

Climate Camp Scotland 2023 – report by RS21 members

*This year, Climate Camp Scotland set up on the doorstep of INEOS, Scotland's biggest polluter. **rs21 members** participated and here they report on the camp and lessons learned.*

From 12 to 17 July, the oil town of Grangemouth experienced a new sight. Tents were pitched, people wandered about with camping gear, and dog-walkers were making new friends. Climate and social justice activists from across Britain had come to the town for the third Scotland Climate Camp.

Why Grangemouth?

Grangemouth is host to one of Europe's largest petrochemical facilities and ports, producing plastics, refined oil, and various other products. Much of the facility is run by INEOS, owned by British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe. One of Britain's richest men, he is estimated to avoid around £4bn of taxes through 'residing' in Monaco. From 2013 onwards, Grangemouth workers have been [repeatedly victimised](#) by this management. This creates a site of near-cartoonish evil, that climate and worker organisers decided to focus upon.

On several occasions at the camp, local residents and workers spoke of the impacts of the port and industrial site. Workers are exploited, the community is made ever sicker by the port, and the wider planet is destroyed. On an evening walk to the nearby bay, those at the camp saw thousands of plastic pieces washed upon the shore, released by the facility.

It is for the above reasons that Climate Camp Scotland decided to focus on Grangemouth. The camps are structured to have several days of political discussion and training, and then a mass direct action at the close. In this way, people get to learn from each other, both technical skills and political analyses, as well as, in the end, taking action together. As

opposed to actions done by a small group of activists, the aim is to get something akin to a 'mass' character – a space where community members, workers and environmentalists have all got to know each other and engage in resistance together for the first time.

The program

The camp this year began with an address from [Ecuadorian activist Leonidas Iza](#), leader of the country's biggest indigenous group. Iza led the 2019 and 2022 protests against the Ecuadorian government's austerity measures and rising fuel prices, which disproportionately impacted the country's poorest.

His speech brought the urgency of internationalism to the camp. We must not only unite workers and environmentalists against facilities like Grangemouth's, but also be able to mobilise in solidarity with those globally facing the violence of capitalism.

The workshops were interesting and varied. They included a discussion with the Scottish histories of resistance project, which highlighted the importance of learning from past struggle and explored how our climate movement could be understood in a historical context. Fuel Poverty Action ran a workshop on their [Energy For All campaign](#), and how a shift to renewables could combat overpriced heating bills. A workshop on anti-fascism dug into how liberal discourse can be hacked by fascists to swing mainstream ideas on climate to the right.

In addition, an important workshop on the history of energy transitions looked at first-hand accounts from workers who experienced the move from coal to oil. The discussion explored what we would need to bring about a 'just transition' to renewables led by rank-and-file workers.

The artistic side of the camp was quite wonderful – a climate cabaret took place one evening, and another there was an

impressive open mic. A band performed fantastic songs against police, billionaires and queerphobia. There was also an arts tent where people could make banners and masks of INEOS-mogul Jim Ratcliffe. The chance to meet other activists and swap stories was also an invaluable part of the week.

The action days

On Saturday the 15th, the camp geared up for action. Early in the morning, around 100 activists began the march from the site to the facility. As they attempted to exit the forest and walk towards the facility, police officers appeared en-masse to block their passage.

This tells us something crucial about the role the police force has today. The police do not protect INEOS workers facing victimisation, they do not take on the billionaire owner who's avoiding an estimated £4bn in tax, they don't do anything for the Grangemouth community who are being poisoned. Rather, the police mobilise with force to protect the polluters.

What resulted was a pitched struggle where the marchers attempted on several occasions to pass police lines, with 5 being arrested for attempting to merely try and find ways to walk past the police. The march ended when police ruined the entire road system around Grangemouth, so they could kettle a series of people marching along the pavement.

Not all was lost. In all their excitement to harass and attack the protesters from the camp, Scotland's finest had foolishly left their flank wide-open. Having sent a significant number of officers to that end of the facility, they were not prepared for [another crew of activists](#) from the camp, who succeeded in entering the site unopposed by private security or the police.

Having succeeded in entering the site, these activists proceeded to occupy the roof of the facility's power station

for seven hours, with a banner reading 'Climate Justice for Grangemouth'. The police force, terrified now that activists had succeeded to get on site, were forced to allow them off-site without arrest having recognised that attempting to remove them by force from the roof would likely end badly.

