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“You Should Feel Guilty for Nothing” says Judge, as he finds Seven Guilty and Acquits Two, for Disrupting Esso Terminal in Birmingham

Court & Prison, Press / February 16, 2023

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Seven Just Stop Oil supporters have been found guilty and two have been acquitted in relation to peacefully blocking the distribution of oil from the Esso Fuel Terminal in Birmingham in April 2022. The Just Stop Oil supporters were demanding that the government halt licences and consents for any new fossil fuel projects in the UK. [1]

Harley Brewer, Naomi Goddard, Paul Barnes, Oliver Clegg, Jon Deery, Paul Fawkesley, Diana Hekt, Sylvie More and Alan Woods appeared at Wolverhampton Magistrates Court, before District Judge Wilkinson, answering the charge of Aggravated Trespass. The court heard how the Just Stop Oil supporters had arrived at the site at 4am on the 3rd April 2022, and had stopped all distribution for around 12 hours. [2]

During the trial, District Judge Wilkinson heard evidence from the defendants that Esso, a subsidiary of Exxon Mobil, had led a sustained campaign of misinformation, across many decades, over the role of fossil fuels in climate breakdown.

One of those on trial, Alan Woods, 58, a company director, said:

*"Esso knew about the climate crisis as long ago as 1979. They deceived the public, misled their shareholders, and robbed humanity of a generation's worth of time to reverse the damage their product has caused. I participated in this action in order to highlight this, and to demand the UK do not license any further fossil fuel projects."*

Another of those on trial, Naomi Goddard, 58, a parish Clerk from Calderdale, said:

*"As a Parish Clerk, part of my role is to make sure things are lawful. Is it lawful to continue to license new fossil fuels, when we know that they are killing us? This is the question we need to be asking our government and the judiciary!"*

Oliver Clegg, 20, a plant science student from Manchester, said:

*"I never expected that I'd find myself breaking the law, getting arrested and before a judge. However, I also never expected that the government would license new oil, gas and even coal mines, whilst claiming it's leading the world on the climate crisis! If the government will not stand up to the fossil fuel industry, then it's up to young people to defend our own futures."*

Paul Barnes, 43, a design manager and father of two said:

*"My children, who are seven and four years old, have no concept of the risks our government is taking, by issuing over 100 new fossil fuel licences."*

*"It is my job to protect my children, now and into the future, to weigh up the risks and to take action to prevent them from coming to harm. It is the government's job to do the same for their citizens. A duty they are failing to undertake, for the sake of the short-term profits of oil companies and big business."*

After initially describing the Just Stop Oil supporters as "self appointed vigilantes," on hearing the testimonies from the

defendants, the prosecutor, Mr Fielding, explicitly retracted that comment and conceded the Just Stop Oil supporters were "good people."

In cross examination Esso's terminal safety manager, Craig Pugh, explained that the danger caused by the burning of fossil fuels didn't matter because "there are lots of things going on in the world."

In summation the judge stated:

*"It's abundantly clear that you are all good people. You are intelligent, articulate and a pleasure to deal with. It's unarguable that man-made global warming is real and we are facing a climate emergency. Your aims are admirable and it is accepted by me and the Crown Prosecution Service that your views are reasonable and genuinely held. Your fears are ably and genuinely articulated and are supported by the science."*

*"When the United Nations Secretary General gives a speech saying that the activity of fossil fuel companies is incompatible with human survival, we should all be very aware of the need for change. Millions of people, and I do not dispute that it may be as many as 1 billion people, will be displaced as a result of climate change."*

*"No-one can criticise your motivations. You all gave evidence that was deeply moving. I certainly was moved. The tragedy is that good people have felt so much, without hope, that you feel you have to come into conflict with the criminal justice system."*

*"Thank you for opening my eyes to certain things. Most, I was acutely and depressingly aware of, but there were certain things."*

*"I say this and I mean this sadly, I have to convict you. You are good people and I will not issue a punitive sentence. Your arrests and loss of good character are sufficient. Good people doing the wrong thing cannot make the wrong thing right. I don't say this, ever, but it has been a pleasure dealing with you."*

Whilst addressing one of the defendants who had said (through tears) that he felt guilty for not doing enough to save the planet for his daughter, he said: *"You should feel guilty for nothing. You should feel proud that you care, have concern for the future. I urge you not to break the law again. Good luck to all of you."*

Paul Barnes, Paul Fawkesley and Alan Woods have each been made to pay costs of £500. Oliver Clegg, Jon Deery, Harley Brewer, Diana Hekt have been charged costs of £250 each. All seven have been sentenced to a 12 month conditional discharge and made to pay a £22 surcharge. Naomi Goddard and Sylvie More have both been declared not-guilty, as the Crown Prosecution Service 'offered no evidence' against them.

The result of this trial comes in the wake of the acquittal on the 25th January 2023, of a further four Just Stop Oil supporters who also blocked the Esso Fuel Terminal on the 3rd April '22. [3]

Since the Just Stop Oil campaign launched on the 14th February 2022, there have been over 2,000 arrests and 138 people have spent time in prison, many without trial. There are currently seven Just Stop Oil supporters and one Insulate Britain supporter in prison whilst awaiting trial or serving sentences for actions taken with the campaigns.

We stand with these eight supporters in prison, with the 1,800 victims of our broken criminal justice system imprisoned for over a year without trial and with the 1,700 murdered across the global south, for protecting all our lives.

This is the moment for us to come together and resist the destruction of everything we love, something that is being imposed on us by a few, who only seek to enrich themselves.

We're done with begging. We are going to stop new fossil fuel projects whether those in power agree or not. As citizens, parents and children, we have every right under British law to protect ourselves and those we love. We are the last generation who can solve this. Will you step up? Join us and Just Stop Oil. [4][5]

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## **ENDS**

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## **Notes to Editors**

[1] Just Stop Oil is a coalition of groups working together to demand that the government immediately halt all future licensing and consents for the exploration, development and production of fossil fuels in the UK. Just Stop Oil is a member of the A22 Network of civil resistance projects. Climate Emergency Fund is Just Stop Oil's primary funder for recruitment, training, and capacity building.

[2] Press release from April 3rd '22- <https://juststopoil.org/2022/04/08/just-stop-oil-targets-key-oil-facilities-in-essex-on-their-eighth-day-of-action/>

[3] <https://juststopoil.org/2023/01/25/just-stop-oil-supporters-who-resisted-the-criminality-of-exxon-mobil-acquitted-of-wrongdoing/>

[4] Fair Trials reports that the number of people being held in prison without trial in England and Wales is at its highest for over 50 years, with 1,800 people in prison without trial for at least a year.

[5] A recent report from Global Witness says that more than 1,700 people have died while trying to prevent mining, oil drilling or logging on their lands.

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