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National Climate change



Extinction Rebellion claims record tally of protest arrests

Frances Perraudin

More than 1,000 arrests have been made at Extinction Rebellion climate protests in London, police said yesterday, in what the organisers described as the biggest civil disobedience event in recent British history.

The Metropolitan police said yesterday that, as of 10am, they had made 1,065 arrests and 53 people had been charged in relation to the protests.

Police cleared activists from Waterloo Bridge late yesterday after doing the same at Oxford Street and Parliament Square earlier in the day. Protesters from those sites moved to the main camp at Marble Arch, where they had permission to gather.

As people at the Marble Arch site enjoyed musical performances in the sunshine over the day, scores of environmental activists staged a protest at the Natural History Museum in South Kensington. The group lay on the floor in a "die in" to raise awareness of the mass extinction of species.

The demonstrators - some wearing red veils and robes - gathered underneath the museum's blue whale skeleton and listened to an impromptu classical music performance.

Extinction Rebellion, which aims to use non-violent civil disobedience

to avert a climate breakdown, held a public meeting yesterday afternoon to decide its next course of action.

After hearing from speakers, the crowd of hundreds split into groups before representatives took to the stage one at a time to share their



▲ Climate activists at the museum yesterday PHOTOGRAPH: TOLGA AKMEN/AFP/GETTY

ideas. Suggestions ranged from pausing direct action and vacating Marble Arch "leaving it better than we found it" to taking the action outside the capital to staging protests in the City of London and outside parliament.

The group started a week of protest on 15 April, stopping traffic at Oxford Circus, Marble Arch, Waterloo Bridge and around Parliament Square.

Roger Hallam, a founder and organiser of Extinction Rebellion, said it had been the biggest civil disobedience event in recent British history. The number of arrests had surpassed that at the anti-nuclear protests at Upper Heyford in 1982 (752), Hallam said.

He added that the police had confirmed none of their officers had been hurt during the past week's protests.

The group is planning to stage a demonstration today in Parliament Square as MPs return to Westminster. The Met warned activists they face arrest if they do not confine their protest to the square or finish by midnight.

Over the past eight days, there have been a variety of protests across London. On Wednesday, two activists glued themselves to a Docklands Light Railway train at Canary Wharf and a group stuck themselves to the fence at Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's home.

On Friday, activists, all born after 1990, gathered on a roundabout outside Heathrow airport with a banner reading "Are we the last generation?"

London's mayor, Sadiq Khan, has said the disruption is "counterproductive" to the climate change cause. The head of the Met, Cressida Dick, has urged activists to restrict their action to the designated site at Marble Arch.

The teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg spoke at Marble Arch on Sunday, saying nothing was being done to stop the climate crisis "despite all the beautiful words and promises".

Shane Collins, a Green party district councillor in Mendip, a volunteer organiser, said the fact that the Marble Arch camp was a strictly no drugs and alcohol zone had contributed to a positive atmosphere. The band Massive Attack played a surprise gig at the camp on Sunday evening. Publicity for the event had described them as the Stroud Village Green Band to avoid attracting unmanageable crowds.

The protests have attracted support from several high-profile figures. After the actor Emma Thompson's appearance at Oxford Circus on Friday, the Olympic gold medal-winning British canoeist Etienne Stott was arrested on Waterloo Bridge on Sunday evening.

Philip Kedge, a retired chief inspector with Hampshire Constabulary, was at the protest yesterday. He said he had seen "nothing but the utmost professionalism and respect" from police.

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▼ Dozens of Extinction Rebellion protesters stage a die-in inside the Natural History Museum, London PHOTOGRAPH: LEXIE HARRISON-CRIPPS/EMPICS



Greta Thunberg Activist lends support to general strike for the climate

Jonathan Watts
Global environment editor

Greta Thunberg, the 16-year-old Swedish environmental activist, gave her support yesterday for a general strike for the climate, saying the student movement she inspired needed more support from older generations to ensure politicians kept their promises under the Paris agreement.

Speaking at a Guardian Live event in London yesterday, the initiator of the school strike for climate movement was typically frank about the scale of the problem the world faces and the impact her campaign has made.