Early in the week, [activists on kayaks](#) had also succeeded in getting on site with a banner reading 'INEOS: Profiting from Pollution'. Finally, after the camp had packed up, [This is Rigged activists](#) further succeeded in getting into the site and blockading it with a series of actions lasting many days. Ultimately, the forces of the state, despite their desperation to defend fossil fuel billionaires, have been revealed as incompetent. This also shows that we can be more impactful than we ever thought we could be.

Questioning the way forward

A core strength of Climate Camp Scotland is its experimental attitude toward its work. The camp relies upon an ecosystem of organisations, who provide everything from accessible toilets to facilitation of meetings, legal advice to delicious food. There is an openness to reflecting on what configurations would be most effective, and how the participatory democracy of the camp could be expanded.

One of the challenges of the camp was how to connect the educational aspect of the workshops with the action-oriented nature of the week. On one hand, a case could be made for focusing the workshops more closely on the imminent action: the skills training could focus on fence-climbing rather than tree-climbing, a history workshop could look at previous instances of direct action and what those achieved. Given that many attendees are new to this type of activism, allowing more critical engagement with direct action strategy could bring new ideas into the fold of the action.

On the other hand, climate justice depends on a lot more than

direct action, and it's essential to broaden out the conversation. The mix of workshops was eclectic, but it catered to a range of concerns which all have a place in the discourse of activism. A camp with a pedagogical focus, separate from action, would also be a useful intervention in our movement. Given the police presence was particularly onerous after the camp's action, a safer space could be generated by separating camp and action. (By the end of the camp, there were allegedly 300-400 police officers on duty in the Grangemouth area.)

Another alternative would be to split the camp into different strategic pathways – a collection of workshops and activity which respectively focus on direct action, broader discourse and community outreach. The question hinges on how the camp could best enable more people to engage with climate activism toward a just transition.

Reaching workers and front-line communities

The camp's stated aim to 'build bridges between workers, front-line communities, and the climate movement' was more difficult in Grangemouth than Aberdeen the previous year. Aberdeen had [a community campaign](#) which the climate camp was able to support, generating solidarity with local people in Torry. In Grangemouth the route was less clear, although conversations occurred with local people across the week which point the way to building stronger relationships in future. The camp's media team drew connections between INEOS's environmental harms and its impacts on the health of people who live in its toxic vicinity. Conversations with locals were positive. During the march, Grangemouth residents were clear-sighted about the fact that it was the police who stopped traffic, not climate activists.

Although the climate camp is clear that we need radical direct action that isn't simply adventurist, but is actually linked to a mass politics of unions, activists, and frontline

communities, that is easier said than done. Building those relationships is slow and difficult, particularly given the way mass media tend to distort environmentalist actions. [Brian Parkin's account](#) of the history of Unite in INEOS is essential reading to understand the necessity to go beyond the union bureaucracy in seeking to reach out to the facility's sub-contracted rank and file.

How can direct action link with the demands of workers and communities? It is worth thinking about how broad climate messaging could be supplemented with more practical demands. A focus on energy bills, cancer rates, life expectancy, and the sheer practicalities of converting INEOS machinery to worker-controlled renewable energy production, must be hashed out and made tangible, if climate activists aren't to be rendered alien abstract beings by the mainstream media. The fight for climate justice is a fight for a better quality of life, locally and internationally. We need to make these material necessities feel real in local areas.

INEOS want to close Bo'ness Road and turn it into a private internal road for their facility, and [the community are against](#) the plan. If that campaign were to escalate, it would be a good opportunity to create the kind of practical solidarity we saw in Aberdeen. Further, just transition strategies need to be developed which will facilitate the agency of [rank and file](#) INEOS workers to figure out the shift to sustainable energy.

Climate Camp Scotland rose to the challenge of setting up in Grangemouth this year, and now the journey begins to incorporate the many lessons learned, so we can progress Scotland's climate movement further.

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Ecosocialist.scot Editor's Note: RS21 – [Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century](#) – is a group originating in splits in the British Socialist Workers Party around a decade ago. ecosocialist.scot members also participated in Climate Camp Scotland and helped organise the tour of Britain by [Leonidas Iza](#). We will be writing about our experiences and reflections in future articles.