Courage My Friends Podcast Series IV – Episode 3
Good Jobs, Clean Economy, Healthy Planet: Pushing for a Just Transition

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ANNOUNCER: You're listening to *Needs No Introduction*.
Needs No Introduction is a rabble podcast network show that serves up a series of speeches, interviews and lectures from the finest minds of our time

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COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: COVID. Capitalism. Climate. Three storms have converged and we're all caught in the vortex.

STREET VOICE 1: When I graduate, will there be such a thing as job security? Will I still have access to healthcare?

STREET VOICE 2: We're not seeing the same increase in wages as we are in inflation and cost of living. And I'm worried about what that's gonna mean as far as having a future, having a family and being able to grow.

STREET VOICE 1 Everything is more expensive. I don't know if it's because of the climate crisis or all of this conflict but I have kids and I need to believe their future is going to be better and brighter.
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COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: What brought us to this point? Can we go back to normal? Do we even want to?

Welcome back to this special podcast series by rabble.ca and the Tommy Douglas Institute (at George Brown College) and with the support of the Douglas-Coldwell-Layton Foundation. In the words of the great Tommy Douglas…

VOICE 4: Courage my friends; 'tis not too late to build a better world.

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: This is the *Courage My Friends* podcast.

RESH: The planet is telling us it's high time we change our ways and transition to a clean economy, but what does that look like? What does that look like for workers? And how must this transition be a truly Just Transition that protects workers, respects communities, and even transforms the way we work?
Welcome to The Courage My Friends podcast. I'm your host, Resh Budhu.

In our third episode, *Good Jobs, Clean Economy, Healthy Planet: Pushing for a Just Transition*, we continue to bring you discussions from the 31st annual Labour Fair at George Brown College in Toronto.

In this episode, Senior Program Manager for Blue Green Canada, Jamie Kirkpatrick discusses the alliance between labour and climate movements in the push for a clean energy economy and the Just Transition we need to get us there.

Jamie, welcome. Thanks so much for joining us.

JAMIE: Thanks for having me.

RESH: To start off, tell us about Blue Green Canada.

JAMIE: Blue Green Canada is an organization that incorporated in 2010. Started with a strategic alliance between the United Steel Workers Labour Union and Environmental Defence Canada. And the realization was they had more they agreed with than they disagreed with and they'd be stronger working together.

And from that point, we've grown to include seven different member organizations and we work on things, if I could put it in a short term: We want to keep the jobs. Cut the carbon. And build the future together. And we think that through, a network of labour and environmental activists, we have a lot of strength, we have a lot of reach, and we want to make sure that we have both good jobs and a healthy environment. Because we can have both and we need both to thrive.

RESH: It makes sense, right? Bringing the climate movement together with the labour movement. But this is not a typical alliance. Have I got that right? It's not something we would typically have seen?

JAMIE: Well, historically, correct. There would definitely have been regional differences and issues. Environmentalism for a long time was I think about just shutting down that thing. And labour advocates were advocating for jobs no matter where and what they could be. And so there was definitely opportunity for tension there.

But I think the more important point was the recognition that we're all actually kind of on the same team here. We're all working likely for someone else. We're all working to try and sustain our families and make sure we have a place that's safe to live in.

So there's a lot more in common between these groups. And I think that the individual tensions still come up because, just like any relationship, there's going to be points of agreement and disagreement. What we value at Blue Green's table, is that we can sit down and agree that we can have both good jobs and a healthy environment. We need those things. Let's work together to make sure that we're doing that.

RESH: So you are in touch with unions all the time. Obviously a key part of this alliance are unions. So have you seen that climate has now become more integrated into union demands for labour justice?

JAMIE: I believe I really have. I've seen it happen over the years I've been with Blue Green. Absolutely. It has changed over time for certain. We were involved in the launch of a video that led to Unifor's Auto-Pact and Auto-Plan; the way they're bargaining with the big three Detroit automakers.

And in their Auto-Plan it talked about the importance of sustainable jobs. It talked about battery recycling. It talked about the need to recognize the climate crisis and act on it. And that's just one example.

All of the major unions now seem to have, at least at the top level, an environment committee that will include national reps to address issues across the country. There was just several recent submissions by unions and labour groups that were speaking to the federal budget and talked about the need for climate action in there.

I was lucky enough to participate a few weeks back in one of many different taskforces that have been struck by labour groups that their members are saying, "We need to take action on climate change. It's affecting our work and our lives."

The realities of the crisis that we're in are dictating a little bit more willingness to work together. But also we're seeing, even with recent announcements, out of Southern Ontario yesterday, there's investments being made by corporations in greener products, in renewable, uh, or less dangerous products. So..

The tensions are still real though, because we do live in a position where we have a lot of extractive industries that pay well, and we're needing to shift some of that extraction to be more sustainable and less focused on burning fossil fuels. So that friction is real and there is going to be friction.

But there's also a great opportunity in a lot of areas, and we're seeing that being embraced by labour and corporations.

RESH: Now, I want to go back to the tagline, the Blue Green tagline: Keep the jobs. Cut the carbon. Build the future. And right from the get-go it pushes back against, as you said, this long-standing idea that good jobs and a clean economy cannot co-exist.

Is this a real fear or a narrative by political and industry forces?

JAMIE: Yeah, it's a very good question. And it's an evolving reality, I believe, as well.

When we began this whole Industrial Revolution that we have, it was all about we have to have dominion over nature. We need to exploit these resources. And get them to a market. And turn them into products. And sell, sell. And the progress was smokestacks. And that vision has changed over time. We recognize that the stuff that goes up those stacks actually has a big impact on the rest of the world, and we need to adjust that.

And you mentioned political and other interests.

