

Extinction Rebellion paints UK government office black

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Members of Extinction Rebellion protested coal mining at the U.K. Department for Leveling Up, Housing, and Communities in London on January 18, 2023. (Photo: Extinction Rebellion)?

London, January 20 (RHC)-- Climate activists with Extinction Rebellion gathered in canary costumes and doused a U.K. government building with black paint to protest the recent approval of the country's first new deep coal mine in three decades.

"As police hurried to block access to the doors, protesters lit smoke bombs," according to The Guardian, which noted that the Tory government "is pressing ahead with moves to crack down on disruptive protests" by giving law enforcement new powers.

Michael Gove, the Conservative secretary of state at the Department for Leveling Up, Housing, and Communities, last month greenlighted the mine in Whitehaven, Cumbria. The coal will be extracted for steelmaking versus energy, and 85% of it is expected to be exported to mainland Europe.

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"Opening a coal mine today means the U.K. can't argue that China and India should decrease their own coal emissions," declared Dorothea Hackman, a 70-year-old grandmother from Camden, in a statement from Extinction Rebellion (XR). "Whitehaven coal isn't even wanted by British steelworks; it's going to be exported. There is no argument for domestic production."

Gove's decision has been widely criticized by campaigners, scientists, and some politicians, due to estimated planet-heating emissions from mining and the coal. Climate groups have launched two legal challenges to the project.

"2022 saw record global greenhouse gas emissions, and record global temperatures," said Sarah Hart, a mother from Farnborough and one of the two XR protesters who laid down in front of the department office on Wednesday with one arm in a lock-on tube featuring the message "End Coal."

"Where is the government's ambition to act on this climate and ecological emergency? How dare they even think of opening a coal mine now?" she continued, blasting Gove's claims about the mine and demanding an end to all new fossil fuel projects.

Wednesday's demonstration was part of XR's "Cut the Ties" actions, which launched in November at 13 sites across London and led to 17 arrests, according to the group. Hart highlighted at the time that "behind incomprehensible government decisions to double down on fossil fuel development, sign off new oil exploration licenses, and allow the big energy companies to rake in record profits, lies a network of companies and organizations that are profiting from this destructive path."

"While the rest of us worry about the cost of turning the heating on our government is prioritizing the profits of the very companies that are jeopardizing our climate and environment," Hart argued, adding that XR is "sending the message that it's time to cut the ties with fossil fuels or lose the social license to operate in the U.K."

The new action notably comes after Extinction Rebellion's U.K. arm announced at the beginning of the year that it will no longer use "public disruption as a primary tactic," explaining that "this year, we prioritize attendance over arrest and relationships over roadblocks, as we stand together and become impossible to ignore."

As part of that aim, XR is planning a nonviolent mass direct action for April 21. Because "100,000 is the number of signatories on a petition that gets a question raised in Parliament," the group hopes to bring together at least that many people in London "to demand a fair society and a citizen-led end to the fossil fuel era."

Marijn Van Der Geer of Extinction Rebellion U.K. said Wednesday that the group "wants a citizen-led transition away from fossil fuels via a citizens' assembly on climate and ecological justice."

"Providing unstable jobs in the coal sector during a climate crisis in a region where there are limited economic opportunities is not justice," Van Der Geer stressed. "Opening a coal mine in a region that is already disproportionately affected by the climate crisis with floods increasing and unprecedented rainfall is complete madness."

The BBC points out that "West Cumbria Mining, the firm behind the project, promised to create 500 direct jobs and 1,500 in the wider community," but "critics questioned those figures."

Due to rising sea levels, swaths of Cumbria could be underwater by 2040, according to an analysis published last year by Climate Central, which noted that "our maps are not based on physical storm and flood simulations and do not take into account factors such as erosion, future changes in the frequency or intensity of storms, inland flooding, or contributions from rainfall or rivers."

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