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Reclaim the Power

Near Didcot, Oxfordshire

29 May-2 June 2015

**Press pack**

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**1. What is Reclaim the Power?**

Reclaim the Power is a grassroots direct action network fighting for social, economic and climate justice. We aim to join the dots between these inextricably linked issues.

Reclaim the Power grew from an action taken by the group ‘No Dash for Gas’ at West Burton Power Station in 2012, who shut down the gas plant for a week to highlight the Government’s ‘dash for gas’ - plans to build up to 30 new gas-fired power stations. The action reached even more people as EDF, the owners of West Burton, attempted to sue No Dash for Gas for £5 million. They failed, because a public outcry saw 64,000 people sign a petition in protest at EDF’s case.

After ‘No Dash for Gas’ took action at West Burton, the plan was to go back with hundreds more people to kick up an even bigger storm. But then Balcombe happened. In the summer of 2013, this sleepy Sussex town had suddenly become the frontline of the dash for gas, with Cuadrilla undertaking test drilling against the wishes of over 80% of the community. They asked us for support, and we responded, changing our destination from West Burton to Balcombe just two weeks ahead of the camp.

Thousands descended on Balcombe where Cuadrilla's fracking operations were shut down for six days followed by a 28 day rolling blockade, making fracking front-page news. Last year, in the summer of 2014, Reclaim the Power responded to calls for support from the communities around Blackpool where Cuadrilla were planning to stage a full-scale commercial fracking operation. Thirteen nationwide actions sprung from the camp, including activists superglueing themselves to DEFRA's headquarters, occupying Cuadrilla's Blackpool office, blockading IGas' London headquarters, and shutting down a fracking site near Hull.

Reclaim the Power is part of an increasing number of protest groups including Occupy, UK Uncut, Disabled People Against The Cuts, the Greater London Association of Pensioners, Fuel Poverty Action, Rising Tide London, Campaign Against Climate Change and UK Tar Sands Network who are appalled by the monopoly on fuel prices, and a government that is controlled by corporate influence. We are unified in fighting this crisis in democracy.

This year, from May 29th - June 2nd, hundreds of participants will gather again to share skills and knowledge in a variety of workshops as well as taking part in a global day of action against corporate power as part of a co-ordinated grassroots response in the lead-up to COP21, the UN climate talks taking place in Paris this December.

This is also our immediate response to a new Tory government that’s in bed with the fossil fuel industry. For four years, communities all over the UK have managed to hold off fracking, which threatens our air, water, health and the countryside, as well as furthering the devastating effects of climate change, for people everywhere.

Now it will take similar determination from all of us to prevent this government from renewing its push for extreme energy, austerity and more corporate welfare.

But why set up an action camp near Didcot power station?

**2. Why are we in Didcot?**

1. **Because Gas is still dirty and pushing us into fuel poverty**

Didcot B is a gas fired power station built in in 1997. Whilst gas generation is often touted as cleaner than coal, it’s still a fossil fuel that we can’t afford to burn if we’re to have any chance of avoiding runaway climate change.

[Against the advice](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2012/sep/13/uk-dash-gas-illegal-climate-committee" \t "_blank) of the government’s own Committee on Climate Change, Chancellor George Osborne has approved the construction of up to [30 new gas-fired power stations](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-20608948" \t "_blank) such as the recently completed stations at West Burton in Nottinghamshire and Carrington in Salford.  The government intends to go “all out” for shale gas – with up to two thirds of the UK licensed for fracking.  Whether extracting it or burning it, this is the new dash for gas that must be resisted.

Relying on gas to generate electricity isn’t a cheap way to power our homes. As the Confederation of British Industry explained, “Even if you forgot about carbon momentarily, look at European gas price projections. They all disagree on the number, but they all agree on the direction – up.”  The UK suffers some of the [worst levels of fuel poverty in Western Europe](http://www.energybillrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/ACE-and-EBR-fact-file-2013-03-Cold-man-of-Europe.pdf" \t "_blank) with thousands forced to choose between heating and eating each winter.  More fossil fuels might help Npower make [£766 million](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/npowers-three-years-of-zero-corporation-tax-8575099.html" \t "_blank) in profit in three years (whilst paying no corporation tax) but meanwhile 10,000 people die each year from not being able to heat their homes.

Didcot is at a crossroads. The old coal station (Didcot A) and iconic cooling towers have been part-demolished.  By December this year, Npower must decide whether Didcot B station will continue indefinitely (via the [Transitional National Plan](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/details-of-uk-transitional-national-plan" \t "_blank)) or be phased out and closed by 2023 (via the [Limited Life Derogation](http://npowermediacentre.com/releases/ReleaseDetailPage.aspx?releaseId=4868" \t "_blank) scheme).

