

The People's Monster: The Rise and Fall of Extinction Rebellion

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Picture courtesy of Extinction Rebellion: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/act-now/campaigns/insure-our-survival>

The birth of a new idea can be a wondrous thing, full of positive change and the promise of something greater. Who amongst us hasn't had that giddy wave of inspiration overcome us just as we're drifting off to sleep, or soaping ourselves up in the shower? However, with inspiration comes responsibility. As that fragile new idea crawls from the dark vaults of our skulls and into the world, it has the potential to grow up into something monstrous. British activist organisation, Extinction Rebellion, experienced such a metamorphosis. In the span of less than seven years, Extinction Rebellion transformed from a group of likeminded activists determined to stop catastrophic climate change, to one of their founding members being jailed and estranged, over 50 million pounds worth

of damage costs for UK taxpayers, and a perchance for alienating the public through fearmongering. Now the question remains, is this the end for Extinction Rebellion, or can this feral beast of an organisation be tamed in time to implement much needed change?

Humble Beginnings

It all started in the quaint little town of Stroud, nestled in the heart of the British Cotswolds. The town serves as the meeting point of the Cotswold's renowned Five Valleys and, in 2018, it also held the position of a meeting point for the founders of Extinction Rebellion. Hosted at the house of one of their co-founders, Dr. Gail Bradbrook, the budding group decided that enough was enough when it came to the ongoing Environment and Climate Emergency plaguing our planet. In response to the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change [IPCC's] 2018 [report](#) stating that we only have twelve years to stop catastrophic climate change, the ten activists came together and drafted a [Declaration of Rebellion](#) against the United Kingdom's Government. Included amongst this declaration were three demands:

- Tell the Truth
- Act Now
- Decide Together.

Extinction Rebellion was born, the game was set, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Aims and Demands

In Bradbrook's home, the newly fledged organisation was refined. Aims were drafted, scrapped, then redrafted. Demands were debated, committed to paper, then expanded upon. In the end, the aims of Extinction Rebellion were threefold and decidedly simple:

- To implore the government to declare a climate emergency
- To Achieve net zero emissions by 2025
- To create a citizen's assembly to oversee these necessary changes.

Three straightforward, manageable goals, and all easy enough to implement. In theory.



The first aim was pursued with unrelenting tenacity. Using "Non-violent civil disobedience," activists took to the streets in 2019 over a series of days to demonstrate against climate change

and push the government to declare a climate emergency.

Proudly displaying Extinction Rebellion's symbol – a circle representing the earth in which an hourglass is enfolded; warning us that time is quickly running out for humanity to act – activists took part in marches, blocked roads, glued themselves to public transport, staged die-ins (one of which concluded with an eerie performance by the Invisible Circus's Red Rebels), and even chained themselves to politician Jeremy Corbyn's home.

Despite 1,130 arrests, police working overtime, and over £6,000 worth of damages to the Shell headquarters, the protests encouraged MPs to gather and finally approve a [motion to declare a climate emergency](#).

Aim one for Extinction Rebellion was complete. Our budding monster had grown its feathers and jumped fearlessly from the nest. But would it plummet, or would it spread its wings and fly?

Activism: The Good

The people's monster is a term most often used to allude to a creature or entity that personifies the collective anxieties of a society and/or culture. Extinction Rebellion certainly serves this purpose, offering the public a chance to confront, process and fight

against the worldwide impact climate change is wreaking upon our planet.

From their conception in 2018, all the way up to the present day, Extinction Rebellion has strived to meet their aims in several ways. Amongst their most acclaimed accomplishments are:

- 2019's success in pressuring the government to declare an Environmental and Climate emergency, resulting in a dramatic incline in awareness of the Climate Emergency amongst the general population.
- The Insure Our Future's Week of Action 2023, leading to insurers Zurich and Probitas 1492 pulling out of fossil fuel expansion projects and The Big One Protest, flooding the streets around UK parliament



Image: © Ethan Wilkinson via Flickr

- The Church of England's divestment from fossil fuels after actions from Extinction Rebellion activists and Christian Climate Action

- The closing of Merthyr Tydfil's open cast coal mine, Ffos-y-Frân, after a campaign by Extinction Rebellion activists
- 2024's Restore Nature Now march, in which 100,000 of people from more than 300 climate, nature and social justice organisations united, requesting urgent action from the government.

There is no question that the above actions were taken with the betterment of the world in mind; to aid society in advocating for our Earth and bring awareness to the climate crisis.

However, there is more to these accomplishments than what is written on paper. Untold stories of the people impacted by Extinction Rebellion's actions.

In 2023's Deep Adaptation Conference, Extinction Rebellion's Bradbrook took to the stage to address a crowd of captivated listeners. Dressed in a smart cream jumpsuit, Dr Bradbrook – seemingly unaware of the controversy surrounding her organisation - took her place to raucous applause. She addressed the gathering with firm authority, [stating](#), amongst other things, "We assert that the land under our feet is ours to steward. That it is a common treasury for all. The ownership of excessive tracts of land is unjust and against life. We will reclaim and occupy

the lands of our birth, growing food and living lightly.”

Though Bradbrook’s declaration is admirable, in theory, what are the consequences Extinction Rebellion has had upon the general populace, and what of the organisations fall from grace?

