

opinion

Climate change is no laughing matter – but protests are making a joke of it

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It's hard to not be pessimistic – but the world seems to be falling apart, doesn't it?

Every time we turn on the television, we're met with a constant slurry of bad news.

Covid cases are rising, there's still unspeakable bloodshed in Palestine, marginalised groups across the world still face constant and horrible injustices – and now the ocean is on fire.

Yes, you read that right. The ocean actually caught fire. It almost doesn't seem real, and sounds like a pair of cards you'd draw in a game of Cards Against Humanity.

But if you caught a glimpse of the news last weekend, you'll have seen the alarming footage of a fire that broke out on the Gulf of Mexico. Not near it, actually on it.

An underwater pipeline burst and caused a gas leak which led to a blaze atop the water.

And if that wasn't enough, just a few days later a mud volcano caused a massive explosion in the Caspian Sea off the coast of Azerbaijan, where a number of offshore oil and gas fields are located.

Not only are our oceans burning, but North America is currently going through one of its worst heatwaves in recent history. Its west coast has seen an unprecedented number of heat-related deaths, with temperatures reaching a shocking 49.6°C in some parts of Canada – the highest temperature ever recorded in the country.

Our ongoing reliance on fossil fuels is causing devastating destruction across the globe – and unfortunately, I don't see catastrophic scenes such as these stopping anytime soon.

We need to take climate change seriously – there's no doubt about that.

But there's something that rubs me up the wrong way when it comes to Extinction Rebellion, and how they go about trying to spread that message.

I'm certainly on board with the cause they're fighting for – but I can't get on board with



Climate change activists stood atop the tube and with their hands glued to the doors

their often classist and thoughtless protest tactics.

The group describes itself on its website as 'a do-it-together movement', with the aims of using 'non-violent civil disobedience in an attempt to halt mass extinction and minimise the risk of social collapse.'

But unfortunately, a handful of its stunts have raised a few eyebrows and pushed people away on both sides of the political spectrum – especially people firmly on the left such as myself.

Cast your mind back to just a couple of weeks ago, when a group of Extinction Rebellion members dumped seven tonnes of manure on the road outside of Northcliffe House in west London. This building houses a number of national newspapers, including the Daily Mail, The Independent and the Evening Standard.

While the protest itself certainly caught the attention of the media and wider public, who was left to clean up that manure?

It certainly wouldn't have been the staff at these publications – but rather some hardworking street cleaner or worker hired by

the council who is just trying to make a living. He or she would have had all of their other tasks put on hold, to clear away tonnes of waste. How is that in any way fair?

The day they lost me however was one morning back in 2019, when a number of the group's protestors stormed various stations across the London Underground during rush hour.

Protestors clambered atop the tube carriages, causing disruption to people trying to get to their jobs that morning.

Think teachers, nurses, social workers, office workers, and everyone in-between who is just trying to earn a living in one London's most deprived areas.

Footage of the 'protest' can be seen online, and one commuter can be heard shouting "I have to get to work too – I have to feed my kids."

The group's members were stopping honest, working-class people from getting to their jobs – and setting the cause back by a number of steps, in my opinion.

These sorts of people aren't the ones to direct your anger towards. Even Sarah Lunnon, a member of Extinction Rebellion's political circle told

The Guardian shortly after the stunt: "Obviously we did not get that right."

And as someone who works in the regional press, who could forget just last year when they blockaded the printworks, preventing not only national and tabloid papers from being distributed, but the very paper you're reading this column in.

How can the group unfurl banners that say 'Free the press', but stop people getting what could be their only source of news for the week?

Don't get me wrong, I'm no fan of many of the nationals and red tops that dominate supermarket and newsagent shelves. But lots of readers of the regional and local press don't get their news from the internet – and instead rely on a printed copy of their local paper every day to find out what's happening in their village and surrounding area.

Thoughtless stunts such as these hurt the climate change awareness movement, and make a mockery of it at times.

We need to be taking that well-intentioned and rightly-held anger and focus it towards the bankers, oil companies, and

billionaires who control a disproportionate amount of the world's wealth.

Climate change affects everyone – and therefore the fight against it should be inclusive of everyone. Otherwise, you run the risk of alienating those very folks you need on side.

Without Emily Davison and the Suffragettes, women might not have the right to vote.

If someone didn't throw the first brick at Stonewall, we wouldn't have rights for the LGBTQ+ community.

And the protests last summer following the murder of George Floyd opened up people's eyes to the ongoing injustices black people face every day, such as police brutality and systematic racism.

But I can't help but think certain climate change protests just miss the mark. It's all a bit 'Bullingdon Club for the liberal elite', if you ask me.

What is happening to the planet right now is terrifying. But if we don't stop with the silly, performative stunts, we'll have lost sight of what we're fighting for. And then it'll be too late.