Absolutely! There's always going to be those that are profiting and benefiting from the current arrangements that obviously don't want to upset that status quo and keep things as they are. And there's others that are seeing the impacts of our industrial economy that was based on burning fossil fuels, producing coal, all of these things that really helped us to advance as a society, but they had a cost. And that cost has been borne out in climate change. And this is something that probably was not foreseeable by all participants in the initial extractive era. But I think that the reality is we now know that "the solution to pollution isn't dilution". That used to be the phrase, that's not the case anymore. And that we need to take steps if we want to continue to have the way of life that we do, to get the carbon out of our jobs. Focused on building a future that doesn't involve that level of exploitation. And in the meantime, we've gotta start cleaning up the mess that we've created to get to this point.

It's obviously a challenge. It is the challenge of our time. And if we isolate individual issues, it becomes more difficult. If we look together... Like we all want to get through this, we want to have a better world. I don't think that anyone's happiness is tied to the type of fuel that moves their automobile around.

Maybe it's more about looking for solutions to ensure that kids don't have asthma. Recognizing the impacts of decades and decades of operating with an exploitive process leading the way.

And I think individual workers see that. I think unions see that. I think corporations see it. But I think that there has to be more of a hand from the government involved in this instead of just sort of standing back and letting the market sort it all out. Because the market and changes are occurring, but they're not necessarily occurring in a way that is going to take care of us as we go through it.

Like change is inevitable. A just change takes work. And that's the type of phase I think we find ourselves in right now.

RESH: And as you said, we're in this steadily worsening climate crisis, largely brought on by industrialization and carbon-based economies. We don't have a choice.

If we wanna survive, then we have to transition. And the trick is how do we move from where we are now to where we need to be? And the language of just transition has now become part and parcel of national budgets. So it seems government is paying attention. But from a labour perspective, what must a Just Transition look like? What are you actually hearing from workers on the ground?

JAMIE: From the folks that I work with in organized labour, it starts and ends with the job. You know, it's great that there's programs that are going to be funded that are going to help retrain or upskill workers, but to what end? Show them where the actual job is that you're talking about. Because they have a job now. They have a secure job. They're in a position where they're able to take care of themselves,

support their friends and family or whatever they do. And we're saying, "Well, no, we're gonna teach you to do something else." But there's not a clear path. There's no clear direction necessarily that we're being asked to follow. We're just trying to get rid of the carbon.

But if there's no plan, that leads to jobs and security, then of course there's going to be pushback and hesitation. And of course there's going to be those that take advantage of that and use that for political purposes as well.

What's really interesting is when you start to see it working. Like electric vehicles are now starting to be manufactured in Canada, and in different parts of North America and the world.

But we have a slice of that. The other day there was a massive, nearly $2 billion investment by Ford Motor Company to retool one of their plants in Oakville to start making electric vehicles and parts. So the shift is happening and what we have to do to make sure that it actually works is that there are protections in place for those workers.

We don't want to have the workforce that built the internal combustion engine automobile swept aside and have a new workforce brought in perhaps with less pay, lower wage or labour standards. We don't want this to be an excuse to create a bunch of cheap labour jobs. We need to continue to have good paying jobs that have protections in them, and that we build the future by building the new technology that we need. Or building the adaptive processes that we need. Or upgrading the homes that we have to retrofit them and make sure that they are more energy efficient, as that's going to matter a lot more now.

The idea of a transition is all about ... to what? And I think that we have seen, and as you'd mentioned, you know, budget items, talk about Just Transition. We've set up Sustainable Jobs Action Plan, I believe they called it.

And these things are happening, but they're still happening without anyone acknowledging the elephant in the room, which is that we have to actually now make a change and shift away from expansive production of fossil fuels and start to ratchet that down because the science is clear. The rest of the world, at least the majority of the world is going in that direction. And we're gonna continue to be in an old era if we don't start to make these changes now.

And as we've seen over time, transitions that occur without planning are the worst for people. You don't have to go far, but look at the cod-stock collapse.

Science said we have to limit the fishery. We have to monitor this. We're overfishing. There's issues with the population of the fish. And then the hammer came down and the fishery was closed. And all of those folks were thrown out of work. And had there been a more step-wise planned approach, maybe that wouldn't have been the case. Or it would've been a lot less detrimental to a huge group of people.

RESH: So unsustainable jobs are also not sustainable in terms of they're not lasting jobs as well. So we need to transition, but transition while people are on the job so there's no break for them as well.

Well, that's right. I like to say that the person who built the first automobile took a horse and buggy to work. There is a transition period. We can't just snap our fingers - as much as we seem to be able to in this technological age - we can't just snap our fingers and things have changed. So we do have to account for the fact that we are still human in this system. We still have our human needs, and you can't just flip the switch and expect everything to have occurred without the forethought of like, well, how are these people gonna work? What's gonna happen if this plant disappears? It's the only major employer in town. That's going to have a major impact.

Are we a society that cares about that? Are we one that wants to make sure that we're not creating ghost towns all over parts of our country because we're switching out to a different fuel?

And I think that if we don't actually see some leadership that directs us toward those science-based targets that we have to hit, then we're going to still be flailing and leaving it up to good corporate citizens to take us there. And we don't have a great history of involving good labour rights and support for workers and people in need.

Workers who without government intervention are abandoned to the not so tender mercies of the market.

Now you spoke at this year's annual Labour Fair at Toronto's George Brown College, and you brought up the statistic that while $1 million can create two oil and gas jobs, that same amount of money can create 15 clean energy jobs. So, Jamie, do the math for us. Why so many more clean jobs for the same price?

JAMIE: Yeah, it's a fun graphic we've used a lot. So what that shows is that if we just continue with the old ways we get the same results that we'd expect. You know, two jobs for a $1million investment. Those are probably well paying jobs. But we have so many more economic opportunities if we diversify where we're investing. If we're investing in different renewables, creating jobs in a new sector, we see that there's a economic bump that creates more jobs because of that.

The issue that I've had labour folks bring up to me is, "Well, are those good jobs? You can create a whole bunch of crappy service-jobs, but my job's paying me really well."

