

# Extinction rebellion

*Angie Zelter*

*On 29 June 2019, the author explained to Hendon Magistrates Court why she pleaded 'not guilty' to a minor public order offence during the Extinction Rebellion protests in central London in April. Unfortunately, the Court was not persuaded and Angie was given a conditional discharge. She later helped set up XR Peace and was active again in the October Rebellion when she was arrested five times.*

I am now 68 years of age but when I was 21, in my final year at university, I read the January edition of *The Ecologist* magazine, called 'Blueprint for Survival'. This had an enormous impact on me as it introduced the major problems then facing the world – war, poverty, acid rain, ozone depletion, desertification, deforestation, species loss, civil and military uses and abuses of nuclear power, pollution, population growth, consumerism and climate change.

I had been through a university education and been unaware of these major problems. I determined to educate myself and devote my life to helping solve these problems. After spending three years in Cameroon, learning about the long lasting impact of British colonialism and racism, the deforestation for timber, oil palm production and other cash crops, and the exploitation of the rich resources of Africa to the detriment of locals and enrichment of corporations and western societies, I returned home to the nuclear weapons Cold War crisis.

I joined the Greenham Common protests, founded the Snowball Civil Disobedience Campaign and then, later, Trident Ploughshares, which won the Right Livelihood Award in 2001. Alongside the nuclear crisis that still haunts us today, I became involved in work on climate change. Lecturers in Climate Science at the University of East Anglia provided expert witness statements for me when defending my non-violent direct actions against nuclear weapons. And this is how I was first acquainted with the nuclear winter that would result if only a very few nuclear warheads were used. I learnt that everything is connected and that it all has an impact on

the climate, on biodiversity and on the sustainability of life on earth. I discovered how our reliance on fossil fuels was causing the greenhouse effect and soon joined with climate scientists and local environmentalists to start a group in Norwich that tried to educate the public about greenhouse gases and climate change.

We had maps up of how much of East Anglia and London would be under water as temperatures soared and the sea levels rose. This was in the early 1980s – almost 40 years ago. We concentrated on what individuals could do to lower their carbon footprints, by putting up solar panels, changing our light bulbs, recycling and re-use, eating less meat, using public transport and giving up our cars, shopping carefully and locally, and consuming less.

After discovering the impact UK timber imports were having on the loss of old growth forests and their biodiversity, I got involved in carbon sinks and sustainable forest management. I was part of the UK Forest Network and worked with major UK timber importers to persuade them to stop importing old growth timber stolen from indigenous reserves in South America and Asia and was part of the process that set the UK standards for the Forest Stewardship Council.

But of course this was never going to be enough. Governments had to get involved and make systemic changes. Individuals changing their personal lifestyles was not enough. However, very few people and governments listened to us. We were considered Cassandras, doom mongers, nihilists, mad. But if governments had acted then we would not be at crisis point now.

I will not go into more details about my personal activities over the last 40 years, but I hope it shows that my actions during the week of 15 to 20 April 2019 were not taken spontaneously or lightly but came out of lifetime concerns, and that I have tried everything I could think of to create the changes necessary to combat climate change and prevent catastrophic collapse.

### **There is a Climate Emergency**

I will present some evidence of the materials that have had most impact and influence upon me, and the basic information in my possession and which I was aware of before my action. These will show why I believe that, without urgent and systemic changes in our society, it is likely that civilisation will collapse along with global ecosystems. They will also explain my motivation for refusing to leave a protest area on 17 April 2019.



Stuck in London: Angie glues herself onto a tripod in Oxford Circus

1. We are already living through mass extinction of other species and it is now clear that this is due to human activities. If we do not change, our own species is likely to suffer the same fate.

2. In the very near term we are less at risk in the UK than in other parts of the world. However, many here already feel the impact, in particular the young and the old. The 2003 heatwave, attributed by researchers to climate change, caused the loss of 70,000 lives across Europe, including in the UK. Homes in parts of the UK, such as Carlisle and Manchester, are already uninsurable due to flood risk. Tens of thousands of lives are lost every year in the UK due to air pollution attributable to fossil fuels, with children's lungs badly affected.

3. Carbon dioxide, the main driver of climate change, stays in the atmosphere for hundreds of years, and much of the change we're experiencing is now already 'locked in'.

