

BY ORGANIZERS FROM **JUST STOP OIL**,
LAST GENERATION, AND THE **A22 NETWORK**

SOUP THROWERS **AND** SUPER GLUERS

INSIDE EUROPE'S CLIMATE UPRISING



Soup Throwers and Super Gluers is a book about democracy, dissent and the price of speaking truth to power. Timely, courageous and deeply thought-provoking, it exposes a deeply troubling reality: liberal democracies increasingly defend the appearance of representation, participation, inclusion, while repressing minorities, dissenters and those who stand by their side. More alarming than censorship itself is the self-censorship that spreads when societies learn to look away.

Through the voices of those who accepted to endure pressure, intimidation, arrest and public vilification in order to confront the social crisis and our so-called liberal governments' failures, A22 reminds us that fundamental freedoms are not preserved by memory alone, but by those willing to exercise and defend them. Memory is in fact responsibility, not merely commemoration.

We Europeans, perhaps more than anyone else in the West, must ask ourselves whether we have truly learned from history, or merely learned to recite it. And which West do we claim as our inheritance: the Magna Graecia of philosophy, inquiry and civic thought, or a West shaped increasingly by the political and strategic influence of the United States and the predatory elites mostly domiciled there. As Europeans, above all we must ask whether we have truly learned anything from history, or merely memorised it.

An important testimony to the courage, contradictions and human cost of nonviolent civil resistance, this book is an urgent call for societal introspection, and not only to resist repression, but to recover the moral courage required to confront it.

— Francesca Albanese, international legal scholar and human rights expert

It is endlessly tempting to slot the A22 civil resistance experience into the “activists complaining about things” category. Nothing could be further from the truth. “Climate” is not a thing—it is an everything—it is affected by everything and it affects everything. If we allow this “everything” to be destroyed we go extinct. This explains the intensity of passion and commitment that flows out of the pages of this book. There are no words to comprehend the cost of failure.

— Roger Hallam, co-founder of Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil

Part political thriller, part strategic analysis, and part cri de coeur, this book brings you inside the most energetic and prominent climate movement in recent years. It was an honor to raise funds for them.

— **Margaret Klein Salamon, Board Chair, Climate Emergency Fund; author of *Facing the Climate Emergency***

The climate crisis demands that we move beyond easy judgments of those who disrupt business as usual. This book offers a rare inside account of how movements are built, the dilemmas activists face, and the courage required to confront systems that place profit ahead of people and planet. Honest, thoughtful and often deeply moving, it deserves to be read by activists, policymakers and anyone who believes that another future is still possible.

— **Kumi Naidoo, President of the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative; author of *Boiling Point: Can Citizen Action Save the World?***

For decades I've been gripped by a single question: can we deliberately start new social movements—can we incubate them? Human history offers very few examples of successful movement incubators, and the ones that worked came and went. A22 did something almost no one has ever done: it incubated movements in multiple countries at once, and those movements became the largest mass protest movements in their nations at their time. Whatever you make of their politics or their tactics, every activist should be studying this incubator and these movements—and there are vanishingly few documents that explain the A22 experiment as clearly as this one. The history of the world may turn on whether we can understand the last generation of mass protest movements and build a better incubator for the next.

— **Paul Engler, co-author of *This Is an Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt Is Shaping the Twenty-First Century***

“Some readers will open this book curious about how anyone could throw soup on a Van Gogh or climb roadsigns over highways. They will close it understanding that these choices were the visible edge of a rigorously argued strategy—one that took seriously how attention is produced in modern democracies, how the state’s supporting pillars can be moved, and how the industry is never the real target when the state is the one holding it up. This is what a movement memoir looks like when the activists have already done the strategic thinking themselves and have no intention of leaving it to the historians.”

— Carlos Saavedra, Founder of Ayni Institute

This book doesn’t just tell you why climate activists take direct action, it shows what it actually costs them. These first-hand accounts don’t flinch from the hard parts: the disagreements, the exhaustion, the ways repression can fracture a movement from within. I felt real pain as I read these pages, with activists describing the weight of fighting for a future that can feel impossibly large to hold. But what makes this collection so powerful isn’t only the courage of the actions it documents, but the honesty behind them. These powerful stories of personal and collective transformation also captured something rare: the moments when shared struggle brings out people’s best selves and fosters real solidarity. They showed how taking action, even imperfect, difficult action, can turn grief into agency and isolation into solidarity. The book will help activists around the world looking to build and create the future we need as we face climate change. It is essential reading for anyone serious about understanding resistance from the inside and building powerful, transformative movements. It is a book that trusts its readers, activists and allies alike, with the truth about what it really takes to fight for the planet.

**— Robyn Gulliver, University of Queensland; co-author of
The Advocates: Women Within the Australian Environmental Movement**

SOUP THROWERS AND SUPER GLUERS

Inside Europe's Climate Uprising

By Chloé Bertini, Cécile Bessire, Harley F. Brewer, Thibaut Cantet,

Carla Hinrichs, Henning Jeschke,

and Pierre Taieb

With contributions from Beatrice Costantino, Anna Holland,

Hannah Hunt, Alizée Le Fur, and Laura Paracini



Soup Throwers and Super Gluers: Inside Europe's Climate Uprising by Chloé Bertini, Cécile Bessire, Harley F. Brewer, Thibaut Cantet, Carla Hinrichs, Henning Jeschke, Pierre Taieb, Beatrice Costantino, Anna Holland, Hannah Hunt, Alizée Le Fur, and Laura Paracini (2026)

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Front cover images: Activists Phoebe Plummer and Anna Holland from Just Stop Oil after throwing tinned soup at Vincent Van Gogh's famous 1888 work *Sunflowers* at the National Gallery in London, Friday, October 14, 2022. Credit: Photo provided by Just Stop Oil. Used with permission; Activist Alizée Le Fur from Dernière Rénovation interrupts the 2022 French Open semi-final tying herself to the net. Credit: Photo provided by Dernière Rénovation. Used with permission.

Back cover image: Just Stop Oil activists take action outside a UK government office over the granting of new drilling licenses, June 2022. Credit: Photo provided by Just Stop Oil. Used with permission.

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FOREWORD

Look at any historic episode of collective societal insanity from the last 200 years—be it economic crashes, mass slaughter, or rapid descent into authoritarian rule, and, in almost every case, there is a critical binding agent holding together these destructive nonsensical eruptions that allows them to escalate and spread.

Whether it's the near total cult-like grip that the Nazi party held over Germany in the 1930s, or the cartoonishly fraudulent and broken banking world that birthed the global financial collapse of 2007, the day-in, day-out work and leisure routine of the “professional classes” holds these flare ups of group madness in a business-as-usual and deadly effective shell.

After all, how does a modern nation like the United States accept the idea of legalizing synthetic heroin in the form of OxyContin as it did in 1995? The results were tragically predictable: a million people died from the opioid epidemic and are still dying to this day.

Yet in the early 1990s, government officials, regulators, lobbyists, doctors, etc., woke up, drove to work, had coffee, then approved the commercial release of a drug that decimated whole communities before driving home for dinner with their family.

What stopped the tens of thousands involved in the effort from stopping and declaring, “This is crazy. I won't sell heroin like a consumer product?”

Because like all of us they wanted that big promotion, raise, or to pay for their kids' school or braces. Or maybe they had a company retreat or a class reunion to attend and just weren't focusing on how legalizing (with a prescription) highly addictive, deadly opioids would destroy millions of people's lives.

It's not so much an “I was just following orders” excuse but more “I was just following my daily planner.”

As someone who has attempted to create awareness and action in response to human caused, rapid planetary climate warming, I had a moment about five years ago when I felt particularly beaten down and exhausted after trying and trying to get people in government, media, and industry to break away from their

day-to-day professional routines and realize how grave and urgent the threat we're facing is.

As a result, after years of trying, I had been eyerolled hundreds of times, mocked, ignored, and told I was being hysterical, by senators, billionaires, mainstream journalists, fellow filmmakers, friends, and family.

And I found myself completely exhausted and fairly demoralized.

But then I happened to meet various members from a collective of international climate activist groups calling themselves the A22 Network.

In a series of fundraising zooms & meetings, Roger Hallam and Margaret Klein Salamon introduced me to young, committed, and very sharp activists who were doing something simple and breathtakingly honest to disrupt the business-as-usual spell that has civilization marching toward a violent and dark future.

Like the stories of dolphins pushing human swimmers away from unseen dangerous sharks, these activists were using their actual bodies to disrupt the business-as-usual, day-to-day tasks that animate modern capitalist society. Every day, hundreds of millions drive to and from work, watch sports on the television, or maybe go to a museum to see a pretty painting.

Groups from the A22 Network disrupted and halted televised sporting events and blocked work commutes. Even the simple act of looking at a painting in a museum was fractured by members tossing tomato soup on several iconic paintings' protective coverings.

Stonehenge, the earliest and most iconic symbol of Northern European civilization, was tagged with the distinctive (and easily washed off) neon orange paint of Just Stop Oil.

For the first time maybe ever, the climate crisis had become frontpage news.

And the reaction from leaders, media, and monied representatives of big capital—those with the most to lose if “business as usual” is halted?

Fury. Raw fury.

Because no matter how many misleading or inciting news stories the corporate and billionaire-owned news media churned out there was always an unspoken question underneath every one of the A22 Network's climate actions that simply

could not be denied: why would these young people or scientists or retirees or farmers do this?

Why?

Why would these people choose to get arrested, attacked, jailed, screamed at, and even deported when they could be peacefully looking at beautiful paintings or watching tennis?

Why?

And the answer to that question is more powerful than any army, police, billionaire, or oil company.

– **Adam McKay**, writer and director of *Don't Look Up* and *The Big Short*



**HUNGER
STREIK**

**DER LETZTEN
GENERATION**

PART I:

*Acting As If
the Truth*

Were Real



STARVING FOR A DIFFERENCE

Henning Jeschke

The German federal elections of September 2021 were four weeks away when the seven of us decided to stop eating.

The idea kept returning in conversations and surfacing on calls, never quite going away for months. I had been watching the climate movement contract. Extinction Rebellion, which had started with genuine radicalism, was softening. The energy that had filled streets in 2018 and 2019 had dispersed into working groups and internal processes. I had been on Zoom calls about what to do next with a Pole, an American, an Australian, and a Briton. The latter was Roger Hallam, the organizer who had co-founded Extinction Rebellion (XR).