And that's where there's a huge next leap and challenge as well. If we don't actually fight for labour standards and good work in the work we want people to be doing, then we're gonna be putting ourselves at a disadvantage as well.

I think what the graphic also shows is just how much we over-subsidize the oil and gas sector. And in doing so, we net out far less jobs than were we to provide equal subsidy to jobs in the renewables and emission-free sector.

So that's the main point of the graphic is a million dollars gets you two jobs in oil and gas. That same million dollars invested in renewables gives you the opportunity to have way more jobs and economic activity. And then, there's no magic bullet, the challenge is we have to also work to make those new jobs, good jobs with labour protections and things that you'd see in some of the more traditional fossil fuel jobs.

RESH: Absolutely. Now, for those who are somewhat new to the conversation on energy and green economy and whatnot, what do you mean by clean energy jobs or renewable sources of energy?

JAMIE: So there's a variety of clean energy jobs. A clean economy is one that is very much like our current economy. It's just it's not based on the exploitation of resources. The GDP and growth aren't tied to carbon production. And we've seen that decoupling occur.

It starts with electrification and the recognition that we're going to have to switch fuels from burning to having electricity charge a whole bunch of stuff.

We talk about increasing electrical for production; whether that's building out the electrical grids across the country. We talk about green jobs and clean energy jobs in terms of renewable construction, that sort of thing.

We also talk about bus drivers, people that can help displace the single- occupant automobile, which is one of the major sources of urban pollution.

Those that are doing remediation work to address maybe the Tar Sands that are pooling and need to be addressed.

But the main point is that everything doesn't have to change. We're still talking about having an economy that can function and help provide for us all, but that we switch out a lot of the types of fuel or jobs that fund that economy.

And we can enumerate specific tasks like engineers that are working on different types of fuel. We can talk about ways of extracting hydrogen in a green way.

A lot of people in the care sectors, I think could even be considered in the green or clean economy going forward because they're doing work to help people deal with the climate crisis, whether they see it or not. They're doing the work to help people through the transitions that are occurring and the climate events and just the overall affordability crises. All of these things contribute to a healthy economy, so they're contributing to a green economy as well.

RESH: Avi Lewis, who was with the LEAP. He was at the Labour Fair as a keynote speaker a couple years ago, and he was making the same point. He was saying that the green jobs are those that are not carbon-burning jobs. The jobs that people like me are doing like teaching, nursing, community work, essentially those soft- sector jobs can also be considered green jobs as well.

JAMIE: Oh, absolutely. That's a hundred percent correct. Those jobs aren't directly tied to the, fossil fuels or to the extractive industry jobs.

We need those workers. We need more of them even because we have an aging population. We have more care that is needed in our society. Looking after each other is gonna become a big deal as the population continues to age and you add the complication of more extreme weather events and the unpredictability that that brings with it. It's a needed growth industry, frankly.

We need to buckle down and build things so that we can sustain ourselves and be less focused on the profit motive and more focused on things like, are people happy? Are people surviving? Is life affordable for people writ large as opposed to a few at the top? Those types of things that are very human when we look at how we interact with each other.

And I think those things need to guide more of what we're doing as a nation and as a globe.

All of these things contribute to a healthy economy, so they're contributing to a green economy as well.

The green economy is essentially the vision that we want our current economy to get to. And it's not about leaving things out, cutting people out of work. It's about recognizing the changing nature of the environment, the changing nature of work. Continuing to provide economic opportunities for people to be working.

There's all sorts of potential activities in a green economy, very much like the current economy. It's just that we cut the carbon-burning part out and we see what we can replace that with. And there's so many opportunities and there's so much in terms of investment needed to get us there.

All we're doing is cutting out the carbon aspect of it is the goal. I know it's not as simple as that, but in terms of a clean economy; that's what we're advocating for.

And we see pieces of it occurring all over the globe. We see particularly European nations that have upped their renewables. They've eliminated coal in certain jurisdictions where they were coal-based economies. There's lots of these examples. In North America, we're starting to see them.

The green economy is economy that works for people. It removes the direct tie to exploitation of resources. And it talks more about recognizing holistic and more sustainable approach to how we should exist on this planet.

RESH: Correct me if I'm wrong, but Canada tends to be one of the larger polluters in the world, right?

JAMIE: Canada's population punches way above its weight in terms of its pollution impact on the globe. There's only, what, 38 million Canadians. But on a per capita basis we're one of the worst. I'm joining you from Saskatchewan and we boast the largest per capita carbon emissions in the country. And there's all sorts of both reasons and excuses for this.

Canada is a really big place. It is very cold. We do have to heat things, heat ourselves and keep ourselves warm. But a lot of the other Nordic or northern countries have had to deal with this and they've managed to proceed a lot further down on electrification than we have.

But traditionally Canada is a resource and extractive country, right?

For better or for worse, and mostly for worse, we would rip and ship our natural resources around the globe to be processed and produced and made into goods somewhere else. And labour folks know that that is really not a intelligent way to base your economy. Because you're taking all of the value-added out of the economy and sending it to other places.

And so we don't think that ripping and shipping raw logs is a really smart economic strategy. Or if we did, we don't think it is anymore because it's a valuable resource that we could do more with here.

But in terms of the carbon impact that Canadians have, yeah, like we have one of the largest, I think it's the third or fourth largest oil and gas reserves in the world.

And as such, the process of exploiting that and producing usable products from mud... the Oil Sands, pardon me, is a very taxing one.

Now we hear a lot about the improvements that have been made in the industry over the years, and I actually don't doubt that there have been more efficiencies gained in terms of ways to squeeze the oil out of the Oil Sands. But it is still an incredibly carbon-intensive sector. And most all of the focus is on the production, and we don't really follow the product down the line and talk about the impacts of burning that fossil fuel.

So if we actually did a more holistic approach to our production of coal and oil and gas and the things that we produce and export around the globe, Canada has a huge impact on the pollution that we create and we're responsible for bringing into the market.

