

Things are hotting up!



A Report from two members of Rising Tide North America who came to the UK to participate in the 2006 Camp for Climate Action.

In late August, two of us with Rising Tide North America traveled to England to attend the Camp for Climate Action, meet our British comrades face to face and, under the looming shadow of the Drax power station, collectively plot our strategy for manifesting an international uprising against the fossil fuel industry.

There were loads of amazing people, fun new words to be learned, an impressive array of sustainable infrastructure, and over 130 workshops covering everything from climate justice solidarity work to building your own wind turbine.

The site for the camp was a squatted field in Megawatt Valley near Leeds, England, home to three large power plants, the biggest being “Drax the Destroyer.” The camp’s exact location was kept secret until it was secured a couple days before the camp started. For months, the Climate Camp had been publicly declaring their intention to shut down the coal-fired Drax power station (the largest power plant in the UK, responsible for producing 7-10% of the grid’s energy), and the camp was set up just a couple miles from Drax’s 12 massive cooling towers.



The taking of the field was a substantial action in itself, involving a good mass of people and a two-tiered tripod (see photo). The farmer who owned the land was apparently a bit bewildered when an eco-village suddenly sprang up in his usually quiet field, but he wasn't too upset about it, and due to the the Brits' kindly squatting laws, the squat was actually declared legal and the police weren't allowed in! (Though that didn't stop them from trying...)



The camp was organized by a number of groups and individuals throughout the UK, including Rising Tide UK, and its structure was loosely modeled after the eco-village protest camp at last year's G8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland. People camped in several "neighborhoods" that were set up around the center of the camp, each one representing a different geographical location (ie, London, Nottingham, Scotland, etc). Each neighborhood ran its own communal kitchen and sent two reps to a spokescouncil every morning to make decisions affecting the whole camp (most meetings were dominated by the ever-present issue of how to deal with the strong police presence

and their constant stop-and-searches of anyone walking around outside the camp boundary). The communal space in the center of camp was comprised of workshop spaces, an action support tent, a kids space, a bar, an Indymedia tent, and a bike tent. There were also spaces for well being, medical, legal, and general information. The set-up seemed to work well in fostering community amongst neighborhoods while having an overall democratic and participatory decision-making process. Alcohol was plentiful and allowed everywhere on site; there was a bar open each night selling organic beer, cider and liquor.



Infrastructure included composting toilets, hay-bale pissers, greywater systems connected to an impressive water system of pipes, hoses and spigots running throughout the camp, wind and solar powered sound systems, film screenings and computers.



The camp generated a shitload of national media coverage over the course of the week, one of the more bizarre examples being the front page of The Independent showing a photo from the mass action on Drax alongside Arnold Schwarzenegger, with the headline “The Green Revolution.” It was refreshing to be in a country where the media and the general public agree that climate change is a huge problem and that things need to change (the UK government has already pledged to reduce the country’s CO2 emissions by 60% by 2050).



The idea battle that UK activists face is more against rampant “greenwashing” and the notion that green capitalism, carbon trading and other “market-based” carbon-offset schemes will save us. Micro-reductions are not only insignificant when you consider that the numerous feedback loops (trapped methane in the Siberian permafrost, the shrinking arctic, the Greenland ice sheet, and the amazon, to name a few) are causing climate change to occur much faster than expected; such incremental reforms are actually quite damaging, in that they reassure the public that everything is under control when we all need to be making drastic lifestyle changes. One London-based activist emphasized in his workshop on Tipping Point that we only have about 10 years to cut our global emissions by 75% if we are to avert catastrophic climate change, and that business-friendly “solutions” like carbon offsets are really the equivalent of bailing out the Titanic with a thimble. He pointed to the IPCC report coming out in February 2007 as an important marker to look for, and recommended the website www.realclimate.org as a good source for up-to-date climate science. UK activists are especially targeting the aviation industry right now, as it is the fastest growing source of carbon emissions. Jet fuel is not taxed in the UK, so airlines offer super cheap flights around Europe and even around England. NGOs are working on establishing stricter aviation emissions regulations (not just capping them at Kyoto levels) and are encouraging people to fly less. Autonomous direct action groups throughout the UK are setting their sights on airports planning to expand (check out the Plane Stupid campaign) as a long-term project. This is an area that hasn’t been explored much in the US, but is worth pursuing; 1/5 of all flying in the world is on domestic US flights.



Rising Tide UK has of late been organizing a series of actions, often incorporating street theater and huge, glossy banners, targeting oil companies' greenwash ("specifically BP and Shell). A lot of their "fluffy" actions (as opposed to "spiky") are about celebrating life and having fun while taking action against the death machine. Also, focusing on environmental justice, they try to show the destruction that we first world countries export to the global south, and bring home the struggles for social justice that imperialistic resource barons (and carbon offset companies) have sparked all over the world. Part of this work involves avoiding the pitfall of allowing climate change to be framed as an 'environmental issue,' which automatically limits who is interested and how the issue is talked about. London Rising Tide has also been sponsoring an art installation called Art Not Oil, a three year old exhibition that started in a squatted space and now travels the country (see planning to establish urban community permaculture gardens, called (com)mutiny gardens. Aside from doing amazing work, the UK Rising Tide folks are also downright lovely people. It was great getting to know them over the course of the camp, strategizing over tea and cider, and working with them during the action. We did a workshop on Rising Tide North America (RTNA), which was quite well-received. We talked about the origins, strategy and projects of the group, as well as mountain top removal and the Green Scare. Everyone we spoke with was eager to hear about how we organize in the US and the political climate here. Folks had heard about the recent roundups, but it didn't seem like their full implications for the movement had fully percolated across the ocean. The Battle of Drax ("...and then we got chased by pigs - I mean real pigs...") It had been announced in the media, on posters, in peoples' email inboxes, and by word of mouth: we were going to shut down Drax on August 31. When the day rolled around, we were about 500-strong, not quite the thousands that camp organizers had hoped for, but still a good, determined bunch. There was the clandestine insurgent rebel clown army, a samba band, a kids block, the Bicycology bike tour, a giant ostrich puppet (a theme for the camp), a block of people in white hazard suits, and self-motivated affinity groups from all over the UK.