The Australian was a young activist named Sergio. He had begun calling himself “Last Generation” and published a manifesto online. I signed it. The clarity of it moved me. “The elites are killing us.” In the UK, a campaign called Insulate Britain was preparing to block motorways. The question everywhere was the same: what action, at this moment, could cut through?

A hunger strike, we thought. Young people refusing to eat until election candidates responded or until we collapsed—whichever came first. Before the election, before the moment of whatever collective power remained, we would make our bodies the argument.

Rumen and I agreed to do the hunger strike together. He was an old school friend of mine. As we invited others to join, we didn’t say, “Would you consider joining if we did it?” but “We will do it. Will you join us?” That small shift in framing turned an idea into a commitment.

Image (previous page): The hunger strikers Henning Jeschke and Lina Eichler hold the first of their daily vigils in front of the German parliament building.

Image (left): Hunger strikers Mephisto, Lina Eichler, and Rumen Grabow of Letzte Generation give a press conference to a tent full of journalists in Berlin after roughly two weeks on hunger strike, September 15, 2021.

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Rumen immediately began building the medical support structure: doctors, psychologists, the infrastructure of care that would keep us alive long enough for the action to work. Julian, from my hometown of Greifswald, took on logistics. Then there was Lina, who I had just started a romantic relationship with, and who would later become one of the people I built everything with afterward. She joined alongside Mephisto and Isi—three young women from western Germany I had watched do courageous actions, including occupying the roof of a parliament building to protest coal. Mephisto and Lina would hunger strike; Isi would run support. Jakob and Hannah, both from XR meetings I had attended or organized, rounded out the group—Jakob striking, Hannah handling press. We had trained 16 people in the medical protocols. In the end, seven of us went in.

I had asked myself whether I should step back, whether the action needed me more as an organizer than as a body on the ground. If people were giving their health, possibly their lives, the supporting infrastructure had to be good enough to make it mean something. I decided to risk it with the others. I'm so glad I did.

We set up camp in front of the Reichstag, the German parliament. Getting permission to be there required two committed people navigating weeks of bureaucratic coordination. We were thrilled when it came through. This is Germany and there are rules: we had to maintain visible political activity at all times, which meant daily speeches, reading texts on the parliament stairs, banners, a constant outward presence. Nothing could be staked into the ground, to protect the underground irrigation systems, so we weighted the tent corners with sandbags. We had to move the tents periodically to let the grass recover underneath. On the first day we were already arguing about the wording on flyers and had to abandon the idea. But then we held the press conference, read the manifesto, and it stopped mattering.

The first four days were wretched. Constant headaches. The physical insistence of hunger is nothing like appetite. It is a demand that does not negotiate. We were irritable and cross with each other. Conflicts that would have been minor became sharp. I remember cycling back to our flat from the camp on day two or three and being able to smell every bakery from 20 meters away as I was passing by. Every smell became overwhelming, weirdly heightened, while the rest of the body was filing its complaints.

Then, around day five, something shifted. The headaches faded. A strange stability arrived. And I noticed something unexpected: I had so much time. No food to buy, prepare, cook, eat, clean up after. Hours opened that I hadn't known

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were being consumed. I used them to post online, write to supporters, think through strategy. It was like this for all of us, a paradoxical productivity inside the deprivation.

Someone came to the camp in that first week to run a workshop on mindset. They were an experienced faster, and what they said stayed with me. The psychological trap of a hunger strike, they explained, is framing it as endurance: *I just have to stay strong for a few more days*. That framing makes every day a countdown to escape. The shift that makes it bearable is different: *I am choosing to give something of myself to something larger*. It sounds simple, but it changed how I experienced the days that followed.

What did not change was the cold. Even in relatively good weather, a fasting body cannot generate heat properly. We drank endless hot tea, kept hot water bottles against our skin, slept in multiple layers inside doubled sleeping bags. On day nine, one of the strikers lost consciousness briefly and had to be checked by doctors. They returned.

The hunger strike caught the attention of the public. We had reached 50,000 people on Twitter on the first day alone. Soon, we had front-page coverage. In under two weeks, the story was everywhere. A Berlin radio station ran a piece that caught the attention of Jörg Alt, a Jesuit priest based in Nuremberg, coming out of decades of activism including international work to ban landmines and improve conditions for immigrants in Germany. His connections in the Global South had already made the human cost of the climate crisis concrete to him. He emailed us. We talked. He told us our demands were valid but would not reach politicians through media alone. Through his network, he could deliver them directly to political offices.

All the offices refused a public debate. But a rhythm established itself: we fasted and escalated, offices refused, media covered our response to the refusals, politicians were forced to respond again. Jörg made sure the pressure didn't dissipate between cycles. He was one of those people who arrive at exactly the right moment and understand immediately what is needed.

On day twenty of the hunger strike, Lina collapsed into my arms. I held her hand while the emergency medical team put her onto a stretcher. Watching the ambulance leave, I was frightened in a way I had not been frightened for myself. She

was going to be alright. But the fear for her was different in quality from anything I had felt about my own condition.

I had felt stable, physically, through most of the strike. Too weak to walk by the final week—my father came to Berlin and pushed me in a wheelchair—but mentally sharp, or so I believed. Watching the videos back later, I was shocked to hear how slowly I was speaking. The body was further along than I knew.

But the conflicts inside the camp were the hardest part. Harder than the hunger, harder than the cold. We had made a plan before we started—the strike would remain open, meaning that those who wanted to escalate to a full thirst strike could do so. But as the weeks accumulated and some strikers had already stopped, decisions that were reached after five hours of discussion would be reopened the next day by people who were no longer even fasting. I was furious, repeatedly. The press team at one point didn't want to publicize that anyone was still on hunger strike. I felt the whole thing coming apart at the seams even as it was reaching its climax.

What kept me in it was simpler than strategy. I was convinced this moment would not come again. I thought about the people who would look back at this period from the future, how they would see us and what we did.

By day twenty-one, there were others who joined in solidarity fasting for a few days. One of them was Lea, who had come from the same XR strategy groups as me. We had organized together, done actions together, and four months before the strike we had moved into a flat together in Berlin, neither of us knowing then that we would end up here. Lea had studied civil resistance history and thought carefully about strategy. She was serious in a way that mattered when everything felt like it was breaking down. On day twenty-one she began fasting. And on her sixth day she went into the thirst strike with me.

That was on day twenty-seven. By then there were only the two of us. Without water, the body's deterioration accelerates from daily to hourly. There is no longer a question of endurance across weeks. There is only the present hour.

I did not speak much. Speaking made my throat unbearably dry. Others gave the interviews. I sat with the knowledge that if I did not open my eyes at some point, that might be the end. The thought came and went. It was strange, but I felt strong.

Then my phone rang. An anonymous number.

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The voice said it was Olaf Scholz, the presumed incoming chancellor. The election was a day away.

I waved to everyone around me—Lea, the supporters, the camera people. “This is it. It’s Scholz.”

Everyone leaned in over the phone in my hands. I tried to put it on speaker and missed the button. I was shaking. It was the evening before the election—the last possible moment before he could disappear into the post-election vacuum and the demand would die with the news cycle.

He said he would agree to the debate. Not to the later, escalated demand that he personally declare a climate emergency, but to the original demand: a public, televised debate, open for everyone to watch. After the election, because there was no time before it. But he framed it explicitly as: “I am doing this so you will eat again. So you will not suffer. So you will not die.”

I said, “Yes. That is the deal. And of course we will eat if you commit to a public debate.”

But politics is a dirty business when this much is at stake. We needed it to be unretractable. So we pushed: the debate within four weeks. And immediately—within minutes—both his office and ours would post statements on social media confirming the agreement and confirming that we were ending the strike. He agreed.

I put down the phone. We had won.

That night in the hospital, they checked my pulse: twenty-six beats per minute.

The next day was election day. I was still in the hospital, but I got onto the international Zoom call. Picture it: twenty-seven days without food, eight hours without water, coming directly from the hospital, going into the call to give the network a report.

I could tell them a story of victory.

Seventy thousand people watched the debate on YouTube. We laid out the demands in plain sight, starting with the simplest possible ask, one so reasonable it was nearly impossible to refuse: make it illegal for supermarkets to throw away good, edible food. And we told Scholz, the incoming chancellor, directly: if you fail to agree even to this, we will block the Autobahn. I remember thinking that no one believed us. Even the Greens, who drafted some technical response the

following month, did not treat it as a real ultimatum. When no genuine response came, we told everyone who had been preparing with us: it was time to start the next wave.

About a month later, in Switzerland, a man named Guillermo Fernandez began what he called “Papa on Hunger Strike.” On his youngest daughter’s birthday, he had read the latest IPCC report and written: “I felt my soul break.” After thirty-nine days, he won a parliamentary session with climate scientists presenting the state of the crisis. In the US, five Sunrise Movement members went on hunger strike. In the UK, Angus Rose went on what he called “Uncle on Hunger Strike.”

Something was spreading, not by coordination but by example. Roger, who had been on those early Zoom calls with me, now began drawing together the disparate campaigns: a real international network, with Conny, an Austrian organizer living in Czechia, and Rhodri, a British organizer in Finland, at the core of the new structure.

Our previous XR Global experience had taught us what not to repeat. In 2018 and 2019, once XR won a climate emergency declaration in the UK, people across the world copied the model wholesale. After a six-month honeymoon it began contracting everywhere. Countries that had changed the model differed from the original in ways that mattered. There was no clear core structure, more horizontalism, less appetite for disruptive tactics. The international movement was chaotic and unable to align.

This time would be different. The new network would not franchise a brand. It would coordinate between campaigns that understood their own contexts while sharing strategy, tactics, and hard-won experience across borders.

I went into every one of those biweekly calls where every country shared its situation. Even at the end of the hunger strike, even from a hospital bed, I went. Not because I had to. Because it was the best thing, to be in that room where something was being built, to take in the energy, or to give some when I could.



RENOVATE SWITZERLAND BEGINS

Cécile Bessire

I found Extinction Rebellion by accident. Having just finished my studies, for years I had wanted to get involved in a community service organization. But everything I found felt too conventional. Then one evening I searched online and randomly found a presentation happening around the corner from where I lived in Biel-Bienne. I brought my flatmate so I wouldn't have to go alone. There were four of us in a large room. Two people stood at the front.

They showed a map of the world. The areas that would become uninhabitable in the coming decades were marked in color—vast stretches of Asia, Africa, South America. Three and a half billion people who would have to flee. I sat there and looked at the map and felt something give way inside me. I had been doing my part for years, but I had no idea it was this bad. The anger came first, then the fear, then a sense of betrayal. Why had no one told me? Everything I had built for myself, everything I had been told was real, suddenly felt like it was made of paper.