And you know, I think if some people hear this, they get their backs up and they think, "Well, no, we're not that bad. What about all these other places?" Everyone wants to talk about China as the biggest problem in the world. And the scale and scope that things happen in China is incredibly bigger than Canada. 100%. And it's happened a lot faster.

But people in North America and Europe or the West, we have benefited tremendously over hundreds of years from this method of exploitation. We have centuries of pollution built up that we've produced and created, and our fair share of the problem is a lot larger than your average person in the world.

Carbon in the atmosphere came there from our progress. And as such, I think we have a responsibility to step up and perhaps even do a little more than some of the smaller or developing countries because they're just trying to get to our level. And we've been here for quite a while and they have suffered as a result.

The one thing that has I think allowed all of this cycle of exploitation to occur is that we don't always bear the negative impacts immediately, right? Those are impacted on folks in the North with huge temperature changes and swings and melting caps and the droughts and things in other parts of the world.

We're only now really starting to see some more of those impacts. When the town of Lytton lit on fire, that woke a lot of people up.

We have an outsized contribution to the carbon pollution in the world. And it is our responsibility to address that. And I think that anyone who argues against that is probably doing so because it's, for their best interest to try and keep the status quo.

And figures where we talk about the individual impacts or the per capita pollution per Canadian is high. It's not on the individual person pumping gas or the person doing one job. It's societal and structural change that needs to occur.

It doesn't mean that it's up to every individual Canadian themselves to solve this problem. It means that we should ask our leaders to lead and to show us how we can get out of this. And that's the step we're at right now, I think.

We are in a bad state. The science says that because of our northern location, we are going to have more rapid impacts of increasing temperature.

RESH: Canada is actually warming faster than the rest of the earth.

JAMIE: Like I said earlier, In the North, it's already three degrees, in some cases warmer than it would be normally. And because we're talking about averages, we're at the high end.

So if we don't get leaders that can recognize that something exists beyond the four year political cycle and they need to plan for the economy that their kids are going to

be running; we're going to be always struggling to catch up and there's going to be more pain and suffering than is necessary. And that could have been avoided.

The solution isn't in making everyone feel bad about themselves. It's about demanding more of our leaders. Telling companies if they want to work here and employ people here, then they have to follow certain rules. And we build things up together instead of dividing the problem up and making it feel so big that you can't do anything.

RESH: It's interesting that you brought up the difference between the Global North and the Global South. That it has been largely Global North industrialization that has caused this issue and the Global South that's largely in the catastrophe right now.

I remember two climate conferences ago you had the Minister of Tuvalu who delivered his speech to the UN standing knee-deep in water and said, "We are sinking."

And then of course, you know, China, India is the other one. They have well over a billion people, whereas as you said, we have only 38 million. There's also that issue that Canada, our polluting doesn't just happen within our borders. We also transport a lot of our pollution across borders. China and India were doing a lot of our industry as well as for other places within the Global North. We have global mining companies.

JAMIE: Yeah, exactly right. The reach that our country has in the world is massive. You know, we're one of the G7 nations. We're one of the richest countries in the world. Despite our small population, we have an outsized influence. And traditionally people have looked to Canada to be a leader in international efforts. Peacekeeping. That was the thing that was our role. We helped. We were there not for conflict, but for support. Or at least that's the narrative.

And I think that numbers are fun. We can make them say all sorts of things. There's a million people in my province. Per capita, we are responsible for more of the pollution. But also materials are extracted from here and then they go off to other parts of the country to be refined or they go shipped somewhere else and they're made into other products.

We are in a very connected system. And just pointing at individual problems and not recognizing the whole connection is not gonna get us anywhere. It's just gonna make us fight amongst ourselves. The politics of division are stronger than ever right now, and that's the problem. Climate crisis and trying to ensure that we have a livable planet shouldn't be seen as a partisan issue.

And it actually isn't in all of the world. A lot of the nations that have been making strides, greening their economy, developing Just Transition programming within the government, they happen to have conservative governments in charge. And it's because it just makes economic sense.

It's less about what you should do and more about what we need to do and what's also going to be profitable.

Those countries that have started to decouple growth from carbon are going to be ahead. And as I said, those are not necessarily all Lefty countries or Left-leaning governments.

RESH: And then we see the other side of this, say in the United States where talk of Just Transition or Green Economy or a clean economy has really become a political football over there.

JAMIE: Yeah.

RESH: Right? Between the Democrats and the Republicans.

So where do we fit in Canada? Are we closer to the US in terms of this being a partisan issue? Or are we closer to say the Nordic countries where there really is no division?

JAMIE: Well, I still think we're in the first camp where we're closer to it being a partisan issue.

Just look at the fact that the long-awaited Just Transition Act, something called The Sustainable Jobs Plan was dribbled out instead. Because the idea of the federal Liberal government doing something related to Just Transition, when that term is being used as a vilification .. I think we're still in the muck here. I think we're closer to that US-style division than we are the European approach to this. Now, there's a lot of pluses and minuses about all these different things. There's incredible amounts of horrible anti-immigration and Right-wing things going on in a lot of those European countries that are also doing great environmental things.

RESH: And some of them are actually transporting their environmental issues to, again, other countries. So they have a clean record and those other countries are bearing the brunt.

JAMIE: That is correct. And I think it's very challenging when we don't have the ability to check on statements or things like... there's lots of folks who talk about Canadian oil being the cleanest in the world.

And I'm sure you could develop some metrics to make that statement become true. But that's only if you're looking at one part of the chain. Or if you're ignoring all of the externalities that come from that processing. That's politics. That's the idea that we have to boast our technological know-how and our ability to do this stuff.

It's just problematic because it divorces the politics from the reality. And makes politics more of a game about getting elected than it is about being a leader who's going to help lead us through a crisis.

Canada is a lot closer to the position that we find our American neighbors than our European allies.

