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Who owns wind and sunlight? Property on the renewable resources frontier

Abstract: Institutions formed around dense, compact energy may not suit the dispersed vastness of sunlight and its immediate derivatives. In Spain, for instance, private landowners and corporations have recently appropriated wind, provoking rural protest powerful enough to slow the energy transition. In the US, the problem lies in cities, where owners of roofs and parking lots waste photons by the terawatt. Both cases present the same dilemma: how shall capitalist societies avail of renewables in a fashion that is both efficient and fair? At the necessary speed, how can we achieve environmental sustainability and energy democracy? In the presentation, I will suggest different solutions for different resources, ranging from a commons of wind to urban homesteading for sunlight. Writ-large, these policies converge on one social goal: to enfranchise people long excluded from control over energy resources and infrastructure. To depart from hydrocarbons is also – one might hope – to escape their politics.

Bio: **David McDermott Hughes** is professor of Anthropology at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. He has published articles on energy in *Boston Review* and three books, including *Energy without Conscience: Oil, Climate Change, and Complicity* (Duke University Press, 2017). In Fall 2021, Verso Press will publish his next book, *Who Owns the Wind? Climate Crisis and the Hope of Renewable Energy*. Hughes serves as a member of the Climate Task Force of the American Federation of Teachers. His website is <https://davidmcdermotthughes.wordpress.com/>