That night I went home and watched videos of the 2018 Rebellion in London on YouTube. The colors. The music. All those people in the streets. The joy and the courage of it. I cried watching them. I wanted to be part of something like that. I needed to be. I joined the local branch of XR with high hopes of achieving great change.

I never again saw the other two people who attended that presentation. They heard the same things I heard. They saw the same map. I have wondered about them many times since—how they live with it, how they sleep.

That was 2019. By 2021, things were different.

Image (left): Activists from Renovate Switzerland block the A2 motorway near the Gotthard Tunnel in Wassen.

I was now part of a small group inside XR Switzerland trying to hold the movement together. It was not going well. We were a loose network of groups across the country, each pulling in a different direction. What connected us was a logo, three demands, and ten principles—each interpreted differently by everyone involved. There was no shared strategy, no common understanding of how any of it was supposed to work. COVID had cut off the early momentum, and what remained was disorientation and a slow, spreading disaffection.

We wanted to rebuild it properly, return to the original structure developed in the UK. We needed a real theory of change, a way of understanding how our actions would translate into political impact. We worked on it for months, but at every turn it generated opposition. Hidden conflicts surfaced. People who had worked alongside each other for years turned out to hold completely different ideas about what they were doing and why. We realized that organizing a large group of unaligned people who already held strong ideologies was nearly impossible.

I have bitter memories of that time. The sadness and disillusionment. I had left my job as a speech therapist to do this work. Sitting with vulnerable children, teaching them the names of animals, I kept thinking: *what is the point of this if most of these animals will become extinct?* I wanted to help these children, so I left to become an activist. And then my activism ground down into frustration and conflict, and I had nothing to show for it.

In October 2021, XR Switzerland held what would turn out to be its last official action, “Rebellion Against Extinction.” They launched the action week with a sit-in at Zurich’s city center—almost 200 people were arrested—with smaller groups returning every day to continue the tactic. Around that same time, a man named Guillermo Fernandez sat down in front of the Federal Palace in Bern and stopped eating. He called it “Papa on Hunger Strike.” He was demanding that every member of parliament receive a full training day with IPCC scientists on the climate emergency. He was prepared to die for it.

I helped where I could. Watching him, I was forced to face the existential questions I had been trying to avoid. But Guillermo won his demand. After thirty-nine days, he got up. When our small group sat down to decide what came next, I carried his example with me—the fact that it was possible to win and that to do so, it might be worth sacrificing everything we held most dear.

Our small group decided to start over. In early 2022, five of us met every day in the large living room of my shared flat. We read everything we could find. We ran workshops. We talked late into the evenings. It was one of the best periods of my life. We were building something from nothing, and we knew it. We felt it every morning when we sat back down to work.

Our strongest inspirations were Insulate Britain in the UK and a video by Roger Hallam called “How to Stop the Climate Crisis in Six Months.” Through Roger, we were invited onto an online call with people from around the world who were trying to do the same thing we were. On that call I met Last Generation from Germany. For the first time in a long time, I felt that I was in the right room. These were people taking it as seriously as I was, people willing to give everything. For days afterward I stayed up too late and woke up too early. I couldn’t wait to further the work.

We called our campaign Renovate Switzerland. We wanted to address the climate emergency with urgency, but we also wanted to build legitimacy around civil resistance in Switzerland, to give climate activism a different face than the one it had in the media, which treated it as the domain of left-wing youth making demands without offering solutions. We wanted to be something harder to dismiss.

We had a strong sense of purpose, deep commitment, a great deal of energy, and a beginner’s innocence that helped more than it hurt. From our time in XR we had learned what horizontalism costs—the informal power, the hidden conflicts, the ambiguity that hollows an organization from the inside. So from the beginning we built structure. We wrote a constitution. We defined how decisions would be made, how power would be distributed, how people would be brought in or let go. We gave each member of the core team a specific role with a specific mandate.

None of this prevented conflict. Conflict came anyway, as it always does when people work closely together toward something that matters to them. But the structure held. We could fight and still come back to work the next morning.

But what I take from all of it is simpler than any of the strategy or governance or theory of change. We were beginners. We had no idea what we were doing. But we decided to do it anyway. I followed what felt right. I took the risks. I ignored the many voices telling me it wasn’t worth it, that it wouldn’t work, that I should be more careful with my life.

What if I had listened? None of what followed would have happened.



PAST THE GATEKEEPERS

Thibaut Cantet

I was in the Philippines when I truly learned what was happening to the world. I don't remember what I expected as I was landing, but I found people living inside a catastrophe that had already arrived. Homes wrecked by storms that came more often and hit harder than anything their parents had known. Coastlines eaten back. Families who had fished the same waters for generations now watching those waters rise against the walls of their houses.

I stood there and felt something shift that has never shifted back.

What I witnessed was the consequence of a deliberate choice made by the elites of my own country and the Global North to increase the profits of a few at the cost of the lives of many. People who would never visit the Philippines, who would never have to look at what I was looking at, had decided, in boardrooms and parliaments, that these lives were an acceptable cost. Their casual willingness to treat people as disposable gave me the same feeling I got reading about slavery, about genocide, about the worst things human beings have ever done to one another.

I flew home to France, where people were talking about climate change as though it were a technical problem with unfortunate consequences for polar bears.

For a couple of years after that I tried to do the right things. I read the books and watched the conferences. I went vegan. I stopped flying. I lobbied the people around me and took the backlash. In my work as an urban planner, I tried to reshape how cities were built so they might meet the climate deadlines we had set. But the more I did, the smaller it all seemed. The power holding the old systems in place was enormous and enduring, and it did not care what I read or ate or how I designed a street.

Image (left): Police officers arrest a protester at a roadblock outside an oil terminal in Essex.

I was barely connected to the climate movement when I first walked into an Extinction Rebellion welcome meeting in late 2020. XR was exciting and frustrating in equal measure, which meant it was at least alive.

Soon I tried to set up a French version of Rebellion of One, a campaign that had started in the UK and was spreading across Europe. The idea was simple and strange: A person, alone, would sit down on a busy street holding a placard naming a fear they had about climate collapse. No flag. No banner. No chanting crowd. Just one person—perhaps your neighbor, your colleague, your sibling—sitting in silence on the pavement to pull you out of your ordinary day. A handful of other activists would be nearby, undercover, ready to photograph and de-escalate. That was it.

In many ways it was a first step toward what would later become the A22 Network. While I was building this campaign, drifting from the direction XR France was taking, I met some of the most committed people in the European XR ecosystem. Most of them were frustrated. Their national chapters were stalling. The anti-leadership attitude had paralyzed the organizations. The appetite for real disruption was shrinking. Everyone could feel it.

It was in this state that I found Roger Hallam's videos. Roger had founded XR but was pushed out after drawing parallels in the German media between climate collapse and the Holocaust. I learned he was now building something new, mobilizing people, proposing new strategic directions. He would post two-hour videos on YouTube that 96 percent of viewers abandoned well before the end. But he would say that he didn't care much about the 96 percent. He was interested in the 4 percent who stayed. The lone wolves. They were the ones willing to do the work.

I was one of those people.

What Roger said in his videos touched something raw within me. His language was blunt. His moral gravity was real. He placed the climate crisis inside the long history of atrocities human beings had committed against one another, and he refused to soften it. His strategic absolutism and dichotomous framing inspired some and repelled others. For me, at that moment, young and searching, it was the first time I had heard someone say out loud what I had felt standing in the Philippines. It went straight to my core.

Then two things happened that pushed me to take an even firmer stand in the fight against climate collapse.

First, a campaign called Insulate Britain had begun in the UK. Activists were blocking major highways with small groups, demanding their government implement an ambitious home insulation program. One of them, Jimmy, a comrade who held my respect and who had been very supportive in my launch of *Rebellion of One* in France, was sentenced, with eight of his comrades, to four months in prison for his involvement in these actions. It was the first time in British history that nonviolent climate activists had been sent to prison.

At the same time, a group of young Germans called Last Generation went on hunger strike in Berlin. Henning Jeschke had already fasted for 27 days when he announced he would stop drinking water. A few hours into his thirst strike, the incoming German chancellor agreed to meet him for a public debate.

These two events—a close comrade in a prison cell, a young man near death in front of the German parliament—did something to me that no argument had managed to do. They were not trying to persuade anyone of anything. They were simply acting as though the truth were real, as though an imminent catastrophe were actually imminent, as though the lives at stake actually mattered enough to sacrifice our comfort, our freedom, our bodies.

Seeing that forced something to open in me. I understood, suddenly and completely, that stepping up was no longer a choice I was weighing. And in the same moment, I felt relief. It was as though I had been carrying a question for years and had finally been given permission to answer it. My life had nothing to do with stability or material security. It had to do with closing the distance between myself and everything I loved—with letting that love express itself by whatever means were necessary, however hard.

This was the spark that ignited the A22 Network. The mission we set ourselves was to bring those same dynamics to our own countries—nonviolent, disruptive, sacrificial—and to do it at a scale that could not be ignored.

Roger's strategic proposals gave us the needed framework. It was crude in places, and you could argue it was too simple—a YouTube video called "How to Stop the Climate Crisis in Six Months." But it was more concrete than anything else on the table. In a movement full of vision and short on method, that was enough for me.

I was no one in the activist world. I had no standing, no credentials, no organization behind me. I tried first to convince the respected figures, the decision-making bodies, the people with leverage in the movement. I explained why I thought we needed to move forward, because nothing else was working and the world was coming apart. At best they offered constructive explanations for why they wouldn't get involved. At worst they would try to discourage us from trying out a new thing.

This is what gatekeepers usually do. They protect the assumptions they have built their work around. They will do everything in their power to prevent you from connecting and challenging these assumptions with the base they allegedly represent. Anything that seriously challenges these is a threat, and they treat it as one.

I sent some messages on different climate-related chats and forums I was on. Together with the few daredevils who responded positively to my initial invitation, we started *Dernière Rénovation* without the support of the gatekeepers. Not because we were fearless but because we felt we couldn't afford to stop. We knocked on doors until one of them opened. We refused to be discouraged by people who had decided in advance that it couldn't work.