But I think that there has been a great amount of change in the United States. Even conservative-run states doing a bunch of wind exploration or recognizing the value in those things. So it's like we're getting to the point where it's not a values-based change to what is good, it's what's gonna make us money as well. And I think that can help, but we need to go faster.

RESH: You talked about the carbon-intensive areas of Canada. You are in one and Alberta of course is the other one. Well, another one. Blue Green just held a couple of just transition and good jobs conventions in Alberta. So what was that like having this conversation in what is essentially the oil and gas province of Canada?

JAMIE: So we held three *Just Transition and Good Jobs for Alberta* gatherings in Calgary and Edmonton. And that was in response to, and trying to tackle the fact that we'd recently decided as a nation to phase out burning coal for electricity. By 2030, that was the declaration.

The first conference was, "Well, let's deal with this. What does this mean?" And we had a lot of folks turn up and a lot of polite clapping. We talked about the opportunities and we brought in folks in specific building trades to talk about the work that they do and how that is a growth-industry in terms of retrofitting and energy efficiency. And it was still pretty new the first year.

So there was cautious optimism. We can figure this out . And the newly elected Alberta NDP government at the time was actually trying to come up with a plan for this because the Conservative federal government with Steven Harper, their plan was..."And then people will find other jobs." There wasn't any concept of a transition that would be supported by government.

It was that, this phase-out's happening. People will find other work. That's that.

And so when you're introducing a problem and a solution at the same time, it's kind of hard to, I think, get a full understanding of everything.

In one year, things changed dramatically because all of the companies that ran mines and burned coal for electricity, saw that this was going to change. And they worked out a deal with the government to basically be allowed to begin shifting from coal to gas, without penalty and more quickly.

And they even got a big payout to do so because the province was concerned about all of these companies closing up shop and leaving, rightly or wrongly. And so the second year of the convention, we suddenly had all of these folks working for companies that had said they're going do the switch to gas and they're phasing out their mining productions.

And this was the second year in what we thought was a 16 year window. We had a long time for planning. We thought we could make this work. There'll be early retirements for some folks, but they have another good 10 years of work with them.

And then it just changed like that. Companies suddenly saw another way to make money. You know, gas is a lot less labor intensive. And so the shift started happening really quickly.

We'd have more people paying attention. And more people concerned. And more people starting to want to know "how is this just transition going to work for us?" And you'd have local unions starting to organize and have those conversations.

We also saw folks from Fort Mac starting to turn up at these things because they were seeing the changing nature of their work. Automation started creeping in. Big trucks that used to have 10- person crew were now run by someone in a control room with the remote control.

RESH: And these are the Tar Sands folks, right?

JAMIE: And these are folks working in, sorry, yes, in the Oil Sands, in the Tar Sands. And a group of them from a local came to these conferences to talk about the connections. And how they saw the writing on the wall as the next step.

So that expanded even our conversation, I think, to recognize, yes, coal's, first- and, you know, there was always a strong push to make a joke about the canary in the coal mine. And I think I always had someone reign me back in about that.

But it was like, if we don't get coal right, how in the heck are we gonna get to transition off of fossil fuels correct? Because at this point, there were maybe 3,300 Canadians working directly in either mines or electricity or maybe 4,000.

But there's like 10 times that directly tied into the fossil fuels. And there's even more that are indirectly tied to exporting gas to all sorts of jobs.

So the conference and those conversations helped to show just how connected these changes are. And some people's plan to move from coal to just go work at Fort Mac, that backup plan wasn't as solid now all of a sudden.

Unfortunately we did have a political change in government and a lot of our work shifted to trying to defend and keep some of these programs that had been started up and running.

And that's sort of where the focus became, at least in Alberta. And the transition program for those coal workers did continue and, was funded through a carbon levy that couldn't be repealed. And there was a bunch of money in the account. So the government continued to roll out that Just Transition program, but not grow it, not

expand it. And it's in this position where there's not a clear next step for the other workers.

All of the coal fossil burning plants, at least in Alberta, have been transitioned either offline to renewables or they're burning gas now. And basically the rest of the folks in the coal sector are kind of being bounced around.

Here in my home province, in Saskatchewan that is, there's a long and strong pushback against the idea of even why we would phase out coal. And the government is focusing more on the fight with the Feds than they are a fight to make sure there's good jobs for their soon to be unemployed coal workers.

The politics of this always gets involved. If we had an agreed upon framework that said, " these science-based targets that say we need to be by this point at 2030 and to zero by 2050," that should be the thing that guides where we're going. Easy for me to say. But it seems to be if you make your living and profit from a system that is being threatened, you're gonna not necessarily be as into the idea of switching off of the gas and switching fuels.

RESH: Well, we certainly saw that right? In 2019 when we saw the trucker caravan, this was before the Convoy and the pandemic, but the trucker caravan driving from those provinces out West to Ottawa to protest the Federal Carbon Tax and the stalling of oil and gas pipelines. And we've seen other iterations of those fears across Canada.

But speaking of the 2030 and 2050 targets that Canada has to meet. Where are we now in terms of transitioning? Because we have been doing it piecemeal over a number of years.

JAMIE: Yeah, piecemeal is the, right way to describe things I think. Because it really depends. If you have a province that has decided to take this as a serious challenge and opportunity, you're further along in the process than if you're in a province that's decided, no, we're gonna dig our heels in and we'll go the root of lawsuits instead of making change.

Canada has been very good at setting targets to address climate change. We've done a great job of setting targets, but we've never actually met one. And I think that does not inspire confidence in the average person when we keep setting targets. We keep trying to bring in at least tiny steps and some restrictions, and they're met with huge amounts of opposition, in part because we have no success to point to. And also because it's not being explained well.

All of the counter arguments to climate action: Canada is so small. Go talk to China and India first and then come back and talk to me.

