

# Police arrest over 1,000 climate change protesters in London

By Robert Stevens  
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More than 1,000 people have been arrested in London over the last seven days of climate change protests organised by the Extinction Rebellion (XR) group.

Protesters continued to peacefully occupy public spaces in the capital, including Parliament Square, Piccadilly Circus, Waterloo Bridge, Oxford Circus and Marble Arch, despite mounting and provocative police arrests. On Saturday, 200 extra police from neighbouring forces were demanded by the Metropolitan Police to deal with the protesters. Met Police Commissioner Cressida Dick declared, “Every day we have had over 1,000 officers—and now over 1,500 officers.”

The right-wing media and politicians have applauded the manhandling of protestors by the police, demanding the full force of the law to be used against them.

Video footage shot Saturday afternoon showed police dragging protesters down the road near Regent Street adjacent to the Oxford Circus area. By Saturday evening police heavily outnumbered protesters. Forcing protesters to leave Waterloo Bridge on Saturday, police issued a warning that remaining there would be an arrestable offence.

By Sunday evening, 963 people had been arrested, and a further 100-plus were arrested by Monday afternoon—for a total at 1,065 people. Those arrested range in age from 19 to 77. Of these, 53 have been charged for various offences including breach of Section 14 Notice of the Public Order Act 1986, for obstructing a highway and obstructing police.

A Met spokesman said that, contrary to reports, its cells were not yet full in London and that they had contingency plans to handle even larger-scale arrests.

On Sunday, police moved in to clear protesters from Oxford Street and Parliament Square during the day, and the remaining activists from Waterloo Bridge in the evening. Those demonstrators not arrested were being allowed to go to a small designated “legal” protest area at

nearby Marble Arch. After evicting them, police remained at all three sites in force.

There was no let-up in calls by the right-wing media that the police step in and clear the streets. The *Sun*, owned by billionaire oligarch Rupert Murdoch, editorialised Monday, “The Mayor and the Met have huffed and puffed in the press—but the green tents are still standing [in Marble Arch].” It warned of the danger that “Their pathetic efforts have emboldened protesters,” adding, “Tomorrow, Britain goes back to work. The Home Secretary must ensure police have cleared the streets.”

On Monday, around 100 Extinction Rebellion activists protested in London’s Natural History Museum, lying down for around 30 minutes in a “die-in”.

The arrests were stepped up following a tweet issued Thursday morning by Home Secretary Sajid Javid. He wrote, “No one should be allowed to break the law without consequence” and called on police to “take a firm stance” against “any protesters who are stepping outside the boundaries of the law” and “significantly disrupting the lives of others.”

After a meeting between Javid and Cressida Dick, the Met described the protests at Waterloo Bridge, Oxford Circus and Parliament Square as “illegal.”

The Conservative government’s response was backed up by Labour Party Mayor of London Sadiq Khan. On Saturday, Khan declared, “I remain in close contact with the Met Commissioner and agree that Londoners have suffered too much disruption.” The protesters had to “let London return to business as usual,” as they were “now taking a real toll on our city—our communities, businesses and police. This is counter-productive to the cause and our city.”

Describing the massive state operation he was authorising, Khan said more than 9,000 police officers had been deployed, which had proved “extremely

challenging for our over-stretched and under-resourced police.” He slandered those demonstrating, saying, “It simply isn’t right to put Londoners’ safety at risk like this.”

This followed comments from former Labour home secretary under Tony Blair, David Blunkett, who said, “The full force of the law needs to be used against those who have been warned and yet who persist with their anti-social protests.”

On Sunday, those gathered at Marble Arch were addressed by 16-year-old climate activist Greta Thunberg, whose protests outside Sweden’s parliament last year sparked the current wave of global strikes and demonstrations by school youth and students.

Thunberg, who will meet politicians, including Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn over the next week, said to a standing ovation, “Despite all the beautiful words and promises. ... For way too long the politicians and people in power have got away with not doing anything at all to fight the climate crisis and ecological crisis ...”

She added, “We are now facing an existential crisis, the climate crisis and ecological crisis which have never been treated as crises before, they have been ignored for decades.”

The nominally “left” Corbyn has not issued a single statement condemning the scale of arrests that even Met chief Dick said was the largest number she had ever seen in a single policing operation in her 36 years on the force.

In spite of the sincere intentions of many joining its protests, the Extinction Rebellion offers nothing more than a version of “green” capitalism. It makes no appeal to the working class in Britain and internationally—the only social force that can prevent the planet’s ecological destruction—but to the capitalists and their politicians, whose relentless profit drive has created the crisis. On Sunday, as these same politicians and their police units were ramping up their mass arrests, XR’s leaders declared it was time to stand down their protests and made calls for direct negotiations with the government.

Farhana Yamin, XR’s political circle coordinator, said Sunday represented “a transition from week one, which focused on actions that were vision-holding but also caused mass disruption across many dimensions. ... Week two marks a new phase of rebellion focused on negotiations where the focus will shift to our actual political demands.”

She added, “We can do that by showing we are disciplined and cannot only start disruptive actions but also end these when needed. ... Being able to ‘pause’ a

rebellion shows that we are organised and a long-term political force to be reckoned with.

“This will give XR leverage as we enter into negotiations with those in power to make headway on our three demands.”

XR organiser Sam Knights, stated, “We are now calling on the government and political class to come to us.”

Their demands are for the government to “tell the truth about climate change”; to reduce carbon emissions to zero by 2025; and to create a citizens’ assembly to oversee progress on its agenda.

This bankrupt perspective only provides political cover to the very Conservative government and Labour “opposition” which have jointly orchestrated the mass arrests of those demanding change. The Tories and Labour have imposed decades of austerity in which millions of people have been pauperised. They will do nothing to imperil the accumulation of wealth by the super-rich, whatever the cost to the environment.

More fundamentally, it is impossible to resolve the environmental crisis based on forlorn hopes of one or even several governments tinkering their policies, within the confines of the existing economic system. What is needed to resolve the climate crisis is a global effort, mobilizing the scientific, technological and productive resources of the entire human race.

Overcoming the challenges of rapidly rising sea levels, accelerating CO2 emissions, loss of biodiversity, collapse of food chains and desertification is bound up with the task of overthrowing the failed capitalist system and its replacement with a socialist society based on rational planning, democratically undertaken on a global scale.

*The author also recommends:*

The Youth Climate Strike and the fight against global warming

[14 March 2019]

Extinction Rebellion: “Green” capitalism versus world socialism

[14 March 2019]

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