Much of what gave me the strength to do that did not come from inside me. It came from Jimmy in his prison cell in England and Henning on his hospital bed in Germany and Guillermo in front of the Federal Palace in Switzerland and every person who had stood up before me and passed something forward. We stand on all of them. They connect us to whatever is deepest in ourselves. And that fire—small, stubborn, persistent—does not care about our inexperience or our self-doubt or where we rank inside any organization. It only cares that we keep moving.

If you believe strong enough, and no organization will follow you, then leave if you have to and build something else. Reach out directly to people, past the gatekeepers, and trust that there are lone wolves waiting who will show up to join the work.



BLOOD
ON
YOUR
SHOES

BLOOD
ON
YOUR
SHOES

NO NEW OIL



THE INDUSTRY IS NOT THE TARGET

Harley F. Brewer

On an unusually cold April morning I woke at four in a room that smelled of sweat and camping. I was sharing it with half a dozen other people. There was only one bed, so I had been curled in the corner in my sleeping bag. When the alarms started going off I unzipped myself and opened the window, feeling the cold come in and the stale air go out. In less than an hour, many of us would be chained, locked, and glued to the gates of an oil terminal.

We were an odd group. A teacher, a retired BMX world champion, an intensive care nurse, a tour guide business owner, several students, half a dozen retirees. Every class in Britain represented in one room. It wasn't often you found a mix like that, and almost never with that particular sense of unity. But we knew why we were there. This was the first major Just Stop Oil action, designed to shut down the UK oil industry for weeks, targeting the dozen most important fuel terminals in the south of England.

While it was still dark we piled into a minibus, drove to the Esso terminal near Birmingham, climbed out, and hid under a canal bridge. We waited for the sound of the gates opening. When they did, the fastest among us ran across the amber-lit industrial estate and blocked a tanker as it left. Two people clambered on top of it. Others chained themselves to the inner gates protecting the fuel silos. The rest blocked the outer entrances. Within two minutes, a small group of ordinary people had shut down a large fuel terminal. Within two hours the road was backed up with dozens of tankers that couldn't refill. It worked.

We stayed nearly two days in freezing temperatures, sleeping in our bags on the concrete, until the police arrested us all—their response had been stretched thin by the number of sites being blocked simultaneously. In court, despite the action having cost

Image (left): Just Stop Oil activists take action outside a UK government office over the granting of new drilling licenses, June 2022.

the company hundreds of thousands, the judge described us as good people with honest intentions acting to prevent the genuine harm of climate destruction. He still found most of us guilty of trespass. I was ordered to pay Esso a victim surcharge of 22 pounds. Across the four hundred people who took part over two weeks, we had cost the industry millions in lost revenue.

But what did it achieve?

This was potentially the largest direct action against oil companies in UK history, and it barely touched their operations. The level of sustained disruption needed to damage a company of that size is immense. We shut off the tap for a week or two. It wasn't close to enough.

But damaging the industry was never really the point. Our campaign had been inspired by the Fuel Tax Protests of the early 2000s, when truck drivers and farmers blocked petrol stations and fuel distribution sites to protest a tax increase. Though only a few thousand people were involved, it created a national crisis. Tony Blair later said it was the hardest period of his premiership—and he was also prime minister during the largest single protest in British history, the march against the Iraq War, which brought more than a million people into the streets. A million people marching was easier to manage than a few thousand people blocking fuel.

The Fuel Tax Protest won. The tax increase was dropped.

It won not by trying to damage the industry—companies can absorb a few days of lost production—but because it disrupted the rest of society. Millions of people couldn't get fuel. That pressure landed not on the oil companies but on the government. The industry was the target, but society was the lever.

Now, with Just Stop Oil we didn't have enough people to create that fuel crisis. One third of petrol stations ran dry but it didn't trigger panic buying. It didn't trigger a significant shift in public opinion either, because media coverage—though high by protest standards—was much lower than what public-facing campaigns like Insulate Britain and Extinction Rebellion had generated.

This is the central point. The climate crisis is caused by the burning of fossil fuels, but it isn't the machines themselves that we need to stop. It is the society that wants those machines to keep running. The machines run because the government allows them to, supports them, protects them. Change the government's position and the machines stop. Leave it unchanged and nothing else matters.

They learned the same lesson in Germany, where Last Generation activists turned off oil pipelines nearly 30 times. Little media coverage. Little effect on public conversation. Little effect on the industry. The industry is protected by the power of the state, and as long as that remains true, disrupting it directly is a dead end.

When Just Stop Oil shifted to public disruption—blocking roads, interrupting cultural events—the national conversation around oil and gas began to move. What had been fringe became mainstream. What became mainstream became policy. Ending new oil and gas licenses, once treated as the demand of extremists, entered the political center.

The limits and possibilities of industry-focused action are clearest in the history of the UK animal rights movement, which in the late 1990s and early 2000s pursued it at a scale climate groups have never approached. They shut down fur farms, cat breeders, and puppy farms across the country. When the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) campaign was launched to close Huntingdon Life Sciences, the largest animal testing organization in the UK, it worked with a precision that was remarkable. Rather than attacking the company directly, activists systematically removed each pillar of support that kept it functioning: insurers, banks, security firms, suppliers. Nobody would work with them. Their stock price collapsed. The campaign was winning.

Then the government stepped in.

It could see that if they did not intervene then the animal rights movement would simply continue to take apart the animal industry piece by piece, and so it took unprecedented action. It created a special insurance arrangement and a dedicated bank account to keep the company alive. SHAC was then brutally repressed through long prison sentences. Because the movement had framed the battle as one against the industry rather than against the government, it had no way to respond when the government made itself the battleground.

As is the case now, the real fight was never with the industry. It was with the government that protects the industry—that will step in to preserve any business central to the functioning of the state. Turning off the machines is not the goal. The goal is to create a national conversation that builds the desire to turn them off, and to remove the pillars of support that keeps them running.

Disruption of the industry cannot do that. Disruption of the public can.



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PART II:

*Organizing for
the Climate*

Emergency



BUILDING THE A22 NETWORK

Cécile Bessire, Thibaut Cantet, Chloé Bertini

In January 2022, invitations were sent to people on Roger Hallam’s contact list. On the Zoom call that followed, several people gave inspirational talks. Among them, Guillermo Fernandez described what he had won with his hunger strike in Switzerland. Drawing from the work of Insulate Britain and Roger’s video, “How to Stop the Climate Crisis in Six Months,” Conny and Rhodri laid out a project plan: implement this in your country and we will fund you.

Several groups had already committed, from Germany, Italy, Australia, Canada, the UK. The idea was to build an international network around a simple structure: a bread-and-butter demand—something with direct implications for ordinary people’s lives—built around several iterations of mass mobilization and highly disruptive action phases. Each iteration was structured to grow, to attract more participants, to increase pressure until governments gave in.

Between January and April 2022, campaigns from France, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States, and Norway also joined. It was decided that all projects would converge in April for a simultaneous international action wave. A name was chosen in the spirit of the Spanish Movimiento 15-M. Simple, rooted in a moment: April 2022—A22.

On April 4, the network went public: Simultaneous roadblocks and civil disobedience actions across Germany, Switzerland, France, the United States, Sweden, Norway, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Hundreds of people ready to risk their freedom. A joint declaration: *We are the Last Generation. But we are also the First. We are everywhere. We are coming.*

Image (previous page): Dozens of Letzte Generation supporters march down a street, joined by a farmer driving his tractor alongside them in solidarity.

Image (left): Activists from Dernière Rénovation block the Champs-Élysées in Paris.

How It Worked

For most of its growth phase, the A22 Network functioned as an incubator. It provided one-on-one coaching for founders and core teams, not telling them what to do, but helping them survive the moments when they were ready to quit. When exhaustion set in, when doubts accumulated, when repression wore people down and internal conflict threatened to split everything apart, there was someone on the other end of the line who had seen it before.

Funding worked differently than anything most organizers had encountered. No 20-page applications. No six-month waiting periods. You filled out a short form, reported back every few weeks through a spreadsheet, and kept moving. For people used to begging foundations for years, this was revolutionary.

Every month, organizers from across the network joined late-night calls to trade tactics and share failures. Someone would describe a new action that had worked. Someone else would admit they had burned out their media team. Slowly, a collective practice took shape. A knowledge repository grew, storing documents that could be reused across projects, tracking what was working and what wasn't in real time. Training programs brought in outside expertise for everyone in the network to draw on.

Joining required meeting real criteria: A core team of four to eight people. A concrete, winnable demand with majority public support. A nonviolent disruption strategy with a government deadline, followed by repeated civil disobedience leading to arrest and imprisonment if necessary. Active mass mobilization. A plan for multiple iterations, each larger than the last. A legal entity with a written constitution and clear decision-making processes. Independence from any other movement. And mandatory onboarding for core team members covering civil resistance, governance, mobilization, data, and finance.

Membership was approved collectively by a board made up of representatives from each project.

Decision-making ran on two levels. A small international team held weekly calls with each project, tracked data, shared what was working across borders, and managed the relationship with the Climate Emergency Fund (CEF)—a foundation based in the US that funded most A22 projects in 2022 and 2023. Then there was the Central Legislative Team (CLT)—one voter and one observer from

each national project—which met monthly to vote on proposals affecting the whole network.

Each campaign submitted a budget projection to the international team, who coordinated with CEF to draft a distribution proposal before bringing it to the CLT for approval. In the early days, there was enough money that every campaign got what it asked for. As resources tightened, the decisions got harder—impact, reach, and a campaign’s ability to raise its own funds all began to factor in. Scarcity has a way of clarifying priorities, and not always comfortably.

We attempted to establish an International Strategy Team to bring a new level of coordination around the international vision and its execution. However, it was dismantled after several months. We didn’t have the capacity to address our biggest challenges—differing views on whether to be a loose confederation of independent initiatives or a singular international organization with a clear vision, interpersonal conflicts rooted in gender dynamics, and disagreements about whether the team was necessary at all.

There Is No Recipe

The network’s empirical, data-driven approach had a shadow side.

Because success was measured in numbers, the campaigns with the best numbers became the model. Germany and the UK were usually at the top in mobilization, fundraising, and media reach. After an international gathering, there was always the temptation to go home and replicate what they had done. Even when your campaign was newer, your context was different, your media environment was nothing like theirs.

Some things transfer easily. Action tactics. Newsletter fundraising strategies. Specific tools and techniques. But systems, governance structures, organizational culture, tone of voice—these have to grow from the inside. They have to match who your people are, what your country is, what is alive in your organization at a particular moment. You cannot import them.