4. There is mounting evidence that we are accelerating towards runaway climate change and a ‘hothouse earth’, leading to conditions that will no longer support human life.

5. In October 1988, the World Meteorological Organisation, the International Council for Science (ICSU), and the United Nations Environment Programme Advisory Group on Greenhouse Gases (AGGG) issued a report based on their research project, co-ordinated by the Stockholm Environment Institute. It was to establish appropriate limits for global warming and concluded as follows:

*‘Temperature increases beyond 1.0 °C may elicit rapid, unpredictable, and non-linear responses that could lead to extensive ecosystem damage ...’*

6. By 2018 the 1°C limit had already been breached.

7. Let’s clarify the concept of ‘non-linear responses’. At a certain stage, feedback effects in the climate system will lead to a ‘tipping point’, beyond which the world will continue to warm rapidly, even if human emissions of greenhouse gases were to cease altogether. Ice, for example, reflects heat away from the earth’s surface. As the world warms, sea ice melts, to be replaced with dark water which, instead of reflecting heat away from the earth’s surface, absorbs it, speeding up the process of ice melt in a vicious cycle of warming. With rising temperatures, forest fires increase in frequency and severity. Trees which were absorbing CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere instead release it, compounding the warming process.

8. Lord Deben (the current Chair of the Committee on Climate Change) described the ‘tipping point’ in the following terms (in a 2007 report for the Shadow Cabinet):

*‘Tipping point — This refers to the point at which these changes in the climate system lead to runaway global warming. At this stage, what little influence we had on the climate system will no longer have any effect on the outcome. Runaway global warming could lead to mass extinction.’*

9. In 2008, when the UK’s Climate Change Act became law, the ‘absolute temperature limit’ of 2°C was used as the goal for UK targets, as noted by the House of Commons Environmental Committee in its review of the Climate Change Bill:

*'The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs confirmed to us that the Government was still completely committed to limiting global warming to a rise of 2°C. By stressing the dangers even of this level of warming, he emphasised the reasons why the UK and EU were committed to holding a rise in temperature at no more than 2°C: Just to put that in perspective, I was told ... that with a two-degree average change it will not be uncommon to have 50°C in Berlin by mid century, ... and I think that is quite a sobering demonstration because 50°C is beyond our experience ... Climate change is on a different scale from any other political challenge. Its potential effects could be both physically and economically devastating. It is not just the size but the timing of these effects that poses such a challenge ...'*

10. From about 2010, however, there was increasing recognition that the 2°C limit was inadequate and dangerous.

11. In 2011, Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change warned:

*'Two degrees is not enough – we should be thinking of 1.5°C. If we are not headed for 1.5°C we are in big, big trouble.'*

12. In 2013, Lord Stern, whose 2007 Review informed the setting of the 2050 Target, gave a presentation to the World Economic Forum in Davos in which he said:

*'Looking back, I underestimated the risks. The planet and the atmosphere seem to be absorbing less carbon than we expected, and emissions are rising pretty strongly. Some of the effects are coming through more quickly than we thought... This is potentially so dangerous that we have to act strongly. Do we want to play Russian roulette with two bullets or one? These risks for many people are existential.'*

13. In May 2015, the Structured Expert Dialogue, commissioned by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties in 2012, issued its Final Report, which concluded:

*'The "guardrail" concept, in which up to 2°C of warming is considered safe is inadequate ... Experts emphasised the high likelihood of meaningful differences between 1.5°C and 2°C of warming regarding the level of risk from ... extreme events or tipping points ...'*

14. In December 2015, the 197 governments which are parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change united in rejecting the 2°C limit as dangerous and inadequate, by adopting the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which reframes the limit as follows:

*‘Holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels.’*

15. Leading research concludes that, beyond the Paris Agreement limit, a tipping point may be crossed leading to runaway climate change and a ‘hothouse earth’:

*‘This analysis implies that, even if the Paris Accord target of a 1.5 °C to 2.0 °C rise in temperature is met, we cannot exclude the risk that a cascade of feedbacks could push the Earth System irreversibly onto a “Hothouse Earth” pathway... Hothouse Earth is likely to be uncontrollable and dangerous ... it poses severe risks for health, economies, political stability ... and ultimately, the habitability of the planet for humans...Where such a threshold might be is uncertain, but it could be only decades ahead...’*

16. It is evident from numerous authoritative sources, including the UK Government itself, that we are rapidly heading beyond the Paris Agreement temperature limit and into the zone of extreme danger for all humanity and the rest of life on earth.

17. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change provides the definitive synthesis of all peer-reviewed science on climate change. Its last full report in 2014 concluded that:

*‘In most scenarios without additional mitigation efforts ... warming is more likely than not to exceed 4 degrees C above pre-industrial levels by 2100.’*

18. In November 2016, the United Nations Environment Programme published its ‘Emissions Gap Report’ asserting that ‘urgent action’ was necessary to ‘avert disaster’:

*‘This report estimates we are actually on track for global warming of up to 3.4 degrees Celsius. Current commitments will reduce emissions by no more than a third of the levels required by 2030 to avert disaster. So, we must take urgent action.’*

19. In October 2017, the Government published its Clean Growth Strategy:

*'Without significant reductions in emissions, the world is likely to be on course for average temperature rise in excess of 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and possibly as much as 5°C for the highest emissions scenarios, by the end of this century ... Scientific evidence shows that increasing magnitudes of warming increase the likelihood of severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts on people and ecosystems. These climate change risks increase rapidly above 2°C but some risks are considerable below 2°C.'*

20. The scientific evidence is clear and unequivocal: an urgent and radical change of course is required if the Paris Agreement temperature limits are to be respected and disaster averted.

21. In June 2017, a coalition of eminent scientists, diplomats and policy-makers published a comment piece in the leading scientific journal *Nature* headed 'Three years to safeguard our climate'. This showed that in order to meet the Paris Agreement temperature limit, global carbon dioxide emissions would need to peak by 2020, and collapse to 'net zero' within twenty years, explaining:

*'The year 2020 is crucially important for another reason, one that has more to do with physics than politics. When it comes to climate, timing is everything ... should emissions continue to rise beyond 2020, or even remain level, the temperature goals set in Paris become almost unattainable.'*

22. In 2018 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office referred to climate change as an 'existential threat'.

23. On 9 October 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change published its final report into the implications of crossing the 1.5°C temperature limit and concluded that:

- a. *the implications for humanity of exceeding the 1.5°C threshold were extremely severe*
- b. *at current rates of emissions that threshold was likely to be crossed at some point after 2030*
- c. *avoiding such an outcome demanded urgent and radical action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.*

24. The BBC reported the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change conclusions under the headline: *'Final call to save the world from "climate catastrophe".'*

25. In the face of all these dire scientific warnings, the UK Government should immediately communicate to the public the danger and start building a democratic mandate for the urgent and radical action that is required, which is why these were, and still are, part of Extinction Rebellion's demands.

26. The Government is not only failing to inform the public about the exceptional risks of climate breakdown and a hothouse earth but is also, in fact, carrying on as usual. Rather than taking urgent action to reduce emissions it is, for example:

- a. Expanding aviation, which is one of the most polluting forms of transport, with Chris Grayling MP, then Transport Minister, claiming that the Paris Agreement was 'irrelevant' to plans to expand Heathrow Airport.
- b. Encouraging 'fracking' for shale gas, contrary to the advice of leading climate scientists.
- c. Providing the highest fossil fuel subsidies of any country in Europe.

27. Leading experts, including the Government's own statutory advisers, the Committee on Climate Change, have noted the conflict between the Government's climate obligations and its actions

28. In October 2018 *The Guardian* newspaper wrote as follows:

*'One of the world's leading climate scientists has launched a scathing attack on the government's fracking programme, accusing ministers of aping Donald Trump and ignoring scientific evidence. James Hansen, who is known as the father of climate science, warned that future generations would judge the decision to back a UK fracking industry harshly ... The science is crystal clear, we need to phase out fossil fuels starting with the most damaging, the "unconventional" fossil fuels such as tar sands and "fracking".'*

### **Belief leading to action**

The information I have presented is a dry summary of only a *minute* fraction of the information that has come my way. It has left me feeling frustrated, depressed and, at times, hopeless. I cannot really understand

why those ‘in power’ have refused to act. After all, it is their world too. I know politicians are relentlessly lobbied by the fossil fuel and extractive industries, that there is a revolving door from politician, civil servant to chief executive officers of the oil and aviation industries. But when our society and ecosystem collapses around us, *none* of us will be able to eat, drink, or breathe money.

