know, if you've come with us this far, we've got a different

understanding of who is actually to blame. Um, who's, who's driving some of the worst effects of climate change. We've got an understanding of, the.

Powers that can potentially be used to reign those people in. but what's your sick gestures here. And going back to that concept of we, how do we spell that out? How do we get everybody from these disparate classes with different interests, some are who are more hostile, to some of the framing of climate change than others.

How do we get them to come together? Does the green new deal itself as legislation have any of that scaffolding within it that you know, that people could follow along? Does that make the case where they're different when that gets brought up again? Which I'm sure someday it will. Cause we always keep trying, what would, what would good legislation that did some of that work look like to you?

**Matt Huber:** Yeah, that's a great question. Um, the one, the one thing I would point out is that the green new deal was I mean, it was a non-binding resolution and it was, um, very aspirational document, that didn't have a lot of the, you know, for, for all its flaws build back better was legislation. It was trying to actually, Pass through something.

but in it's aspirational content, you know, it included things like a job guarantee, and things like, guaranteed, uh, vacation time and healthcare and

Medicare for all.

**Lizzy:** which many people said, what the hell does that have to do with climate?

**Matt Huber:** Absolutely. and that to me is a product of the. single issue of vacation of politics. That's happened over the last several decades where everyone's sort of in their little niche policy, advocacy, territory, and people feel like. you just have to sort of have blinders on and only focus.

But to me, like it, again, a lot of our, of those single issue policies are sort of rooted in one issue, which is money and power and corporations kind of control everything. So we have to actually build a kind of broad-based narrative and politics around kind of. Uh, that can really inspire and mobilize the majority of people, towards something.

And so it can't just be a, again, it can't just be at climate. Wonky policy that cleans up electricity in this way, but it has to be, it has to combine these issues of healthcare, of childcare, of, economic insecurity and, and energy altogether in this kind of grand vision, which is by the way, precisely what the original new deal did.

It wasn't just an energy policy. It was a labor policy, it was an infrastructure policy. It was all these things and it was all. Folded together in this kind of inspiring rhetoric. And by the way, the FDR himself welcomed the hatred of the financial class and really railed against the wealthy and actually raised their taxes significantly to fund this massive investment program.

In fact, that wall street tried to overthrow him for that. Um, that's another story, But when it gets down to it, the key thing for me is that the, the very sectors that we need to decarbonize most rapidly transportation, electricity, agriculture, and food. All these things are actually.

So connected to everyone's everyday life. This is what we do every day. We eat, we move around. We, we, we live in houses, we live. And so those are the very things we need to decarbonize. So why not really build a again, a new deal, like type investment program that's about transforming all those things in ways that make them cheaper, more affordable, sometimes free, obviously.

everyone. I think believes that if, every country in the world, every industrialized country in the world can give people free healthcare. Why not the most powerful and wealthy country. you know, the mayor of Boston has recently. Been experimenting with free public transit.

I think that's incredible. and, if we think healthcare is a human, right, why isn't food by the way, because food's pretty important to life and housing. You know, the new deal really was massive about investment in public housing. And there's been a lot of problems in between, but why not resurrect these ideas of public housing, social housing, and a lot of green new deal activist related.

Combined, you know, um, you know, retrofitting housing, installing heat pumps instead of gas furnaces, all this work could be done as a massive public investment program, but again, broken record alert. The key is that instead of the climate wank approach, which says like, we need to raise the price of all these things to internalize the externalities and the missions into their prices, we should say.

Let's transform these systems so that they can be cheaper, more affordable for the masses and. The problem with the green new deal in 2019 is that it was all aspirational and none of it got delivered. Right. And I was someone that really hit the pavement canvassing for Bernie and, and talking about the green, new deal and Medicare for all.

And people were like, yeah, sounds great. But it's not going to happen. I don't believe you. I don't believe Bernie. And so people are demoralized. People are, apathetic. They don't believe. Massive changes are possible anymore. Even though history shows us that they have they happen, they can happen.

Um, so if we're going to start resurrecting people's belief and conviction, that change is possible. We need to start delivering. Like real change where they can see it in their lives. And if, again, if we can attach those changes to decarbonizing climate action, we can start to start to maybe build a, like a popular coalition around these ideas.

the other thing we could do is. you know, I promote a working class kind of strategy in the book. And part of that is, you know, creating, you know, a mass democratic, movement, but the other part of working class politics is obviously the workers themselves and the union movement, the labor movement.

So in the book, I really argue that, any climate, pathway to decarbonisation goes to the electric sector, the electric power sector, you may have heard you basically, we have to electrify everything, but first we have to clean up the electric sector, make it all. Sort of zero carbon and then sort of electrify transportation, electrify our building, uh, heat systems, industrial systems.

So what I started to look at is that lo and behold, actually the electric utility sector. At least in the United States, but I would guess many places around the world is one of the more unionized in the entire economy in the U S it's something like 25%

union density, which might

not. I was going to say, might not sound like much, but it's actually very, very high for the United States.

And so these unions, the international brotherhood of electrical workers, utility workers, union of America. These are, you know, a massive institutions that have union members that are, uh, willing to fight and devote substantial resources to fighting for their members interests. and so what I think the climate movement, uh, needs to do, there's a lot of talk in the climate movement about public power.

Public electricity, but there's not as much engagement with these very unions that are right there in that sector. And we need to kind of start to work with those [00:36:00] unions and get them on board. And I think the key argument we want to make is that, um, if these unions don't start proactively, sort of fighting for a union led, uh, climate transition, energy transition, uh, a lot of the renewable energy development, that's happening today is actually.

Friendly to unions. It's a renewable production has really low union density. So if these unions don't kind of have a much more long-term proactive vision, they're going to sort of lose a lot of jobs and members to this kind of green capitalism. So. I do think, uh, activists and, organizers in the labor movement that are concerned about climate change could consider, um, really engaging more with these labor unions that are right there in the belly of the beast of the system.

We need to transform.

**Lizzy:** Thank you for all of those examples of what can happen and what maybe should happen next. For more on professor Huber's work. Check out our show notes at [scholars.org/nojargon](https://scholars.org/nojargon). No jargon is the podcast of the Scholar Strategy Network, a nationwide organization, connecting journalists, policy makers, and civic leaders with America's top researchers to improve policy and strengthen democracy.

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