Every campaign started from the same streamlined model. But the personality of the core team, the demographics that showed up, the geography and culture of each country made them diverge quickly. Those differences were often invisible in international calls, where what you saw was a room full of deeply aligned,

highly committed organizers exchanging practical skills. The variation underneath that surface was enormous.

Some initiatives achieved a lot replicating the wins across borders. Other initiatives had the most impact when their actions were deeply rooted in their own contexts, when they stopped trying to replicate what had worked elsewhere and trusted what was alive in their own movement.

There is no recipe. There never was. While we can learn so much directly from our fellow organizers in other countries, most of the time it is trial and error. The sooner you accept this, the better organizer you become.

For representatives of smaller campaigns, it was genuinely difficult to sit in calls dominated by success stories from larger ones and hold steady to their own plan. There was rarely space on those calls to discuss uncertainty, or to say out loud that what worked in Germany was not working here and you didn't know why. The network's strength should have been to celebrate the differences between countries, to treat each campaign's unique path as a source of collective learning rather than a deviation from the standard. It did not always manage that.

A Prototype, Not a Blueprint

The A22 Network was more than a coordination mechanism. It was a prototype for a new kind of movement infrastructure, a system for helping groups get started, stay alive through the hardest periods, and share knowledge at a speed and scale that social movements rarely achieve.

It worked. It incubated serious campaigns across Europe and beyond. It gave people the resources, the coaching, and the sense of being part of something larger that allowed them to go all in. When a campaign in one country had a breakthrough, the energy moved through the whole network. Knowing that the fight was international, that others were doing the same thing in a dozen different languages, made the work feel less impossible.

It also had real limitations. We hit them hard as the initial wave settled and the work demanded more complexity than the original model was built to handle. Those limitations are part of the record too. The successes and the failures both belong to anyone trying to build something like this again.

To anyone building something new: borrow freely at the start. Take what you need to establish a strategy and get moving. Study past movements and follow

contemporary ones—not to copy them, but to build a mental library of images, stories, and dynamics that might illuminate your own situation when you recognize a similar pattern. Learn practical skills wherever you can find them.

But once you're in motion, follow the thread of what is alive in your own movement. The goal is not to learn the strategies that worked somewhere else. It is to become a good enough strategist, and to build a culture creative enough, that you can find the right strategy for where you are.



FUNDING THE RESISTANCE

Chloé Bertini, Thibaut Cantet

Money is a tricky subject—not only because of its material importance but because of what gets projected onto it. Fear of scarcity, questions of recognition, justice, pride: these tend to accumulate around money in ways that make it hard to see clearly, in personal life and inside organizations. We were far from immune to any of this. But part of what the work taught us was how to develop a more honest relationship with money—what it is, what it isn't, and how to use it without letting it distort everything else.

The A22 network was made possible in large part by a funding innovation called the Climate Emergency Fund.

The CEF was built in 2019 to address a specific gap. Momentum-driven groups—the kind that move fast, operate in bursts, and depend on radical tactics—were largely unfundable through conventional channels. Grant applications require administrative capacity, institutional legitimacy, and months of lead time; the money often arrives long after the moment has passed. Foundations preferred to fund established organizations with less legal and reputational risk. The groups doing the most disruptive work were the ones left out.

The CEF addressed this with speed and simplicity. Rather than lengthy applications and opaque evaluation processes, it used a straightforward reporting system: groups submitted a mobilization plan projecting how many talks, trainings, and actions they intended to run, then updated a weekly data sheet showing how many they achieved. The same format functioned across all projects internationally. It wasn't perfect. The system tended to make the less quantifiable work harder to justify, and it encouraged a focus on methods over political results. But it made rapid, flexible funding possible in a way that nothing else had.

Image (left): Activists from Letzte Generation spray-paint a private jet orange at the airport on Sylt, a luxury holiday destination in northern Germany, June 2023.

For us, the practical effect was significant. Ordinary people with no connections to major donors and no personal wealth could go all in. The funding didn't offer long-term security—we worked in cycles of a few months at a time, reporting before the next round—but it was enough to make the A22 work the center of life rather than a side project.

All In, Finally

The financial support wasn't the incentive. Nobody joined because of the salary. But it removed obstacles, freeing up not just time but mental space. For younger organizers it sometimes meant not being financially dependent on parents who were pressuring them to stop. For those with children it meant being able to follow their convictions while still providing the roof over their heads.

During the most intensive periods, the most dedicated organizers worked 12 hours a day, six days a week. They did it with genuine energy, because their attention wasn't split. That level of commitment isn't sustainable indefinitely, but it built a culture of political work that most of us hadn't experienced. This wasn't volunteering in the margins of ordinary life. It was the opportunity to center the work, to stop living with the cognitive dissonance of going about a normal life while knowing what was coming.

The failure was that we didn't prepare for the moment when the funding would contract. By growing accustomed to not having to generate income elsewhere, we didn't develop the resilience that activists who have always maintained side work tend to build, the capacity to keep political work central even when organizational resources are thin. When the funding shifted, people had to pick up threads of life they had set aside, redirect energy into income. For some the combination of that with repression and slowing momentum was enough to step away entirely.

Many people who made a shift in mentality have found ways to sustain it regardless—working jobs that cover essentials and channeling everything else into the movement. But it required relearning something we had skipped.

Creating a New Culture Around Money

Whatever the tabloids occasionally suggested, financial support did not mean comfortable salaries. Amounts varied by country: in Italy, between 300 and 800 euros a month for those who received something; in France, people asked for

what they needed up to the level of minimum wage. Many asked for less. In all cases the amounts were at or below minimum wage.

We were trying to hold a tension: we believed a serious, competent organization capable of achieving its goals couldn't function without some financial support for its most committed members; but we also knew we couldn't pay everyone for everything, and that a movement funded entirely from outside would be fragile.

The system rested on trust and what we called corresponsibility and frugality. Amounts weren't tied to seniority, expertise, or centrality of role. People shared what they needed, the community trusted them, and we tried to avoid judgment in both directions—on those who asked for more and those who asked for nothing. If you could travel to a talk on your own, you did. If a large retreat was being organized, the costs were made transparent and people contributed what they could. If anyone had a way to avoid paying rent, they would often ask for less from the organization.

The downside was real. This required far more emotional labor than a conventional employment model. It also reflected patterns we carried in from the broader culture. Most notably, women in our organizations asked for less than men on average, a disparity we noticed but were never able to fully resolve.

We also want to be clear that we were not glorifying unpaid labor or self-sacrifice. Ideally, all work would be fairly compensated. We couldn't achieve that, so we tried to build a culture around money that was honest about the gap and that helped people develop a different relationship to it.

We live in a society where it feels like money has been erected as the One True God. We venerate it, abandon ourselves to it, believe it is what can bring us ultimate security. We have organized society around the ambition for wealth rather than putting life itself at the center. This leads to the unfortunate situation where the money associated with anything—things, people, efforts, experience—is supposed to be a marker of its value. But we tried to make it clear that the value of people's work, in our organizational context, should not be evaluated based on how much they were being paid for. We were aware that the money people received—or didn't, most of the time—did not account for the value they were bringing to the world. We committed to seeing money as a means to an end. This felt deeply aligned with the post-capitalist society many of us wanted to see in the world. We wanted it to be considered a common resource whose purpose

was to enable the change we wanted to see in the world, in our case by enabling impactful actions, the outreach to new people, the legal defense of the people who took actions, and the million other activities our work required.

Avoiding the NGO Trap

Given the short-term framing we had, trimming any excesses and keeping material security to the bare minimum felt necessary to achieve our mission. However, for striving to do this work for the rest of their life, it was hard to imagine how a lifestyle of very little material security could work for decades to come, supporting oneself through different phases of life.

While some were pushing for better conditions for the committed organizers, there is an intrinsic risk in associating higher levels of comfort and security in political work. We have seen this in countless organizations that now form what is called the NGO-industrial complex: people sometimes stay because they have built their life around the material conditions that the job offers rather than because they are driven by a sense of purpose; many decisions are taken not so much for the mission but to preserve at any cost the stability of the organization that allows it to keep people on payroll. An organization's mission can be eclipsed by its own perpetuation.

A more sustainable path would provide committed organizers a basic income and have mutual aid structures that reduce individual financial needs, while encouraging them to build personal income streams compatible with the work. That way the political commitment doesn't depend entirely on external funding, and the organization stays oriented toward its actual mission.

The A22 experience changed how many of us think about money in our own lives. How much is actually necessary? What small or large luxuries have become normalized, and what needs do they serve? Are there other ways we can meet those needs?

The most precious things often tend to be simple, free, or inexpensive. There is nothing inherently wrong with comfort or pleasure. But the scale of what the world now faces, and the inequalities already embedded in it, are an invitation to look honestly at what we accumulate and why. What would it mean, as a broader community, to take only what is genuinely needed and treat the rest as a common resource—directed toward peace and justice?



COLLABORATION AND CONFLICT IN CORE TEAMS

Henning Jeschke, Carla Hinrichs, Thibaut Cantet, Pierre Taieb, Chloé Bertini

Drawing the best lessons from Extinction Rebellion, the campaigns in the emerging A22 network were set up with core teams. Core teams would protect the DNA of the movement—the central demand, the vision, the commitment to nonviolence. It would ensure that no single demonstration could undo what had been built, and that the organization could outlast any individual within it.

It also solved what we called the “who decides who decides” problem. In XR, the prevailing attitude was “do what you want,” which worked locally and created chaos nationally. Every proposed strategy triggered the same question: “Why are you the one deciding this?” Surveys were created to determine who had the right to decide on slogans, demands, targets, tactics, even the rhythm of actions. What emerged from that process was a wish list with no commitment behind it and no coherence. Plans were abandoned when people returned to their jobs. Trust eroded.

The A22 model aimed to combine the strengths of both approaches. It preserved the creativity and grassroots energy of horizontal organizing without depending on it exclusively. It incorporated the coherence and rapid decision-making capacity of more structured models—Greenpeace, political parties—without their rigidity. People could do almost anything within a trained, defined framework. The core drove consistency. The grassroots drove energy. When something went wrong, it was clear who had made the decision, and adjustments could be made.

Image (left): The movement’s most committed organizers gather at a private house for a retreat on A22’s core identity and emerging strategy.

The key challenge was balance. Coming out of XR and other horizontalist spaces, many new people encountered the hierarchy and overcorrected immediately: *I must ask permission before doing anything*. That reflex undermined the model just as surely as chaos had. People projected onto the organization every negative experience they had ever had with authority—at school, at work, in other movements. The balance between structure and autonomy was never fully solved. At the local level, we tried, and sometimes failed, to cultivate a culture of “just do it.”