We collectively know what to do to halt climate change but it is not being done. But to be depressed and to lose all hope only makes the problem worse. I am fearful for the future for myself, for my family and for all living creatures on this fragile planet. I believe there is a real and substantial threat to all our lives, and that, in accordance with the science, urgent and systemic changes to our society must be taken now to mitigate the danger. That is why I took action on 17 April 2019 with Extinction Rebellion.

There have been countless scientific reports, letters from concerned scientists, marches, petitions, and promises. But the government was not acting responsibly and enacting the policies that are needed to address the climate emergency. I therefore took non-violent direct action as a matter of last resort.

In December 2018, Sir David Attenborough told the United Nations:

*‘Right now we are facing a man-made disaster of global scale, our greatest threat in thousands of years: climate change ... If we don’t take action, the collapse of our civilisations and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon ... The world’s people have spoken. Time is running out. They want you, the decision-makers, to act now. Leaders of the world, you must lead.’*

Following the wave of actions in London that commenced on 15 April 2019, I believe that the necessity for the actions, and their success in raising the alarm, are now widely acknowledged. This was reflected in articles across the political spectrum in the mainstream media:

*‘Extinction Rebellion protests have WORKED as MPs succumb to calls for change’ (Daily Express, 25 April 2019)*

*‘Jeremy Corbyn forces MPs to vote on declaring climate emergency after Extinction Rebellion protests over political inaction’ (Daily Mail, 28 April, 2019).*

Like most people, I do not like being arrested. I did not want to spend three

days in police cells refusing what I considered to be unreasonable bail conditions preventing me from returning to the protests. I do not enjoy spending time in courts nor do I wish to spend scarce resources travelling from Wales to London for the hearings.

If the Government had done its job of acting in the public interest by providing the public with honest information about the scale and urgency of the threat, and had addressed the threat instead of compounding it, I would not have needed to engage in non-violent direct action.

Finally, I want to assure the court that all my peace and environmental actions over the decades have been done in a considered, accountable and non-violent manner and my latest Extinction Rebellion actions were carried out in a similar non-violent and responsible manner.

The Extinction Rebellion Rebel Code was and still is part of the non-violence training given to participants and not only is it on their website but was also repeated at all five resistance sites in London. It says:

1. *We show respect to everyone – to each other, the general public and to the government and police. We oppose systems, not persons.*
2. *We engage in no violence, physical or verbal, and carry no weapons.*
3. *We wear no masks – we hold ourselves accountable for our actions.*
4. *We bring no alcohol or illegal drugs.*
5. *We take responsibility for ourselves; we are all crew.*

Extinction Rebellion also engaged in extensive police liaison with the Metropolitan Police. I met Paolo Enock of Extinction Rebellion in the Extinction Rebellion office before the week of rebellion and was told that Extinction Rebellion held many meetings with leading Police Liaison Officers from the Met as well as with other senior officers in the run-up to 15 April 2019. The sites of the roadblocks, for instance, were made known to the police in advance in order for diversions and re-routing to take place to allow traffic to by-pass the blockades and to minimise hassle for road users. I was assured that not only were the non-violence guidelines (the Rebel Code) made clear but that this included moving for ambulances and fire engines. For instance, on 5 April 2019, at a meeting held with the Met (at their offices) with a senior ‘Silver Commander’ present, the outline of the non-violent structuring of the planned protests was given and Extinction Rebellion’s presentation included features such as the presence of stewards, of non-violent communication and de-escalation teams, and that an agreement was given that police officers would be accepted and not hindered when circulating on the occupied sites. Concerns were shared

about the possible co-opting of the Extinction Rebellion protests by violent factions, and a written reassurance was given by Extinction Rebellion that when any roadblock is approached by a vehicle with an activated blue light (including police vehicles to allow for the eventuality of a terrorist attack) the roadblock would let that vehicle through immediately.

I was later told that during the rebellion days, Extinction Rebellion had their own team of police liaisons working a shift system across all five occupied sites. These liaisons were in constant contact with police liaison teams during the day and with duty sergeants in the evenings and at night. Paolo himself was in constant telephone contact with the coordinating desk for police liaison during the rebellion days – often on a minute-by-minute basis.