There had been a blockade at a nuclear plant a couple days before the mass action, and when the camp awoke on the 31st, we were greeted with news that there had already been an early-morning blockade at one of the other two power plants in Megawatt Valley. We all assembled into different groups, some going with the kids bloc down the road, some going with the hazard suits through the fields, others blazing their own trail.



The cops tried to block us in from the outset, when we were less than 50 feet from the front gate of the camp.



Between us and Drax were a number of fields, some with livestock, some with horses, some with greenhouses, some lying fallow. Next to the camp was a nature preserve where a temporary cop shop had been set up, drawing from a number of forces from as far away as London. The police tried to contain the crowd, but people slipped by in small groups, running through fields, jumping over ditches, climbing through brambles and barbed wire, and playing cat and mouse with cops in neon yellow vests and funny hats.



Finally, a critical mass of people made it to Drax's perimeter fence and proceeded to mull around for a bit, listening to the samba band and contemplating the long line of police between us and the fence.





There was not much advanced coordination among affinity groups, but people self-organized and took initiative. Before this mass of people had arrived, a few AGs made it through the fence and onto the sprawling power plant site to climb towers and equipment. Someone locked on to a fire escape; another locked onto the coal conveyor belt for 4 hours. Other AGs made it through the fence only to be beaten and gassed or pepper sprayed and nicked (arrested). Meanwhile, Bicycology was biking around blasting tunes from pedal-powered speakers. The kids bloc made it to the main intersection in the nearest town and was detained by police, their prized ostrich puppet being arrested for suspicious behavior.



Rebel clowns roamed the streets, passing information along and playing mysterious games with groups of police. There were two instances of angry farmers using tractors to try to run over protesters (they were not successful), but in general locals were supportive and no complaints were

filed.



The day of action succeeded in striking fear into the heart of Drax, with employees using secret, pre-arranged knocking codes before entering each others' offices. No trains were running in the days leading up to the action (the plant gets all of its coal by rail), and from 10-4 no coal got into the plant due to safety regulations. The action at Drax also put coal on the radar in the UK in a way that it hadn't been before. While Drax is the largest plant in the UK, it also has modern scrubbers and is the most efficient; consequently, the plant had previously enjoyed a fairly greenwashed image. The climate camp action helped debunk the logic that equates efficient coal burning with sustainability, and brought the focus back to CO2 being the major cause of global climate change.



As a con, the action may have been more successful if there had been more planning. The widely publicized call to shut down the plant got a massive amount of press, but also a massive amount of police and high expectations. Having the action on the Thursday in the middle of the camp also may

have cut down on numbers, and took energy away from the workshops happening on Friday and Saturday, when everyone was recovering. The Future is Unwritten - Inaction is the Tragedy All in all, the Climate Camp was a huge success. The camp drew a wide variety of people (or at least a wider breadth than the young, white, anarcho-punk inclined folks that dominate EF! Gatherings in the US), leading to a healthy debate on various issues, strategies and tactics. We came away from the camp feeling part of a truly global movement, as well as feeling the urgency of this overwhelming issue of climate change. We all understand how the extraction and burning of fossil fuels has made possible the rapid growth of consumer capitalism (and all the genocide and ecocide that has come with it). Now, as the cycle of colonialism spins on, there are new displacements of communities, new disruptions of tropical bioregions, new assaults on indigenous sovereignty, being undertaken in the name of stopping climate change. Genetically modified tree plantations, claiming to “offset carbon emissions,” produce more perfect trees for the chip mills. Monoculture soy plantations, promising us that we can use biofuels to keep all our machines running even in the age of ecological collapse, are displacing indigenous communities and wreaking havoc on local ecosystems. There is currently a multi-billion dollar market (and growing) in carbon offset schemes, providing people, businesses and governments with a service to appease their first world guilt while not for a moment interfering with the machinery destroying the Earth. If the regular people of the (first) world who care about having a future put their faith in these market-based “solutions” to climate change, it may well be too late by the time they realize what a scam they’ve bought into. As EF!ers and others who look at systemic issues, we must make it clear that the system that created this shit is not going to fix it - the struggle for social justice, for sustainability, for equality, must necessarily be a struggle against capitalism. Those of us living in the US have more opportunities than anyone else in the world to hit the Earth-destroying machine where it’s most vulnerable - from inside the brain of the monster. These opportunities abound; they’re all around us everyday. The key is to not get too overwhelmed by the enormity of it all; choose your battles and go forth. The time to act is now! To check out what Rising Tide North America is up to and how you can get involved, see www.risingtidenorthamerica.org.