On the world stage and in global gatherings and in G7s and in UNFCC and all of these things, Canada likes to be on the stage and we like to be part of the team

that's leading progressive change. But when we get back to Canada and we have a confederation and 10 provinces, three territories and all sorts of intergovernmental issues, a lot of those lofty international goals just stay there as lofty international goals and they don't lead to the change that's needed at home.

RESH: Right.

JAMIE: And this is why groups like Blue Green Canada have been calling on the government to lead a Just Transition effort. To talk about the fact that we do need to change how we run our economy and how we function as society and a country. And that there are limits that we need to put on the production of fossil fuels. Writ large.

That would be a huge thing, if we actually had governments in our country not be afraid to say that. I say afraid because if you just look at what happened over I think this past weekend joint letters being written by the leaders of Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, filled with rage and anger because a federal minister mused about looking at the relationships that we have as a federation, between the provinces controlling resources and the Feds.

It was like an offhanded comment that was made by one minister about looking at different options to address natural resource use.

So when you're against even the concept of exploring, doing something different, you're not even willing to sit down and have a conversation about change.

My premier famously said, "I don't care," when asked about Saskatchewan leading the country in terms of carbon emissions per capita.

The concept of even looking at one piece of legislation from the 1920s that set out how we manage resources, got the hackles up of those three premiers who jumped on the chance to talk about how this is awful and it's about control. Because that whips up their base and their support. And it's all about that narrative of big government coming to tell us how we have to live our lives.

It's immature. It shows that we're not at the point of having real conversations because we're gonna have some group of our leaders just decide to kick over the table and walk out instead of actually have a conversation about options and getting through this.

RESH: And what about your average Canadian?

JAMIE: I think that we have seen an increased willingness from Canadians to pull together. The pandemic has changed a lot of people's outlooks on how we supply goods to each other. That maybe an export dominated economy or requiring imports from outside of the country isn't the smartest solution when we can't make our own vaccines or supply ourselves with masks when they were necessary.

I think we're in an interesting point where all of this, the climate crisis, the looming recession, all of these things, I think generally Canadians - and polling bears this out - are more interested in alternatives. They're more interested in exploring, trying to do things differently. But even a whiff of that gets stamped down by in these case these three conservative politicians who just don't want to even talk about anything changing.

And if that's the attitude of those leaders, then we're in a bit of a pickle.

RESH: Now to get us out of the pickle or the pickle jar, Blue Green is advocating for some very comprehensive change. So could you tell us about the Buy Clean Program?

JAMIE: Happy to. This is more of a success to talk about. Bluegreen and a number of allies have been advocating at the federal government for a number of years now to look at paying attention to where we get our construction materials, just to hone in on a very specific point. And the idea of buying clean is instead of let the cheapest product be the thing that our government procures also have a bit of a lens on the lifecycle impact of that good.

Look at the climate impact of getting steel shipped across the ocean from China versus having steel produced in Canada with 88% green grid and far, far, far less transportation emissions and better labour standards.

So the whole point of Buy Clean is if we actually look at, other than the bottom line of the price that doesn't incorporate all of those externalities that I just mentioned. If we actually look at the carbon impact of a good, and we help by having the data that tells us that this is a product that reduces emissions, this is a product that took a lot less carbon to be made and we select those products, we're using government's purchasing power to signal a market change.

We're putting our money where our mouth is in a lot of cases. And when you look at particularly products like forest wood products, concrete cement, steel, aluminum, we produce all of those things in Canada and we have the ability to do that in a lower carbon way.

So why wouldn't we choose those products that are produced in a way that reduces the environmental impact? And there's a win-win-win here. Where Buy Clean is about rewarding companies for their improved environmental performance and for them to continue to invest and make those changes because they see the economic benefit for doing so.

In this last federal budget I don't know if the phrase "Buy Clean" was used, but the government has set up a "buy clean secretariat". I think the term is - and I have to double check that - but we're starting to see various Ministries in charge of purchasing, look at, well, what do we need to do to actually do this?

This idea caught on, and we now are a member of a group called the Buy Clean Industry Alliance that has representatives from Canada's steel sector, the cement sector, the aluminum and the forest product sector. They're all saying, " Let's do this, right. Let's advocate for this."

And it does involve government changing behavior. It may also even involve government subsidizing a small percentage price increase if we're choosing to buy something that's cleaner, as an initial hurdle, you know, pay a slight bit more for that, and you get a greener product.

You're keeping people employed here at home. You're keeping plants up and running. We've seen in the case of steel plants, there's been I think it's a billion dollars, if you add them all up, investments in upgrading the furnace technology from a blast furnace to an electric arc furnace, so there's less CO2 and CO emissions.

So the Buy Clean initiative is about paying attention to where our government buys and produces these goods. And it's about following the money down the chain. So if we get the federal government to adopt this process- which their greening government initiative seems to indicate that they're willing to - let's look at making Crown Corporations follow this along.

Let's talk about when the federal government is giving infrastructure dollars to provinces, that we put a little bit of a green string on there that says, we want you to buy clean. We want you to choose the products that have a lower carbon impact period. And here's a few extra million dollars if it becomes more expensive.

Where it's 100% about keeping jobs, reducing the carbon, building out a future together, and it's just taking something as simple as government... something as nerdy as government procurement and infrastructure and recognizing there's a huge amount of embedded carbon in that process that we can tackle.

And it's an opportunity to strengthen our economic position in the world. And it's an opportunity to keep people working at home. So there's a triple win in that sense.

We did see some signals in that federal budget that some of these things are being adopted. There was a great one-off announcement with the Cement Association and Canada agreeing to work to switch to Portland Limestone Cement for most products when they're building things. And why that's significant, is that comes with at least about a 10% reduction in carbon. And cement and steel are two of the most polluting sectors in the world. They're also two of the most vital sectors to building out things that we really want, like housing and roads and all of that good stuff like wind turbines as well.

Buy Clean Program talks about the benefits of paying attention to what we're buying and walking the talk in terms of the values in our spending.