**2. Because Npower have been lobbying to weaken our emissions controls**

RWE Npower, who own Didcot, are one of the ‘Big Six’ energy companies and have been a key lobbyist both in the UK and Europe in undermining our efforts to tackle climate change whilst protecting their profits.  As we look ahead to the COP21 climate talks in Paris this December, the dominating position of big business – where industry regulates itself with governments and civil servants dancing to their tune, will continue to play a key role in the negotiations - must be confronted.

Fearful that the UK might replicate Germany’s renewable energy transition; UK utilities have lobbied for a ‘Capacity Market’ to be introduced in the recent Energy Act (2013) instead. This uses public subsidy to build new fossil fuel generation (mainly gas) to provide generating capacity against intermittent renewable energy. In effect, energy companies receive public money to build gas-fired stations and will be paid even if those stations are not used. The ‘expert group’ that drew up the design for the Capacity Market comprised mostly of members of the Big Six – representatives from RWE (Npower), Centrica, SSE, Scottish Power plus Drax. [1]

Furthermore, this “safety net” would not be necessary if so much of our energy was not being wasted. One third of the heat in UK homes escapes through uninsulated roofs and walls.

At the European Union, Npower are protecting their profits in the committees responsible for implementing the Industrial Emissions Directive, which aims to reduce air pollution from industrial sources.  Not only do the Big Six have their industry seats on these committees, they also represent the UK government at the same time. Air pollution affects local communities that are not represented, with 29,000 premature UK deaths a year are attributed to air pollution.

**3. Because the Big Six are trying to block the transition to renewable energy**

The business models of the major energy companies rely on centralised, inefficient fossil fuel energy generation. But rising around these lumbering dinosaurs, community-led renewable energy solutions are mounting a fundamental threat to their power and their profits.

Renewable energy in the UK, especially wind and solar are being deployed at far greater rates than was expected 5 – 10 years ago. If communities begin to[generate this electricity for themselves](http://www.backbalcombe.org/" \t "_blank), there is less need to buy expensive, fossil fuel electricity from the Big Six. This is happening in Germany now, where 50% of renewables are owned by individuals, farmers and communities. On one sunny day on May 2014, nearly 75% of the country’s electricity was generated by renewables.

Research shows [3] that it is possible for the UK to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2030 using current technology. When Didcot B gas power station caught fire last October, the lights didn’t go out. It was renewable energy that [picked up the slack](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/damian-carrington-blog/2014/oct/20/while-didcot-b-burned-renewable-energy-powered-on" \t "_blank). Whether extracting it or burning it, there’s no future for a new dash for gas.

Oxfordshire is home to the largest local network of environment groups in the UK with 60 live climate action projects registered in Community Action Groups Oxfordshire, spanning transport, food, waste, biodiversity and energy issues. Collaborating with other groups across the country as part of a supported network, the number keeps growing. Oxfordshire is also being home to the UK's first and largest community owned cooperatively run solar farm - Westmill Solar - and the first onshore wind farm in the South East of England that is 100% community owned, Westmill Wind co-op. Profits from both fund Westmill sustainable energy trust, a local resource for renewable energy.

**References**

[1] [The Big Six on the Run – How renewables are disrupting big energy firms everywhere](http://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/big-six-run-74362.pdf" \t "_blank)

[2] [Smoke and Mirrors – How Europe’s biggest polluters became their own regulators](http://www.greenpeace.org/eu-unit/Global/eu-unit/reports-briefings/2015/Smoke%20and%20Mirror%20final%20report.pdf" \t "_blank) (pg 28)

[3] [Zero Carbon Britain – Rethinking the Future](http://www.zerocarbonbritain.org/)

**3. Timeline and filming opportunities**

Our media team is available for interviews throughout the time of the camp and can provide contacts for local residents in the area, as well as images, on request.

**Friday 29 :** Camp location revealed. Camp set up. Cameras welcome onsite from late afternoon. Please identify yourself to the crew on the gate.

**Saturday 30 – Sunday 31:** Trainings, workshops, assemblies. Cameras welcome onsite 1pm-3pm: please identify yourself to the crew on the gate. Please ask the media team (07597136793) if you would like images of workshops.

**Monday 1**: Day of action. Cameras welcome onsite after 1pm-5pm: please identify yourself to the crew on the gate. Please ask the media team (07597136793) if you would like to attend an action or would like images from one.

**4. Code of conduct**

At Reclaim the Power we are keen to communicate our reasons for being camped near

Didcot as widely as possible; this means engaging in mainstream, alternative, and social media. However, it is vital that our engagement with the media is balanced with camp participants’ ability to live, eat, socialise, and plan for action. For this reason, we have put together a media policy to guide both participants and journalists alike:

**General information**

A member of the media team is placed outside the limits of the camp in order to direct journalists towards the delegated spokespeople and /or the media tent. We will be holding media briefings daily to provide the media with the latest information and give interviews. The location of these is to be announced.