The Slow Work of Cohesion

The founders of one of the national campaigns were united in one thing: they were prepared to give everything. They shared a theory of change at the strategic level and demonstrated comparable commitment. Together they mobilized the first people into the organization.

On a personal level, they were very different from each other. Even before the organization was formally launched, there were serious interpersonal conflicts that had not been resolved. Everything was oriented toward strategy and action, and nothing toward building a functional team. Externally, the group performed well. Internally, the conflicts were already entrenched.

The working culture that resulted could achieve a great deal very quickly, but it built no real relationships. No community capable of bearing what was coming. The culture of the founding group transferred outward through the entire organization, affecting everyone who joined. Small relationship problems at the start became a culture of mistrust that spread across every level.

As the organization grew and external pressure increased, the personal conflicts made effective teamwork nearly impossible. The group eventually sought help from a management consultant, who mediated the conflicts and helped restore function. This required someone who could look at the situation without being inside it. Given the narrative that the world had only two or three years to determine the future of humanity, the team would never have taken that time on their own.

The breaking point came after about a year of protests. The original plan needed adjustment. Repression had gone further than anticipated. Several people had been held in preventive detention for thirty days. Some members were exhausted. At the same time, the organization was at peak mobilization and needed to

integrate large numbers of new people. During critical decisions, the interpersonal conflicts repeatedly paralyzed the group. Outside professional support was crucial in making the team functional again.

What followed was a long, exhausting process—trying simultaneously to mediate conflicts that had been smoldering for over a year and keep the organization running. Eventually, the founding members decided to go their separate ways. Still, it is very special that many times each of them came back to the table, acknowledging that their shared mission was larger than any of their personal feelings about each other.

Conflicts are always easier to address while they are smoldering than after they have erupted. Even when a group of best friends starts a campaign—a group thinking they would always stick together, deeply loving each other—having someone who regularly creates space to surface simmering tensions is not a luxury. It is the difference between an organization that can endure pressure and one that collapses under it. Conflict between people is normal, but it doesn't have to paralyze the campaign they're running.

The Brittleness of Rapid Growth

In *Dernière Rénovation*, we knew from the beginning that the project as we had built it could not be sustained for long. We knew this and proceeded anyway. We deliberately placed enormous stress on the structure and on the people inside it, because we believed the window was real and narrow—a couple of years to act before exceeding two degrees. Though we had been surrounded by people telling us it would take 40 years to build a worthy movement, we knew every day that passed was a lost opportunity.

We anticipated that things might crumble. We decided to try anyway.

In the aftermath, there was a great deal of self-blame. We looked at what the pace had taken from people and chose to absorb this cost. But it was a deliberate decision in which the risks had been seriously considered. That doesn't make the damage less real. It means the damage was the price we chose to pay, with open eyes, for the chance to matter within the time we had.

Could we have prepared ourselves better? I don't think there are many ways to be truly prepared for what it feels like to launch a movement and watch it grow very fast, the rush and the waves of drama that come with it. I worked in an or-

ganization that had years of experience before rapid growth, and it crashed just like the others. The only preparation that works is experience.

This is what we see in the animal rights movement. Animal Rising was launched at the same time as Extinction Rebellion, but with far less momentum—animal rights receives a fraction of the attention and funding that climate does. Their first wave of growth was much smaller. They survived it, then experienced another wave, then another. Through that repeated experience, they built resilience and the practical intelligence to navigate the conflictual moments that every fast-growing mass movement will face.

Maybe the reason they survived what we did not is not only that the wave was smaller. Maybe it is also that they are deeply committed to the mission on a long-term basis, deeply connected to their values, and consistently willing to put those they are fighting for ahead of their own egos. Maybe we were missing some of that. Anyone who wants to launch a mass movement will experience conflict at a level they are not prepared for. Long-term, having people deeply aligned not only on the mission but on the values makes the difference.

Who Owns This House?

In Ultima Generazione, as we grew we ran into a paradox: we were trying to multiply leadership, to empower and train new people, while our internal culture created significant obstacles to doing exactly that.

Looking back, I have more clarity on this. I was not a founder but joined the core team early and stayed for nearly two years. At the same time, I was close to the women who came in later, took on important coordination roles, and gradually became an informal counterweight to the founding culture.

The core team culture was built around people who were exhausted by ifs and buts—people who had watched personal egos slow movements down and had decided it would not happen here. The commitment was total. Twelve hours a day, six or even seven days a week. There was a vision and they would not stop until they saw it realized. When I joined, I embraced this fully. It felt right given what was at stake.

But from the beginning I felt that something was missing. Care, nonviolence, community—not as means to an end, but as things worth building in themselves. As we worked to tear down the old system, it felt essential that we were also con-

sciously building something different. That we were trying to embody a new way of being, not just a more effective version of the old way of organizing.

At first it seemed like we were on the same page. With two other women, we began trying to fill the gap: Post-action check-ins. A first in-person gathering. A facilitator circle to support working groups. As new leaders came in—mostly but not only women—they wove a culture of care and collective empowerment through whatever roles they held. They took what had been a group of people assembled around a purpose and tried to make it a community.

The value of this was recognized after some core team members shook their initial skepticism. It allowed the organization to level up: systematized processes, new leaders ready to match the steadfastness of the old ones, a healthier working culture that strengthened teams. Then some of these new leaders became coordinators. Quickly, tensions with the core team surfaced.

At the time, as a core team member, even with the shared values and personal closeness I had with some of the people who were bringing the most critical voices, I remember holding a shadow of distrust. I felt that what was being attacked was the radical and ambitious vision we had worked so hard to build, that the doubts in what we were doing were coming from a lack of belief that it was even possible to make a difference. This fear was so embedded in our foundational seed that it was hard to let go of it, realizing we were not alone.

I can now imagine how this distrust that the core team was emanating was felt and why the tension kept exacerbating, given that the critical voices could not find the necessary space for dialogue. In similar situations from a systemic facilitation lens, what emerges in similar group situations is called the dramatic triangle. When things are healthy, leadership is filled by promoters, with constructive critics and active followers comprising the group; but when things are toxic, the leaders function as tyrants, with saboteurs and passive followers completing the group. That is often the symptom of a system unable to handle power in a sustainable way and integrate marginalized perspectives that have already made various attempts to be heard. This is how we end up recreating the same dynamics of oppression that we are trying to dismantle.

Amid it all, it was hard to understand what was really being asked of us old leaders.

At the heart of it was a question one coordinator put plainly during a conflict resolution session: “We see you and all the effort you’ve put in. We’ve joined and

brought our strengths to building this house. To move forward we need to know, who owns this house? Is it all of us together? Or do you still consider it yours, conceding only what you decide to concede?”

We shared a radical vision, the commitment to disruption, even a belief in a functional hierarchy. Yet for the hierarchy to be truly functional there was a need to have spaces where all voices held the same value, where the masks of certainty attached to roles could be shed. This required trust but would have allowed us to dive deeper into our revolutionary vision and what strategies could help us reach it, releasing taboos over questioning of the tactics and rhythms that had allowed us to get started. New leaders were not trying to disempower us or the project; they wanted to work together to transform what power was, how it functioned, what it meant to us.

I believe that question was only partially understood. Some people stayed as they were satisfied with the changes. Others left because they needed to dedicate themselves to spaces that would embrace a clearer ideology. Not just seeing revolution as changing who holds power, but how power is held. Not participatory democracy as a procedural fix, but the deeper work of dismantling the patriarchal and colonial organization of power that had produced the climate crisis in the first place.

This dynamic between protecting the established order and the desire to transform it played out across the entire network, not only in Italy. Our intentional omission of ideology from our mobilization strategy helped us get as many people as possible to take radical action fast, but at the same time, it made it far more difficult to navigate these conflicts. Women and other marginalized people in leadership positions were often the first to recognize this. It frequently got tangled up with disagreements about tactics, governance, and pace, making it harder to see it for what it was. The campaigns that failed to navigate it lost people, lost momentum, or lost the decision-making capacity that had initially defined them.



FACING GENDER CHALLENGES INSIDE THE MOVEMENT

Carla Hinrichs, Cécile Bessire

Neither a bold political vision nor an electoral experiment can build lasting power on unstable organizational ground. This is the part movements most often fail to examine—because examining it requires honesty about dynamics that are far easier to ignore when urgent work is awaiting.

I, Carla, attended many of the A22 network’s international conferences during the years it existed. We met several times a year—people from every member country—to exchange ideas, share what was working, and find ways to sustain each other. These gatherings were irreplaceable. Online coordination kept things moving, but it was in-person contact that built the relationships that held people together through the hard periods.

Personal connection mattered to me especially because within the German campaign, there were not many in comparable roles who fully understood what I was experiencing. Knowing that young women in other countries were also appearing on major talk shows, absorbing waves of public attention and hatred, and finding ways through it gave me something I could not find at home.

But I found my courage to connect deeply with people in the network relatively late. Many of the internationally active people were men. The online spaces felt inaccessible—conducted at a high register in a language that was not my mother tongue. Even a leftist activist network striving to change the world is shaped by the same socialization the rest of society produces under patriarchy and capitalism.

This goes to the heart of whether movements can build the kind of power that lasts. A movement that reproduces the structures it is trying to dismantle will not dismantle them. It will build something with inner discord.

| Image (left): Dernière Rénovation supporters debriefing and resting after the Tour de France action in Haute-Savoie.

As my confidence grew, I began actively seeking out other women across the network—visiting campaigns in Poland and England in the summer of 2024, staying in contact after international meetings, letting real friendships form. I held a great deal of respect for these women. They asserted themselves so impressively in spaces that, to me, felt male-dominated. Through conversations with them, I discovered that other women had felt the same exclusion, the same hesitation to enter spaces that were not built for them. And I began recognizing how I had reproduced those dynamics myself: assuming that leadership meant being hard and showing no fear, when I now understood it meant the opposite. I had absorbed the behaviors of colleagues that seemed to work, without asking whether they were actually working, or who they were working for.

Conny, who had built and coordinated the A22 network for years and was in many ways its operational heart, understood this when we spoke. In autumn 2024, we decided to bring the women of the network together deliberately. We offered exchange sessions, spaces to share experiences without projecting confidence. In the first online meetings, women opened up in ways that had clearly been waiting for an outlet: fears, hopes, things that had been difficult to name in the larger spaces. Several described feeling seen for the first time.

