

Extinction Rebellion: a review

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Finally the Western civilization has woken up to the climate crisis. To those of us anarchists who have not been following scientific research on the crisis for the past decade in detail, who live in the West and who haven't been involved in green nihilist circles, the current mass of information can feel like an avalanche.

We might be used to confronting the heartbreaking realities of this world, but how do we face the on-going, ecosystem threatening loss of biodiversity, melting permafrost, methane gas explosions and ravaging fires in Arctic regions, the probable breakdown of the Gulf stream, the loss of 75% of Arctic sea ice, European heatwaves drying up rivers used to cool down nuclear power plants and freak storms destroying 80% - 100% of crops of local farmers in 'the Orchard of France', so close to home?

Midst this we find little other than the Capitalist dogma of growth and technological advancement as our savior, a hypocrisy and hubris of civilization and mass delusion reaching deep even into radical environmentalist circles.

One movement is claiming to have found the way to take on the world and its leaders: Extinction Rebellion. With their impressive mass actions and subsequent arrests, seemingly well-researched Non-Violent Civil Disobedience theory (based on their perspective of a history of social movements) and mass-appealing demands, they have captured a lot of attention both from greater society and anarchist circles. Since there is many calls out there asking people to join the movement, this critique goes against joining them, as someone who had been part of the movement and gotten a more in-depth understanding.

It is hard to focus on one single issue with Extinction Rebellion without touching upon other interconnected side issues at the same time, and it quickly snowballs into an elaborate essay. There is a certain attitude of disdain towards other environmental movements and political efforts, a feeling that Extinction Rebellion is the purest and sole voice of this time, that it has found the single most effective peaceful (and self-sacrificial) way of changing the system, the one movement that we've all been waiting for that can finally bring climate on the agenda (obviously it had to be born in Western privilege, no questions asked), the one movement to win over the Police force. It is a culture *extinctively*— excuse me, instinctively ingrained in the movement and already, despite its young age, internal reform efforts have been undertaken and abandoned by radicals to transform the organization. This culture is incredibly disheartening and ultimately, inherently racist.

To disregard the suffering and pain of especially indigenous and black struggles, who have been fighting for hundreds of years, by welcoming the police force as equals ‘just doing their job’ and even questioning other movements for not establishing good enough communication as the reason for violent police encounters, that is inherently racist.

It is furthermore unfortunate, that the momentum they have gained and the work that has been put in to manage these mass actions will most likely reinforce state power. Their demands are not a threat to the power structure of this society nor to the techno-frenzy of Capitalists afraid of their money burning faster than they can spend it on subterranean fallout bunkers in New Zealand. (I can’t believe this image isn’t even a joke anymore.) Their demands are widely based on state-led actions with a vague idea of some kind of diverse randomized citizens assembly surveying merely climate issues. A citizens assembly being more just and liberating than the state apparatus is as much an illusion as the idea that a worker-led ‘proletariat’ revolution of e.g. a pork factory would be vegan and end up shutting down the factory for the good of the environment and animal liberation.

A demand for the nation states to halt carbon emissions by 2025 falsely puts emission ratings into the dead center of the conflict rather than target the systems of production and culture of progress that allow for such cold evaluation of the natural world.

Extinction Rebellion misunderstands the nature of the crisis, the role of the state and the role of capital, especially obvious when they demand to “Tell the Truth”. Unclear notions like this remind more of a dystopian future. The truth has for ever been interpreted by the ones in power, so suggesting that the state and corporations will wake up to the ‘lies’ they’ve been pulling off for decades is naive, as their ‘truth’ and intention has always been to do whatever necessary to maintain the status quo and exploit the planet and inhabitants.

Their tactics have and will lead to more and more dedicated activists being registered and categorized, perhaps even incarcerated by the state authority, as one of their ‘success criteria’ is a misunderstood perception of ‘standing up for your beliefs’. Activists should turn themselves in to the Police or demand to be arrested for illegal action, as anonymity and ‘getting away with it’ are not accepted forms of direct action under Extinction Rebellion action consensus. Such extensive and open struggles with the Police and legal apparatus, as e.g. Green and Black Cross in the UK have already stated while ending their cooperation with Extinction Rebellion, will lead to a burn-out of resources and is not a suitable way of leading a so-called ‘sustained rebellion’.

Much of this belief and culture is based on a cult-of-personality surrounding co-founder Roger Hallam, who is well-known for his appearances on TV signing up new activists to potentially go to prison for the rebellion, telling police officers that arrests aren’t happening ‘quickly enough’ and holding YouTube talks with his research on the one way to succeed as a social movement.

This game of self-sacrifice to the authorities can only be played to its climax at all times – it means revolution or death, and with the impending ecological collapse that can seem like an acceptable perspective, however, there are many other forms of sustained action and rebellion that should be undertaken without risking to rot away in a cell while the world is burning or being sorted out as a political enemy of a future eco-fascist state in the false hope of a (Western-led) global revolution. I’d suggest that whatever you do, get away with it.

It looks like Extinction Rebellion will at best achieve nothing tangible, and at worst have a destructive impact on the struggle for a just, liberated and biodiverse world.

“The hope of a Big Happy Ending, hurts people; sets the stage for the pain felt when they become disillusioned. Because, truly, who amongst us now really believes? How many have been burnt up by the effort needed to reconcile a fundamentally religious faith in the positive transformation of the world with the reality of life all around us? Yet to be disillusioned — with global revolution/with our capacity to stop climate change — should not alter our anarchist nature, or the love of nature we feel as anarchists. There are many possibilities for liberty and wildness still.

What are some of these possibilities and how can we live them? What could it mean to be an anarchist, an environmentalist, when global revolution and world-wide social/eco sustainability are not the aim? What objectives, what plans, what lives, what adventures are there when the illusions are set aside and we walk into the world not disabled by disillusionment but unburdened by it?”

- *Desert, 2011*

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