During Sunday 30th May, much of the day will be spent planning for the mass action the following day. Therefore, mission groups planning for the action will have the opportunity of opting out of being filmed on this day and the media group will ensure this is enforced. If print or web journalists join a mission group they must identify themselves to their group and ensure that there is complete agreement of all group members that they are able to participate (facilitated by the media team). This is so that the group can make an informed decision on what can be reported.

**Film and TV**

TV and film camera crews will ordinarily be allowed on site during a two hour time slot

(1pm-3pm) each day. The media group is empowered to use their discretion to extend this for individual film and camera crews. All TV and film camera crews must be accompanied by a member of the camp’s media team, identifiable in high-viz vests.

**Print and online**

Print journalists and bloggers must inform the Welcome Tent or Media Team that they are in the camp; they should also introduce themselves at any meetings if they are camping. This enables participants to make an informed choice about whether or not to speak to you.

**Photography**

All photographers must get permission before taking photos of people, whether working for the media or not. Everyone is asked to be mindful of the fact that many people attending will not want to be photographed and are probably enjoying a week away from techno-gadgetry overload, so give them a break.

**Documentation Working Group**

A Reclaim the Power documentation working group will be working to produce a range of images, footage, and writings from the camp; if you would like to contribute to their work, please introduce yourself at the media tent. They will need to adhere to the same rules in terms of asking people for permission to take photographs and introducing themselves at village morning meetings.

email: press@reclaimthepower.org.uk

Twitter: [@nodashforgas](https://twitter.com/nodashforgas)

Tel: 07597 136793

If you are a print or online journalist/blogger and you would like images or footage

from the camp, either:

* follow us on Flickr at: [www.flickr.com/photos/reclaimthepower2015](https://www.flickr.com/photos/reclaimthepower2015/)
* ask on Twitter at [@nodashforgas](https://twitter.com/nodashforgas)
* ring us 07597 136793
* or ask the media group onsite

You can also get on our press list by emailing press@reclaimthepower.org.uk.

**5. Resources**

**Resources:**

**Coal Action Network- What's wrong with Coal?** - An overview of the negative effects of the coal industry on communities, wildlife, and the climate. [coalaction.org.uk/why-not-coal/](http://coalaction.org.uk/why-not-coal/)

**Environmental Justice Foundation - The Gathering Storm:** Climate change, security and conflict (2014) - A report which analyses the multiple interlinking negative effects of widespread climate change including resource and water scarcity, and population displacement and links it to human rights issues. [www.ejfoundation.org/report/gathering-storm-climate-change-security-and-conflict](http://www.ejfoundation.org/report/gathering-storm-climate-change-security-and-conflict)

**Platform - Energy Beyond Neoliberalism (2014).** A report published as part of The Kilburn Manifesto which explores the damaging effects of the corporate stranglehold on society, and explores alternative ways to create a resilient and democratic energy future. <http://platformlondon.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Manifesto_energy_beyond_neoliberalism.pdf>

**Zero Carbon Britain** - the flagship research project from the [Centre for Alternative Technology](http://www.cat.org.uk/index.html" \t "_blank), showing that a modern, zero-emissions society is possible using technology available today. <http://zerocarbonbritain.org/>

**No Dash for Gas: Disaster Gas -** An overview of why the government’s plans to build 30 new gas-fired power stations is a disaster for people and the climate: <http://www.nodashforgas.org.uk/why-we-must->stop-gas/

**Fuel Poverty Action: Why Gas is a fuel we can’t afford** - a short, introductory guide to why our bills our rising, what’s going on with climate change, the situation with UK energy policy and the emerging social movement against the ‘dash for gas’. <http://fuelpovertyaction.org.uk/2013/04/23/new-resource-gas-a->fuel-we-cant-afford/

**Platform: Connecting the dots -** A blog from oil and gas watchdog Platform outlining why frontier gas means more repression and environmental injustice: <http://platformlondon.org/2013/07/12/reclaim->power-no-dash-for-gas/

**Friends of the Earth:** [The Big Six on the Run – How renewables are disrupting big energy firms everywhere](http://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/big-six-run-74362.pdf" \t "_blank)

**Greenpeace**: [Smoke and Mirrors – How Europe’s biggest polluters became their own regulators](http://www.greenpeace.org/eu-unit/Global/eu-unit/reports-briefings/2015/Smoke%20and%20Mirror%20final%20report.pdf" \t "_blank) (pg 28)

**Frack-Off: Fracking Threat to the UK:** <http://frack-off.org.uk/fracking-hell>