Fall From Grace

From Icarus’s doomed flight too close to the ever-watchful sun, to Milton’s humanised iteration of Lucifer and his expulsion from heaven, humanity has been obsessed with its own fall from grace. Hubris is the common theme here. In a classical sense, hubris was one of the key ingredients that birthed a monster. One must only look at how the minotaur came to be, to understand this.

Extinction Rebellion is not immune to this factor. On their website, they state that “We [believe](#) that mass civil disobedience is the only way we will see vital and inspiring change on the scale that is needed.”

By believing themselves above the law, or at least un beholden to it, Extinction Rebellion are leaving themselves open to an inevitable fall at the hands of their own hubris. The organisation states that they use an escalation strategy including mass mobilisation, nonviolent civil disobedience, targeted disruption, community assemblies and disrupting power dynamics. A strategy which led to

over 4,000 [arrests](#) from 2019-2022 alone, 2,197 of which were later [charged](#). Not only does this paint a negative picture of Extinction Rebellion for the public, but it also makes it harder for the activists themselves to fight for what they believe in when they’re all behind bars.

Due to this strategy, UK citizens who care for the state of the world just as much as the activists are being alienated. Imagine: you’re a kind, empathetic person on your way to work. You care about the planet and wish to help, perhaps even dabbling in activism on the weekends, but you are also attempting to survive in a society that seems to be against you. Your one means of survival – a stable job – relies on you clocking in and out on time. Failure to do so, at best, results in you working overtime. At worst, it compromises your livelihood. How, then, is such a person to feel when their hard-earned position is threatened by a group of people [gluing themselves to a bath in the middle of the motorway?](#)

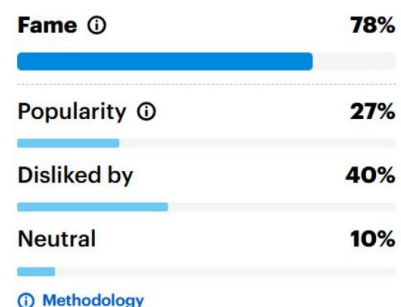


Image courtesy of YouGov: [Extinction Rebellion popularity & fame](#) | YouGov

Not great, it would appear, as evidenced in a 2025 UK poll based upon

representative interviews. [YouGov](#) created a percentage charter on public opinions towards Extinction Rebellion. Though the results showed a popularity of 27%, 40% of the population were reported to dislike the group. This is a considerable drop from years prior.

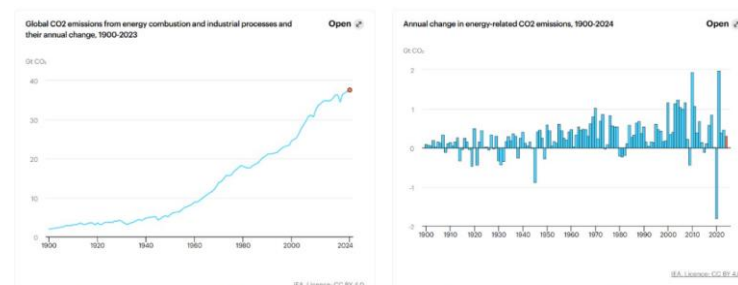
Not only have public opinions of Extinction Rebellion dropped, but they have also been the subject of a number of controversies. In 2020 one of Extinction Rebellion's co-founders, 58-year-old Roger Hallam, was expelled from the organisation due to his comments on the holocaust that were seen as antisemitic by some. These comments caused great detriment to Extinction Rebellion, causing a loss of membership, loss of faith from the public, amongst other [losses](#). Hallam also made allegations against the work of Global Support and threatened to go on a hunger strike in protest against them.

To make matters worse, Roger Hallam was the main advocator behind the strategy of mass arrests. Extinction Rebellion later distanced themselves from both Hallam and his strategies, writing a [public statement](#) of apology and future actions:

“We recognise now that our tactic of arrest has made it easier for people of privilege to participate and that our behaviours and attitudes fed into the system of white supremacy. We're sorry this recognition comes so late.”

However, it wasn't just Hallam's actions that made the public begin to question the faith they had put in Extinction Rebellion. Like an unidentified pup brought in from the cold on a snowy winter's night, signs began to develop hinting that the organisation was not what it had, at first, appeared to be.

Despite how much they had achieved, two of the organisation's three aims have still not been met. Despite their goals of achieving net 0 emissions by 2025, total energy related CO₂ emissions had hit a [high](#) of 37.8 Gt CO₂ by late 2024. On top of this, though it had been achieved in many other countries around the world, a citizen's assembly to oversee the necessary changes has still not been created. Indeed, the UK parliament passed a motion in 2024, once more [addressing the climate emergency](#). MP's addressed, “its profound concern about the Government's failure to address the urgency of the climate and ecological emergency.”



What Does the Future Hold?

Though things may, at first, seem dire for Extinction Rebellion and the world, hope is not lost. Our people's monster

is licking its wounds and limping forward. Can it regain its equilibrium and, if so, what does the future hold?

Extinction Rebellion is, in many ways, reverting to what they were at their core; activists determined to see change within their own lifetimes. In recent years they have placed an emphasis on outreach and engagement and continue to be a leading voice within the climate movement.

In a 2025 blog [post](#) the organisation stated that, “no we are not backing down.” Emphasising that, “It can be easy to feel defeated and overwhelmed in these times. But together we’re going to [take action](#).” These words come as a comfort as the world crashes and burns around us. But the question remains: As humanity hurries towards its end, can we still find solace in the imperfect claws of activism?

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