

Extinction Rebellion Q&A

[Seren Hughes](#) talks to members of Extinction Rebellion, a movement stepping up the battle against climate change

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Extinction Rebellion is a movement which believes the planet is in ecological crisis and that we are unprepared for what the future holds. The current predictions show that at our current rate, we could be on track for not just 2 degrees of warming, but 3 or even more. They believe it is time to face up to the facts and act, that we have been treating climate change as something which can be dealt with slowly, when it is a problem which needs to be confronted now.

I spoke to Merry and Mark, students at the University of York, after a talk they gave to the public in York.

What is Extinction Rebellion?

Merry: We are a grassroots social movement, we're a branch of Rising Up, we believe in non-violent direct civil action and civil disobedience. We think the government has failed us in taking action over climate change, and it's on the people to force the government to take action, and to take the steps necessary to mitigate climate catastrophe.

Tell me a bit about yourselves and why you got into Extinction Rebellion?

Merry: We both went to a talk in Leeds about a month ago. We've been following Extinction Rebellion online for a while, but not actually got directly involved. We found the talk inspiring, it was a movement we very much agreed with.

Mark: And then from there we got involved with the Leeds group as well, but travelling back and forth is

expensive and tiring so we asked the organisers of the Leeds talk “Hey, can we have this talk in York and try to set up our own group in York?” And they said yes. They gave us the materials to organise and plan the talk and we posted the event on Facebook, and here we are!

Merry: We felt like we couldn't not get involved, because it is our future. It seems like a sacrifice personally, but it's really not when you think about it, in the grand scheme of things, this is literally our future in the balance.

One of the points Extinction Rebellion is most keen on is going all the way, even if that means getting arrested. The group is even encouraging people to get arrested. Are you in favour of that? Are you willing to get arrested?

Merry: Yes. Basically.

Mark: Yep, we are.

Merry: We think that although getting arrested can impact your future, we don't really have a future unless action is taken. So, I asked myself the question: what can I do about this and what does it take for things to change? And that is people getting arrested and people going to jail. For me, personally, I can't just sit by and watch. I have to take every action I possibly can to try and change things.

Mark: I'm the same. I agree with everything Merry said. It goes back to morals and doing virtuous things. If you believe something is good, do it anyway, no matter if it's going to fail or if it might not work out. We believe this is what we have to do, we believe we are doing good. And, therefore we are prepared for the consequences. We've prepared for this, it is not something that we have taken lightly. But we are prepared and ready to do this.

What is the plan for the movement, then?

Merry: On the 31st of October, we declared rebellion against the government. We have 3 main aims: we want the government to communicate the reality of climate catastrophe, we want the government to be net carbon zero by 2025. Rebellion Day is November 17th.

Mark: Then we want the government to establish citizen's assemblies to help with the implementation of this and to ensure our democracy is fit for purpose. At the moment, our democracy serves short-term, private interests.

Why do you think right now is such a great moment for this?

Merry: I think it is the only moment we have. If we don't do something now, it becomes too late. If you saw the IPCC report recently, we have 12 years left until it's too late. So, if we don't take action now and start forcing change to happen, it's too late. We have to try. And even if it seems hopeless, we have to have courage to do what is right.

What are your thoughts on the media coverage of the movement? (At the time of the interview, The Guardian had released an article, George Monbiot, a Guardian columnist is part of the movement, and now, at the time of writing, the BBC has covered Extinction Rebellion action.)

Mark: We think it's been great. In the last month, 2 months, the movement has really taken off. If you look at Facebook likes, there's so much more now. Part of the goal with being arrested is media coverage. We know it takes mass disruption and people willing to go to jail to actually force the media to pay attention. For example, when the IPCC released its report, it said we only have 12 years left, only 2 papers in the UK covered it, the rest were talking about the latest on Strictly. I like Strictly but it's not quite as important as climate change.

Not everyone wants to get arrested. What else can people in York do to get involved?

Merry: There's a range of roles in Extinction Rebellion. We have legal observers, people who watch people getting arrested and make sure they film it and record it to ensure there isn't any police brutality or mistreatment. There's also well-being officers that work with Extinction Rebellion and the wider area, because climate change is really heavy, it can make us all feel a lot of despair. We recognise that it's a time of grief. So, we have well-being officers who talk to people and help them get through that. There's also stewards who go to the big events and help with crowd control and prevent things from getting violent. We are big on non-violence.

Mark: It's also worth mentioning, lots of the people who get involved won't be arrested and there will be clear outlines of if you keep going you will get arrested, if you leave now and take a step back, it will be okay.

Merry: You can still protest without getting arrested. We need people, in mass, on the streets. You can take yourself out of the situation whenever you want.



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