"People are slowly becoming more aware, but emissions continue to rise. We can't focus on small things. Basically, nothing has changed," she said.

She insisted the protests needed to spread: "This is not just young people being sick of politicians. It's an existential crisis. It is something that will affect the future of our civilisation. It's not just a movement. It's a crisis and we must take action accordingly."

Responding to Franny Armstrong, the director of the climate documentary The Age of Stupid, who asked whether it was time for a general strike, Thunberg replied "yes" - along with other members of the panel.

Traditional unions have so far been wary of joining the strikes. Although workers' federations in Italy made Thunberg an honorary member, most have given either tepid support or none, due to concerns about the possible impact on jobs. But there is growing support in the UK, the US and other countries for a Green New Deal that would increase spending on renewable energy.

The talk took place on Earth Day, after a week of protests by Extinction Rebellion activists pushed the climate crisis on to newspaper front pages. Police have arrested more than 1,000 demonstrators.

"I support Extinction Rebellion. What they are doing is good. Civil disobedience is important to show this is an emergency. We need to do everything we can to put pressure on

the people in power," Thunberg told the audience, prompting cheers and applause. "Why study for a future that is being taken from us? Why study for facts when facts don't matter in this society? It's empowering to know I am doing something, I am taking a stand, I am disrupting."

The interest in the event was so intense that a long line of supporters stretched along Euston Road in central London waiting for the doors to open at Friends House. Most guests appeared to be fellow school strikers. A handful wore shirts or headbands printed with the Extinction Rebellion symbol. But the audience included all age groups, and just about every major environmental organisation associated themselves with the talk, which was hosted by the Quakers and co-organised by Guardian Events.

When Thunberg appeared on stage, she was greeted with thunderous applause. Armstrong said: "I've been

"There is more leadership here than in Westminster. It feels like a turning point in how we defend our planet"



Caroline Lucas was on the event's panel

◀ Anna Taylor from the UK Student Climate Network with Greta Thunberg at yesterday's event PHOTOGRAPH: JILL MEAD/GUARDIAN

to dozens of talks here over the years, but I've never seen anything like this. It's the first time I have seen a standing ovation even before the event starts. She's a rock star."

In the past week, Thunberg has met Pope Francis in the Vatican and addressed members of the European parliament. Today, she will visit the Houses of Parliament to meet the Commons Speaker, John Bercow, and to take part in an event with the leaders of all the main parties except Theresa May.

She told the audience yesterday that she had been taken by surprise at the swift spread of a movement that began less than a year ago, when she went on strike alone outside the Swedish parliament.

"It is hard to understand what is happening during the last months. It has all happened so fast. I don't have time to think it through," she said.

Green party officials said they hoped the meeting today could spur a new phase of cross-party collaboration on climate change, including monthly meetings, wider public consultations and an agreement that party manifestos should be vetted by an independent body such as the Committee on Climate Change to assess whether they are in line with the Paris agreement.

Caroline Lucas, the Green MP, said the current wave of climate action on the streets and the school strikes gave her hope. "There is more political leadership there, and here, than I have seen in Westminster. It feels like a turning point in the history of how we defend our planet," she said.

"Young people are calling out against a system that is sadly broken ... We are going to change the definition of what is politically possible so that it is what is scientifically necessary."

The discussion ranged from veganism and avoiding flying to political change throughout society.

Thunberg said a variety of actions were necessary, though she put the focus on challenging the companies and governments that are responsible for the bulk of emissions.

How to deal with people in power was a frequent subject of questions to the panel. Thunberg said her autism helped her to filter out much of the "greenwashing". "We are more likely to see through lies. We don't follow the stream. You can't be a little bit sustainable - either you are sustainable or you are not," she said.

There were moments of levity. At one point, Thunberg was asked how she dealt with climate change deniers. "I don't," she replied.

For all the talk of politics and protest, however, some of the most poignant and pertinent questions from the audience came from the youngest children.

One asked: "If pollution continues, how much time have we got left?" Another wanted to know: "Can we achieve our goal in the time we have?"

Thunberg, in response, was reassuring but measured: "Of course we can. It is physically possible, the scientists say. It's up to us.

"If we do this now, then of course we will. If we don't, we might not do it. But yes, definitely we can."