And it's just a simple thing, but it gets to some of those more hard to reach pollution pockets, like stuff that maybe you don't see coming out of the smokes stack, cuz you're not the one building it.

But let's follow the life-cycle of that good. Just the simple act of doing that has a great opportunity to make those tax dollars go even further.

RESH: So we have to invest in cleaner practices, cleaner materials, because buying cheaper is not good. What made fiscal sense didn't make a lot of climate sense.

But right now, Canadians are grappling with the rising cost of living, food inflation, etc.. And again, the narrative is that this is going to cost more for Canadians, right?

JAMIE: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah. Well, that's the narrative. And you can continue the narrative too.

It's gonna cost money to fix my roof. So if I don't wanna pay it now, it's gonna cost a lot more when my broken roof has a hole in it and it's started to flood the house.

Everything in the society that we live in has a cost to it. And it's about whether you're gonna start paying down that debt now, or you're gonna wait for your credit cards to be maxed and then you're gonna be in real trouble. Anyone who owns a home, or anyone who lives in a house, if you see a problem it's better to address it now than to wait until it grows into an unavoidable catastrophe.

It's a simple comparison, but that's the situation we're finding ourselves in.

The climate crisis exacerbates the affordability crisis. As the climate changes, we start to have more vector-borne diseases because bugs are living longer and traveling further and spreading things that we didn't used to have or had been gone for a long time. So everything's all tied in.

A green economy would be an affordable economy. We would be focused more on making sure people's basic needs are met than a shareholder got some really great dividends that quarter. That's where the change needed to happen. And that's why we need to see leadership from those people in power and the provinces and the Feds, and even the leaders of companies to just recognize that there's more than that end of quarter profit margin that we're dealing with here, I think I'm now preaching, I think that

RESH: That's okay, preach.

JAMIE: I think that continuing to ignore a problem doesn't mean it's gonna go away.

We're at a point where we need the scale to tip to taking care of ourselves, making sure we have a livable planet, and that people are able to work and have meaningful jobs.

And the current way things are set up is we have very few people controlling the majority of the resources and constantly making themselves more rich. And I don't think they're gonna stop unless someone makes a change.

That's, I think, the difficult position that our leaders find themselves in.

RESH: As you said, it's about more supporting the local economy because local procurement is a huge part of this., The pandemic also, the current conflict has really shown us some of the failures in relying on the globalized supply chain, that everything can be backed up and held up as we're now experiencing.

JAMIE: Absolutely. We're living this unchecked experiment. This whole rapid expansion of how we've globalized our supply chains. We're seeing the faults in that armor Absolutely. And how that maybe wasn't the best plan for everything. And that we do need to have the ability to self-sustain as a nation and as cities.

It takes these types of crises to motivate people, but we're there now.

I have hope that the changes that need to happen can happen. They are happening in a slow pace. But I really hope it doesn't take another pandemic-level crisis to lead to this change.

But it seems like foresight in acting in advance is something that's really hard for our society to do. We're gonna try and squeeze every last dollar of profit out of the old system before we move on to something else, and that just may be too late.

RESH: So we need obviously strong regulations. Where the policies themselves are sustainable and can survive. As you say, a policy can be great, but only last as long as the tenure of that government and then be shelved with the next one. There are those issues.

But again, more and more people across Canada and across the world recognize how serious this issue is. And they're using certainly their voting power and their buying power to change all of this.

But we are living in the time of globalization and free trade agreements. And one of the other narratives - there's so many narratives, we could write a book, right? But one of the other narratives we so often hear is that if we put too many regulations on industry, they can just pull up stakes and move elsewhere, or bring in non-union workers from elsewhere.

So what are the incentives for industry to stay, make the transition, and maintain the transition and also reach their bottom line in all of that. So what's the incentive for industry?

JAMIE: I think the incentive is still the profit opportunity. I think earlier I mentioned a big investment in a plant in Southern Ontario and Oakville Ford Motor Company saying they're gonna switch that plant over from internal combustion engines to producing batteries and electric vehicles.

I think the change happened there because, first there have been some regulations, there have been some goals and some targets talked about in terms of ratcheting up the electric vehicles on the market. And there have been investments made by levels of government to build those facilities here so that those companies don't pull up the tent pegs and stay and keep employing Canadians.

Basically a green industrial strategy is what we need.

You know, we've done this before. We just happen to do it for things like the Tar Sands. You know, that was the last major Canadian successful industrial strategy where a whole bunch of provincial corporations were created to start extracting and making the Oil Sands into a profitable enterprise.

And that started with huge amounts of government investment. And then for whatever reason, that led to selling off those companies to private interests. And that's how we got to where we are now.

I'm not advocating for nationalizing everything. I'm just saying we actually need to pick some winners and support things that are gonna get us to the future we want to have.

And continuing to throw billions of dollars in subsidies at oil and gas is not a forward-looking strategy.

So, if you're gonna invest in manufacturing and industry, that should be an investment that reduces those industries' fuel costs and even electricity. It's an investment in keeping those companies here, but also recognizing that there's a profit to be made by them.

Some companies have seen this and we've seen the shift. And there's money to be made in green products because people more and more want them.

If Canada wants to have a place in this global economy, then we cannot continue to be pedaling fossil fuel based products necessarily because customers are having changing interests.

The United States's IRA, Inflation Reduction Act has been a huge change in how both the United States and North America are going to have to adjust our economies to climate reality.

In Canada, we're offering a bunch of incentives. Here's some tax credits. Here's some reduced regulation. Here's some this and that.

But it's still not leading. Governments basically handed the wheel over to companies and said, dictate our climate policy to us. That's a void in leadership.

There was no way, this was more clear than previous versions of the Trudeau government talking about we need to fund the Tar Sands so we can fund the transition. And how investing more in the thing that we want to phase out and taking the profits from that to fund the transition was the plan.