In July 2025, Conny and I organized the first Women's Conference of the A22 network in a small village in the mountains of western Austria. We invited women from all member organizations and asked them to bring one to three women from their own country. Women came from England, Poland, Denmark, Austria, Canada, and Germany. An external consultant with long experience coaching leadership teams ran a full-day workshop. The other two days were shaped by topics we had identified together.

The task we each carried back to our campaigns was the same: make your organization more genuinely inclusive, and examine where patriarchal behavior is shaping how you work.

In a world shaped and damaged largely by men, what comes next cannot be built the same way, or it will be damaged again. That much is clear. Frankly, this world will not be built by men alone. It will take a network of women holding each other up, naming what others would rather not see, and leading from a different place.

Confronting the Patriarchy

Inside one national campaign, the core team tore itself apart along a fault line that had a name, even if no one wanted to use it.

Two camps formed. One defended what it described as a strategic, rational, objective approach—data-driven, efficient, organized around strong hierarchical leadership. The other pushed for something more relational—qualitative, emotionally grounded, organized around power-sharing, cooperation, and care. As the conflict deepened, both sides hardened. Attempts at mediation failed. One party refused from the outset to engage with emotion, arguing it had no strategic value.

The conflict spread beyond the core team. One side began recruiting supporters within the organization. It became a conflict between the core team and a group opposing the core team's authority, and it lasted several months before one side left.

What the conflict revealed was a gendered power dynamic. The camp criticizing the core team's functioning was predominantly men. The core team was predominantly women. The criticisms followed a familiar script: not strategic enough, not effective enough, not rational enough, too emotional. Qualities traditionally associated with masculinity—strength, efficiency, strategic clarity—were presented as necessary for organizational success. Qualities traditionally associated with femininity—emotion, care, relationship—were treated as weaknesses, or worse, as obstacles.

Beneath the tactical disagreements lay something older and harder to name. The assumption, never spoken aloud, was that women were not capable of leading a civil resistance campaign. It was never stated directly. But its shadow was present in every criticism, every dismissal, every refusal to engage with what the core team was doing.

The climate movement will not build the world it says it wants by replicating inside its organizations the same structures of domination it claims to be fighting outside them. That contradiction is not abstract. It showed up in meeting rooms, in mediation sessions, in the decisions about who gets to decide and how. It cost real people real things. Naming it clearly and addressing it is not an option but a necessity, because it will happen again, over and over.



OUR MOBILIZATION THEORY

Harley F. Brewer, Thibaut Cantet, Henning Jeschke, Cécile Bessire

Every well-organized movement begins with the same instinct: build a structure, define the process, tell people what to do. It is the most natural response to urgency. There is no time to let things emerge organically. The world is on fire. We need a system.

What we learned, across multiple countries and several years, is that systems built entirely on external control tend to produce exactly the results you'd expect—for a while—until they don't. The question of what motivates people to show up, stay, and give everything they have turned out to be more complicated than any of us initially understood. Getting it wrong cost us more than we expected. Getting it right, when we did, produced results we never could have planned.

The Default Model and Its Costs

Just Stop Oil was organized hierarchically. A national mobilization team oversaw the whole system. Regional coordinators managed different areas. Local mobilisers worked at the town or city level. Regional groups had some freedom in how they mobilized—which outreach methods to use, how to run their territories—but not in what they mobilized for, and not in organizing their own local actions. And then there was a core team that started it all.

Each region had a coordinator, a small team receiving a living allowance—well below minimum wage—and volunteers. Regional coordinators met weekly with the national team to review the previous week and plan improvements. On paper, the national team had authority to remove underperforming people. In practice, the core team—responsible for overall strategy—repeatedly intervened to prevent this. The result was that some local teams performed poorly for months, and individuals who were actively damaging the organization stayed in place because no one with the authority to act would use it.

Image (left): Activists from Dernière Rénovation block the Paris ring road on April 1, 2022, denouncing the government's inaction on energy renovation.

The national team also had almost no presence on the ground. Contact with regional groups happened almost entirely through the regional coordinator.

This kept decision-making clear and allowed the national team to focus on developing new approaches—some of which, like online advertising for talks, worked very well. But it meant the national team had little real understanding of what was happening locally, and limited ability to help struggling teams recover.

The structural tension between national and local eventually produced open conflict. Around a third of local groups split off to form their own projects. In one area, the national team reviewed data showing that the local group was distributing significantly fewer leaflets and posters than comparable places, despite having a vibrant local history of mobilization. The national team believed improvement was possible. The regional team didn't. Several in-person meetings followed, but without trust or social capital, the regional team experienced them as impositions. They began actively undermining the broader campaign, spreading rumors, encouraging other teams to split.

This could have been resolved by asking people to leave, but the core team prevented it. The situation dragged on for more than six months, consuming funds, energy, and goodwill. Eventually some members left voluntarily, and the rest were asked to step down. A new team of two almost immediately outperformed the previous team of six.

What that experience made clear was the cost of refusing to use hard power when it is genuinely necessary. A system of 60 mobilisers, hundreds of volunteers, and thousands of action participants cannot be managed through personal relationships alone. Organizational health sometimes requires asking people to leave. Avoiding that responsibility doesn't protect people; it protects dysfunction.

Renovate Switzerland ran into a version of the same problem from a different direction. Our mobilization theory was mechanical: people would see us through media, actions, posters, leaflets, go to our website, come to a talk, complete a nonviolent action training, and take action. We asked local groups to follow this pathway faithfully: regular talks, trainings, posterings, phone banking.

It was hard work that yielded very few results. Most of the time, only a handful of people showed up to talks. More often than anyone wanted to admit, organizers waited in empty rooms before packing up the drinks and snacks and going home.

What kept people doing this work was media momentum. As long as the campaign was in the news, mobilisers felt they were part of something large and significant. But when media attention decreased through 2023, the motivation to do the grinding day-to-day work collapsed with it. We had built the whole system on extrinsic motivation—on the energy generated by public reactions to our actions—without realizing it. We had told people this was an emergency and everything had to happen now, because that was what we believed. We hadn't told them it was also a long-term story, partly because we hadn't fully accepted that ourselves.

You Cannot Command Commitment

Self-Determination Theory helps explain why these patterns were not accidents or failures of execution. They were structural inevitabilities.

The framework identifies three core needs that drive genuine, sustained motivation: 1) Autonomy: the experience of voluntarily engaging in what you do, not because it is imposed but because you have chosen to stand behind it; 2) Relatedness: the feeling of belonging, of mattering, of doing something that others genuinely need; and 3) Competence: not just performing effectively, but growing, taking on real challenges and succeeding at them.

Autonomy doesn't mean the absence of rules or demands. It means the recognition that the rules are legitimate, that the pressure you're under is pressure you've chosen to accept because you believe in the reason. When rules arrive without explanation, when demands are handed down without context, people don't push back because they disagree with the goals. They push back because the goals no longer feel like theirs.

In Just Stop Oil, local teams were given objectives but not ownership. They were told what to mobilize for but not invited to shape it. When the national team tried to intervene in struggling regions, they had no social capital to draw on, no relationship, no shared history. Their authority was experienced as control rather than support. In Renovate Switzerland, local groups followed the pipeline because the media momentum made it feel meaningful. When that momentum faded, there was nothing underneath it. The intrinsic motivation—the sense that

this work was worth doing because you believed in it, not because it was generating attention—had never been built.

These weren't failures of individual commitment. The people involved were deeply committed. They were failures of design.

The Power of Real Trust

The London team became the clearest proof of what a different approach could achieve.

Frustrated by the national inability to remove underperforming people, the London team created a ring-fence around the city without consulting the core team, and initially without advertising it. They built a team based on trust and shared vision, made clear that membership was a privilege that could be revoked, and gave people real ownership of their work. London went from the worst-performing team per person, with ten members, to the strongest-performing in the country, with only five.

They shared an office with the national team. The constant informal contact meant strategic drift never took hold. The national team could step back and give them genuine autonomy, confident in the alignment. What had looked like a management problem turned out to be a motivation problem. And once the conditions for real motivation existed, the performance followed almost immediately.

In Dernière Rénovation, something similar was happening at the level of individual development. Volunteers were asked to place themselves on a grid of appetite and competence, mapping what they already knew and enjoyed against what they wanted to learn. The organization invested heavily in their growth. We ran gratitude circles within teams, where people took time to name a specific quality or contribution they had seen in someone else. We held retreats with all committed participants, sometimes 100 people together for three days.

When the mobilization team recruited people for actions organized by the action team, which were then covered by the media team, each team could see exactly how their work fed the others. That visibility mattered more than we had anticipated. Contribution became a source of satisfaction rather than an obligation. People stayed because they could see that their specific work was needed.

Last Generation, at its peak, was working through the same question at a structural level. The organization had grown from central working groups to regional

teams across six regions, each building their own action and mobilization plans with input from the national team. The question was how to increase local autonomy without losing alignment.

Weekly updates featuring highlights from across the movement helped. People could see what was happening beyond their own region, and successes anywhere in the network inspired everyone. A tiered system for local groups gave clear guidance on what to focus on at each stage of growth: smaller groups building toward symbolic actions and public events, larger groups planning sustained action weeks and building relationships with other actors in their city. The framework was clear. Within it, people led their own work.

From Pushing to Pulling

The shift that mattered most was one of orientation.

Renovate Switzerland had been trying to mobilize people by pushing them through a pipeline that depended on external factors—media attention, public momentum, the sense of emergency. When that external fuel ran low, the pipeline emptied. The response was not to rebuild the pipeline but to abandon the model entirely.

We stopped using roadmaps and guidelines, telling people what they should do. Instead, we built open spaces where people could contribute personally to the organization, by expressing themselves, sharing ideas, and being creative. Large plenary sessions with collective intelligence workshops. Open calls for action projects. Simple, accessible information about how to propose an idea: who to contact, how to proceed. The question changed from how to mobilize people into our system to how to create conditions in which people mobilize themselves.

The results surprised us. One successful initiative that emerged was a mobilization event in the form of a recurring stand-up comedy show. Organized in collaboration with Swiss comedians, with dozens of people attending each performance, we talked about the climate crisis and civil resistance. Nobody at the national level had planned it. Someone had an idea, found the right people, and made it happen.

More openness produces more chaos. Control decreases. There is still much to improve. But the shift—from mobilization to welcoming, from pushing to pulling, from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, from emergency response to long-

term commitment—changed the texture of the organization. People who join because they chose to, because the work feels like theirs, stay longer and go further than people recruited into a pipeline and handed a set of instructions.