Paolo told me that police vehicles were included in Extinction Rebellion's blue-light policy. He witnessed two medical emergency incidents on Waterloo Bridge in both of which Extinction Rebellion rebels were proactive in helping with getting the emergency services where they were needed. In the second of these incidents, which happened during a major police arrest operation, a 'fire lane' was formed and held open on the northbound carriageway of the bridge for approximately one hour so that ambulances could deal with a medical emergency – a passer-by had suffered a major heart attack on the pavement and required prolonged treatment by medical staff. Not only did Extinction Rebellion stewards and police liaisons alert the police of the emergency, they also collaborated with the police in keeping the emergency lane clear for the full period of the emergency so that ambulances could come and go in both directions.

Paolo said he would be away for this trial date, which is why I have not called him as a witness.

I can testify that I witnessed a beautiful and compassionate atmosphere at all five sites that I visited over the first few days, before being arrested. Local shop-keepers and business people walked through our focal blockade points to get to work and congratulated us on the people's assemblies, the music and carnival atmosphere, and said they wished traffic was stopped every day as there was less air pollution and it was quieter. Many local shops and cafes enjoyed good business and some offered free use of their facilities as a way of showing solidarity.

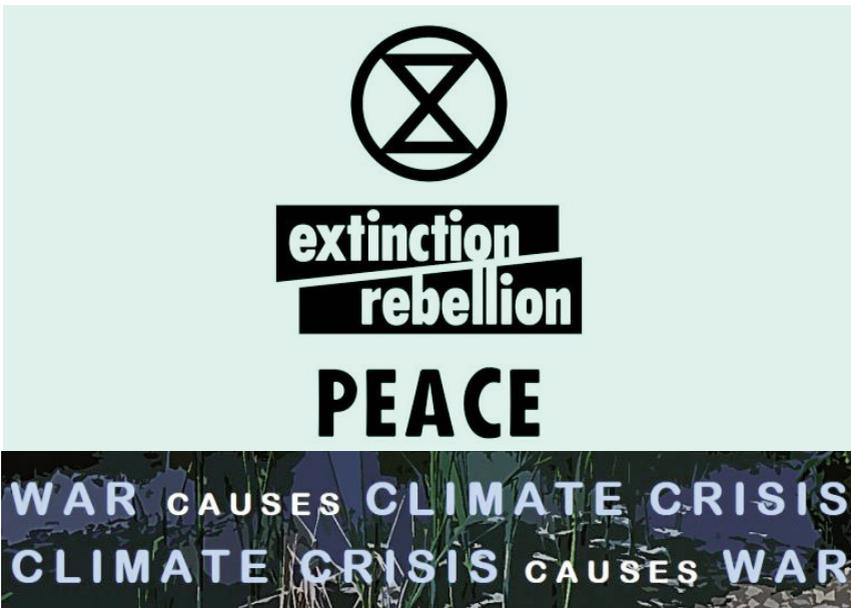
I am pleading not guilty, even though I did refuse to move when asked to by a policeman on 17 April 2019. I am pleading not guilty because I believed I was justified in remaining at the protest in what I considered to be a reasonable and proportionate response to the climate chaos emergency. I believed that my action, along with many of the thousands

gathered in London that week, would help avoid disaster and lead to change. And this has been proved to be true. It has opened up a space for real debate about climate change and what practical actions can be taken. Just days after the Extinction Rebellion actions in London on 29 April 2019, Wales was the first country to formally declare a climate emergency. This was followed a few days later on 1 May by the UK government declaring a climate and environmental emergency .

I have been involved, as have many thousands of others around the UK, in persuading my own Town Council in Knighton to declare a climate emergency and to hold public meetings to decide what practical actions can be taken. I believe that this would not have happened without the creative disruption we caused in central London.

Given that our fragile planet is undergoing massive climate change that will soon, possibly within 11 years, culminate in catastrophic climate chaos that will lead to massive loss of life, I had to do all in my power to bring about the necessary changes to prevent this catastrophe. I hope you will agree that what I did was a reasonable, proportionate and necessary response to the emergency situation that we are in.

I urge the court to find me not guilty. Thank you.



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