And It's kind of perverse when you look at it like that because if you're creating a greater dependency on profit from a sector you want to be reducing the carbon from and phasing out, but you're making yourself dependent on that revenue; you're creating a system that's not forward looking and gets you stuck in this petrol rollercoaster that is not in everyone's interest.

Federally right now, one of the most maligned policies was the idea of pricing carbon or a Carbon Tax.

It's a very conservative idea. It was invented by Conservatives to address pollution at the time. But it's become a political hot potato. And the idea of Carbon Pricing is just seen as like a tax-grab.

My MP is also a Conservative MP, and we got a nice letter home, you know, telling us it's tax season and when it came to the credit for carbon-taxing, they didn't actually have anything good to say about it. So they just said, yeah, this probably won't cover what you paid. Like that level of petty politics.

You can't have an argument with someone who is emotional on the subject. And if it's emotion versus reason, it's going to be a very difficult conversation. And for whatever reason, the idea of taxing pollution just riles up certain people and they can't really hear the logic in it. They're invested in not understanding why you would do that. And that makes for difficult conversation for sure.

RESH: Yeah. Well, emotion or political hay-making. And we've certainly seen a great deal of both. Right? Now where a great deal of the conversation around green jobs, Just Transition, tends to be focused on sustainability. For instance, switching to biodegradable renewable sources of energy and materials. The conversation around climate justice is a bit different. It's not just about, switching materials, but maybe switching practices, changing the ways that we work.

JAMIE: Yes,

RESH: So could you speak to this in terms of what are the more systemic changes that need to happen within a Just Transition?

JAMIE: Well, my immediate response is we wouldn't need a Just Transition if we actually had a functioning social safety net type of program. If losing your job wasn't such a - well, in some cases a death sentence.

If everyone is struggling to get by you are living paycheck to paycheck and that paycheck disappears, you're in deep trouble. We don't have the reliable systems in place to help look after each other. And those are the things that are needed. And that's why we talked about the care economy earlier, and we talked about the importance of good union jobs and all of these things that don't always necessarily seem to be connected, but they very much are.

The idea of, well, let's just keep cars, but we'll switch the fuel and make them electric. Okay, well that solves one problem, but where are we getting the components for that car? And particularly where are we getting the components for the batteries that are gonna move those vehicles?

We can't continue the exploitive ways that we've done this in the past. We can't just have companies exploit the Global South, bring materials back and,"Look, we've got clean vehicles that don't pollute."

That's not a closed loop. That's missing the point.

And so I think that's where the importance of climate justice and just the push for justice is.

Because change is inevitable, but justice is not.

And if we don't talk about how we need to change the way that our economy functions, that we have to eliminate the idea of just taking what we need without actually considering the impacts and consequences.

I think in Canada, if we are actually going to make any progress further on the idea of Reconciliation, we have to actually recognize that there needs to be free, prior and informed consent from Indigenous communities if we're going to be involved In their lands.

This is where the importance of regulation and mining. We need more mining because we need to extract these materials, but we can do so in a way that is more inclusive. There's another phrase that I like to borrow from others. *It's nothing about us without us.*

If you're talking about exploiting and having new mines and territories that are in Indigenous lands and they have the dominion and right over, you can't just have a

company go in there and say, "yeah, but there's stuff underneath. We're gonna dig it up. And that's that."

We need to change that approach.

So constantly bringing the importance of justice into this is necessary. We're not gonna solve all of our global problems if we keep using the same tools that got us here.

You know, everyone owning a private electric automobile or two isn't really gonna fix the poverty or affordability crisis in the country.

If we continue to operate as we have traditionally, we will be looking to find new and interesting ways to exploit new and interesting products and not addressing the root cause of that sort of extractive economy.

There needs to be a more holistic approach that considers all the externalities that we are very clearly aware of now. We cannot claim ignorance on exploitation. We know that we need to do a better job. And it's now gonna be about holding ourselves to that higher account.

So, climate justice is crucial for a just transition to occur. It has to be more inclusive, has to involve local decision making, and take advantage of local knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge-Keepers.

If decisions are being made like in Ottawa that are gonna impact somewhere hundreds and hundreds of kilometers away, that's not necessarily the best way to make your plans. We need to have more involvement from impacted communities and they have to have a say.

RESH: Now in the post-pandemic - I mean, we're not really post-pandemic - but we're moving into the post-pandemic revving up of the economy, how green are we and what are priority areas that we should be focusing on?

JAMIE: Well, there was the strong push for a, "build back better" type of approach earlier on as we were envisioning getting out of the pandemic and how we need to do things better than we did before. And I think that was something that was very popular rhetoric. You know, we've learned something from this, we should do things differently.

I think some things have changed, but I still think that the power lies in those who control the money and control the capital. And we haven't done a lot to change any of that. And so I don't know that we'll have actually achieved anything that would be called justice if we keep the system as it is and just change the widgets that are being produced by it.

In Canada, the pandemic has obviously changed us. I think there's a desire amongst Canadians to have more security at home. It's probably more of a feeling than a concrete policy direction.

We showed that as a nation we can come together, we can deal with big crises, we can put the money in when it's needed. And the excuse it's too expensive or it'll destroy the economy, or all of those things were put aside because we needed to protect people. And I think that the government's kind of shown that they can be more flexible and they can do more things.

Now, it wasn't perfect. There was all sorts of mistakes. We're hearing all about those issues now. But I think that the main lesson is if there's a will, there's a way. And if we treated the climate crisis like the pandemic, I think we would be seeing massive changes occurring right now. And I guess that we haven't gotten to that point yet.

But I think that we've shown that we can make massive change in a short amount of time. And I think that should be a positive lesson from that and it should be a sign that that type of change is possible.

RESH: And with that, Jamie, thank you so much. It's been a pleasure.

JAMIE: Well, thank you for having me. It's been great.

RESH: That was Jamie Kirkpatrick, Senior Program Manager for Blue Green Canada.

And this is The Courage My Friend's podcast. I'm your host, Resh Budhu.

Thanks for listening.

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