# Just Stop Oil ends disruptive protests amid new legal crackdown



Just Stop Oil (JSO), the UK climate activist group known for its disruptive protests over the past three years, is holding its final demonstration this Saturday in Central London, marking the end of its high-profile civil disobedience campaign. The group, which has gained notoriety for road blockades, throwing soup, and splashing paint over artworks, is concluding its activities amid significant legal and policing challenges that have rendered its form of protest increasingly untenable.

JSO co-founder Sarah Lunnon described the upcoming event as a "joyful celebration," reflecting on the achievements and communal trust developed within the movement. The group asserts it has effectively achieved its main goal — the government's adoption of a policy to halt new oil and gas licences. However, privately, members acknowledge that new legal powers targeting disruptive protests have severely curtailed their capacity to operate publicly.

The policing of JSO protests has demanded extensive resources, reportedly costing the Metropolitan Police nearly £20 million in 2023 alone. The policing and political establishment's growing intolerance of such demonstrations culminated in significant legislative changes. Most notably, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 introduced a statutory offence of "intentionally or recklessly causing public nuisance," encompassing a broad range of disruptive behaviours. This has enabled law enforcement to pursue charges of conspiracy to cause public nuisance, potentially leading to lengthy prison sentences even for mere planning.

Subsequent legislation, including the Public Order Act 2023, expanded police powers further by criminalising tactics such as "locking on" and interference with major infrastructure. Courts have also narrowed the scope for protestors to claim "lawful excuse," ruling that the motivations behind disruptive actions related to climate activism are insufficient defence, shifting trials to focus solely on whether the accused committed the acts.

The repercussions for JSO members have been severe, with some activists sentenced to prison terms spanning years. Sarah Lunnon highlighted this harsh reality, saying, "We've seen people being found guilty and sent to prison for years." While critics, such as former police officer David Spencer, argue that earlier laws unfairly favoured disruptive protesters at the expense of public order, groups like the human rights organisation Liberty view these legal changes as significant threats to democratic expression.

In response to the new legal landscape, some climate activists have shifted tactics. One example is a group called Shut the System (STS), which has engaged in criminal damage against financial institutions and infrastructure, deliberately avoiding arrest to circumvent lengthy jail terms. A spokesperson for STS explained that enduring imprisonment for a single protest is unsustainable, stating, "Activists are forced into a position where we have to go underground."

Other clandestine actions include tyre deflation campaigns targeting SUVs, carried out by groups such as the Tyre Extinguishers and others who have damaged vehicle tyres at dealership locations. While these methods may heighten anxieties among motorists, academic experts like Dr Graeme Hayes from Aston University suggest only a small minority of activists will engage in such clandestine activities, given the strong ethical commitment to non-violence in the climate movement.

Meanwhile, alternative legal strategies are being employed. The Citizen's Arrest Network (CAN) has attempted to invert the public nuisance law by "arresting" executives of fossil fuel companies, laying out alleged criminal cases against them for environmental harm. Gail Lynch, a CAN organiser, spoke of the group's origins in frustration, saying, "Disgruntled people find each other, and they need a mechanism to have their voice heard." CAN has issued indictments against major firms such as Shell and BP and submitted them to prosecutors.

The public and political reception to JSO's methods has been mixed and often critical. Despite broad public support for climate action—polls show around 80% of Britons view government efforts on tackling climate change as important—JSO itself holds a low favourability rating, with only 17% of people expressing positive views in a 2023 YouGov poll. The group has faced condemnation from figures across the political spectrum, including Robert Jenrick, the Conservative shadow Justice Secretary, who criticised JSO’s disruptive tactics as unacceptable and counterproductive.

Within the environmental movement, reflection and debate continue about the best strategies for climate advocacy. Rupert Read, former Extinction Rebellion spokesperson, suggests the need for a broad, mass-based movement that unites most of the population through non-disruptive methods, working alongside political allies such as former Green Party leader Caroline Lucas. They are involved in the Climate Majority Project, which has backing from prominent Conservatives like Lord Deben, a former environment minister who also voices concerns about disruptive protest alienating the public.

Naturalist Chris Packham endorses empowering voters to drive change and warns of escalating protests if legitimate voices are suppressed. Referencing last year's Restore Nature Now march that united tens of thousands peacefully yet received limited media coverage, Packham noted, "We put between 70,000 and 80,000 people on the streets of London, but because it was a peaceful demonstration made up of kids in fancy dress we didn't get any coverage."

Sarah Lunnon of JSO acknowledges that while the group's era of public civil disobedience has ended, the broader movement remains active and is likely to explore new ways to challenge government policy. "Nobody is shutting up shop and calling it a day," she said. For now, however, the high-profile disruptive model that brought Just Stop Oil national attention and controversy has reached its conclusion under the changing legal and political environment in the UK.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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