

## Controversial plans for fossil fuel extraction sites continue to threaten West Lancashire

Attempts to halt the controversial gas extraction technique known as 'fracking' continued to gather pace throughout autumn on both local and national levels, after studies found probable links between gas extraction activities and earth tremors in West Lancashire. The study, funded by Cuadrilla Resources, the company behind shale gas extraction in Lancashire, found that it was 'highly probable' that fracking had caused tremors near Blackpool in Spring 2011, before adding a convenient caveat that this was due to a combination of unusual geological factors rather than any direct consequence of drilling. The news was quickly followed by direct action protests co-ordinated between Frack Off!, a national action group focusing on gas extraction, as well as local residents concerned for their safety, who occupied drilling rigs at Banks, a village located between Southport and Preston. At the same time, groups in London picketed and disrupted meetings at the Shale Gas Environmental Summit, a conference organised by the fracking industry.

The West Lancashire and Fylde coastal plains have been the

centre of Cuadrilla's UK drilling activity in the last few years, and while the availability of the gas has long been known, the continuing worldwide rise in the price of dwindling fossil fuel resources has meant that fracking has only recently become financially viable. This method of extraction involves pumping a mix of chemicals and water in to shale rock underground, in order to crack the rock and force out the gas contained within. Fracking activity in North America has seen contaminated water supplies, confirming concerns that gas or the chemicals used to force gas to the surface could be damaged underground water tables. The BBC's Inside Out programme ran a feature in late November on fracking in Bradford County, Pennsylvania, demonstrating that the cost of a handful of engineering jobs at local drills was an abundance of health and environmental problems for local residents, including water with such a high gas content that it became flammable. While the tremors have so far registered low on the Richter scale, the prospect of contaminated water raises question marks over Cuadrilla's approach to safety and diligence

in preventing safety breaches.

Groups such as the aforementioned Frack Off!, as well as household names such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth have been effective in raising awareness of the issue. Groups have organised film nights, question-and-answer sessions and demonstrations, arguing that the willingness of companies to conduct feasibility studies in to fracking is a sign of the earth's stagnating fossil fuel supply. One demonstrator, speaking to The Guardian during the occupation of the drilling rigs, stated that "Conventional fossil fuels have begun to run out and the system is moving towards more extreme forms of energy like fracking, tar sands, and deep water drilling." In reply, Cuadrilla have not been slow in mobilising their spokesmen and publicity advisers, claiming, against all other evidence, that fracking is a safe method of retrieving resources that does not cause tremors, but rather finds extractable gas in areas where tremors are likely. This is despite British Geological Survey evidence confirming that tremors have sky-rocketed since fracking began.

Cuadrilla stopped drilling near Singleton and Preesall on the Fylde after a national outcry earlier this year following tremors, but it continues to drill just a few miles across the Ribble estuary at Hesketh Bank and Banks. Moreover, the legacy of mountain-top removal to extract coal beneath the Appalachian mountains of Virginia, or the destruction of tar sands in Alberta, suggest that such high-cost methods of resource extraction will cost as much again to the people and environment of West Lancashire.

---

### 'Occupy' Movement Reaches Preston

The growing Occupy movement, an on-going, world-wide series of non-violent protests and demonstrations against social and economic inequality, has reached Preston this autumn.

Current 'Occupy Preston' participants have initiated a weekly public presence at the Peace Gardens on Friargate every Saturday afternoon, alongside hosting open group meetings during the week to develop possible plans.

The group is relatively small at present, but with the increased coverage and interest in Occupy protests worldwide it's hoped that the numbers will soon grow to form a more ambitious and larger scale local occupation.

The current group encourage poetry, art, music and other forms of creative expression to help spread the word, and are

keen to have new ideas and input.

The group regularly meet at Beautiful Planet, Preston's volunteer-ran, not-for-profit green centre and community space at 69a Friargate – and all are welcome to attend. Drop in to find out meeting times or find 'Occupy Preston' on facebook.

---

### Solidarity Necessary for Successful Industrial Action

November 30<sup>th</sup> saw close to 1.5 million (reports vary) nationally engage in industrial action against government plans to reduce their pensions. Preston, home to the Lancashire County Council, saw 2000 or so striking workers march along Fishergate to congregate at a rally on the Flag Market.

In spite of this widespread action the government has made no indication that it will let up on its plans for pension reform, and as such further strike action may be necessary to make them see that the raiding of pension funds to pay off the national deficit is entirely unacceptable. It is therefore of utmost importance to the success of this action that solidarity is maintained and that working people see an attack on one as an attack on all.

This is especially true when the media both local and national from the LEP to BBC News 24 appear to have become fixated on the inconvenience the strike will cause for working people not involved in the strike, and placing the sole blame for this inconvenience at the feet of the

unions rather than the government.

As inconveniencing as it may be for parents to have to arrange childcare and NHS patients having appointments rearranged, the struggle by the public sector workers for a fair pension must take precedent. It is through strike action in the past that working people as a class have won the 8-hour day and the weekend after all!

By focusing on the inconvenience the media and government are trying to divide working people, but if solidarity is maintained and the industrial action ultimately successful it will show people across society and in other industries that it is possible to stand up to the government's cuts and attacks on services.

---

### **Lancashire Free Press aims and principles:**

- Provide a free and alternative news and information source
- Report on news ignored by corporate media
- Cover stories and events of political and social importance to the local community
- Undertake the above with a volunteer led/not-for-profit ethic

---

To get in touch or send contributions, please email:

[lancashirefreepress@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:lancashirefreepress@hotmail.co.uk)