An empowering mobilization system gives individuals and local groups real autonomy over their work, developed collaboratively with teams in the national structure. Local activities sit alongside national goals, the two reinforcing each other. That collaboration builds the trust necessary to discuss and shift tensions, make hard decisions when needed, and to step back and give genuine freedom when it's possible.

Meaningful innovation in organizing happens through day-to-day experience. The national structure holds the broader purpose and picture. The daily work carried out to further this greater purpose is constantly adjusted by the people who do it, who are the real experts in their field. The relationship between them should be bidirectional—not a hierarchy of control, but a framework of accountability, built on trust and a common purpose.

The stand-up comedy show was not in any plan. It could not have been. It came from someone who felt that their ideas were welcome, that the movement was theirs to shape, that there was room to try something that had never been tried before.

That is what genuine autonomy produces. You cannot manufacture it from above. You can only build the conditions in which it becomes possible and then get out of the way.



BUILDING FOR THE LONG HAUL

Cécile Bessire

In April 2022, we had launched the Renovate Switzerland campaign and ran it for several months amid a honeymoon atmosphere within our core team. This lasted for six months. By October we had run ten actions in a single month, put 40 people on the roads, and created a national conversation about home insulation, climate action, and civil resistance. Our visual identity was being borrowed by advertisers and referenced in political campaigns and carnival floats. A survey showed that one in two people in the country had heard of us. We were listed among the five words that defined the year. It felt like the next action phase, planned for spring, would be the decisive one. Victory felt close.

Then two people left.

We had been working seven days a week since the beginning. No real breaks. Constantly on call. Each of us carried a specific piece of the organization—media, mobilization, action, legal, care—and knew that our departure could bring the whole thing down. Beyond the seven people working full-time in the core team, we had almost no human resources. Everything rested on the same shoulders it had always rested on, because we had been so focused on producing that we had never stopped to build the capacity that would have let us share the load.

We had told ourselves we were in an emergency. Two to three years left. Every week counted. There was no time to slow down and build for the long term because the long term might not exist. That logic was not wrong exactly. But it had a cost we hadn't fully calculated.

After the second action phase, the cost came due. One member of the team stepped back from exhaustion in November. In December, a second person decided to leave. Two of the most important initiators of the campaign, gone within weeks of each other. The group didn't know what to do. We had a plenary

| Image (left): Renovate Switzerland during a blockade in Bern.

meeting already scheduled where we were supposed to present our plan for the spring to an expected 100 attendees. The plan had assumed both leaders would be there.

It hadn't occurred to us, until now, that we shouldn't have assumed that.

The entire plan began to crumble, and we found ourselves in an existential crisis. Our identity as a group was built around a very specific plan, strategy, set of tactics, and public messaging. Who were we if we could no longer be the famous *Klimakleber* (climate gluers) and road blockers with orange vests and red and white banners? What would we do if we could no longer risk our freedom by escalating direct action to force the government to renovate all buildings in Switzerland? These questions gave rise to deeper ones: Did we really want to continue with the plan of mobilizing hundreds of people for civil disobedience to put pressure on the government, and at what cost? What if we all burned out? Or would it work anyway?

We met every day in my living room. We took stock of what we had and what we didn't. Continuing as planned was impossible. The resources weren't there. We could focus on fundraising and training new people, which meant radically changing our public posture. We could restructure the whole organization to make it less dependent on specific individuals, which would take time we had always refused to spend.

These conversations were not easy. Not everyone agreed on the analysis. Not everyone agreed on the priorities. The tension was real and it sat in the room with us every day.

In the end, we chose to build. Fundraising. Action training. Fieldwork. Developing the skills and bringing in the people that would eventually make our plan viable—because we had proven we couldn't execute it alone. This meant shifting from a short-term, tactics-oriented campaign to something guided by a longer-term vision. It meant becoming a different kind of organization than we had set out to be.

Not everyone accepted this.

A few days after the plenary, my phone rang. "What happened on Saturday was all bullshit!" Someone who had been with us through the previous year was on the line, screaming. Others were disappointed but held on, trusting us enough to stay, wanting to serve something larger than their own frustration. Many of the

younger participants drifted away; organizational work was less compelling than action phases, and we had lost the momentum that had once made the grinding feel worthwhile.

The shift cut off something real. The momentum of 2022 did not come back. We have not, since then, had the same impact on public opinion that we had that year. That is the truth of it.

I have spent a long time with my feelings about this decision, turning them over. There are moments when I feel responsible for everything that was lost—the people who left, the opportunities that closed, the particular electricity of that year that we never managed to recreate. When I examine that feeling closely, I find it is tied to a romanticized image of myself and what I was doing. As long as we were in the media, as long as people were talking about us, I felt like I was finally changing the world. That feeling, once you have had it, is very hard to let go of.

But I have come to see the decision as both inevitable and necessary.

Inevitable, because it was the only decision we could have made. We did the best we could with what we had and who we were. The reckoning would have arrived sooner or later, it just so happened to arrive in December 2022, in my living room, with a plenary approaching and two fewer people than we'd had a month before.

Necessary, because the organization is still here. That likely would not be true otherwise. The campaign was designed for the short term. It succeeded on its own terms, brilliantly, for exactly as long as it could. What came after was somehow harder, slower, less visible and felt less exciting. It was also the only thing that made survival possible and allowed for further positive development.



JUST STOP OIL

THE OPEN LETTER TO JUST STOP OIL

Harley F. Brewer

In the summer of 2022, we were unstoppable. We had finished the oil terminal blockades, built a strong base of supporters, and shifted to public disruption in London. We were running twenty events a week with hundreds of attendees. People across the country were giving talks, flyering, spreading the word. Cultural actions had given us a new kind of reach—one person tied to a goalpost during a Premier League match generated more press than a hundred scientists issuing desperate warnings. The national conversation felt like it was moving. I genuinely believed this was the moment, that nothing could stop us. We were about to change the world.

Then the letter arrived.

It started small. Someone at a talk called me an eco-fascist. I didn't think much of it. I had already been called everything—fascist, communist, idiot—and my skin had thickened. But later that day I heard that a significant supporter was leaving the campaign with the same claim. Then every group chat I was in lit up simultaneously.

An open letter had been written and distributed to every public channel we had. The authors described themselves as an anonymous collective of marginalized people, some of whom had worked with the campaign, signing under the name Just Stop Eco-Fascism. The accusations were specific: we had a culture of urgency, we glorified arrest and imprisonment, we were hierarchical, we were appealing to far-right ideologies, we lacked a community of care, and we showed no respect for other groups in the movement. The conclusion was that these factors made the organization fascistic.

Image (left): Just Stop Oil protesters at a Scottish fuel depot nearly 40 hours after storming the site.

The letter ended with a warning. *We are asking you to act and we hope you won't let us down. We are among you and we are within you, so we will be watching closely.*

Most of those critiques, framed differently, might have circulated as ordinary disagreements about organizing philosophy. But the word fascist is not ordinary. It is explosive, and it was designed to be. Within hours, people were calling for leadership to step down. The youth section was being urged to splinter. Some were arguing the organization should shut down entirely.

I felt the whiplash of it physically. A week earlier we had been doing better than ever, attracting new members, hitting the press. Now it felt like the whole thing was about to collapse from the inside.

We went into crisis mode. The leadership tried to make contact with the authors, asking for an open discussion and a path forward. The authors refused, saying it wouldn't be safe to meet anyone from the group. This split the leadership into camps: those who believed the letter had been written in bad faith and wanted no further engagement, and those who believed we had to keep trying. What everyone agreed on was that we needed to look carefully at the substance of the accusations, because something in the letter had clearly struck a nerve.

Some of it was true, and we knew it.

The care structure was real but imperfect. The pace of the campaign meant people sometimes fell through the cracks, facing long legal proceedings largely alone, without enough support. Out of seven of my own cases, I felt genuinely looked after through five. That gap was real, and the letter created pressure to close it.

The accusation about disrespecting other groups' strategies was also fair. The entire messaging of the campaign was built on the premise that everything else was failing. This was honest, but it was not a posture that made coalition-building easy. It is hard to invite allies when your opening argument is that your allies have been ineffective. By October, perhaps in response to this, coalition outreach had become a much larger part of our strategy. Our biggest action of the year brought thousands together from different organizations.

The accusation that we were appealing to the far-right held no truth. A local group had used a Boris Johnson quote in a leaflet to illustrate the case for climate action. You could read that as a far-right gesture if you stretched hard enough. No one I knew working in the organization came anywhere near far-right politics.

And then there were the accusations that were true but non-negotiable.

Yes, we had a culture of urgency. Yes, we were hierarchical. Yes, we glorified arrest and imprisonment. We had chosen all these things deliberately. Urgency because we believed every week mattered. Hierarchy because it allowed us to respond quickly and act with unity. We glorified arrest because we believed it was glorious—there is no other word for someone willing to personally sacrifice for a cause larger than themselves. That was what Just Stop Oil was. To dismantle those things was to become a different organization, one more like the groups that already existed and that we believed were falling short of what the moment required.

We said this clearly. These were our non-negotiables. People who found them unacceptable were welcome to leave and build or join something that better fit their values. We meant it genuinely. Though more people who were unhappy chose to stay and try to change what they opposed from within than left to build elsewhere.

A few weeks into the conflict, a small group met with a go-between—I joined them. I still wanted to understand the fascism charge, not as a concession but because none of us wanted to become something we would be ashamed of without realizing it. In the meeting I was told that if I needed it explained to me why what we were doing was fascistic, there was no way I could ever understand it.

After that I stopped seeking dialogue with them.

Others in the leadership kept trying, meeting after meeting, in good faith, with no result. Meanwhile, people we suspected were connected to the group sent harassing messages to individuals they believed were involved—sometimes demeaning, sometimes many in a day. Slowly, that too died down.

Eventually the campaign refocused. People returned to their roles. We developed a discipline around purpose: if something served the primary mission, we attended to it; if it didn't, we didn't. That clarity was harder to hold than it sounds, but it was what kept us from being pulled apart by every new criticism, every new accusation, every attempt to destabilize from the outside or the inside.

The more successful a campaign becomes, the more likely something like this will happen to it. I have been part of many political campaigns. Almost all of them faced some version of this. Many collapsed.

There is no way to prevent it. The only preparation is to know it is coming, to have thought, in advance, about what your organization is and what it is not, about which criticisms point to genuine failures and which are attempts to re-shape you into something else, and about how to tell the difference when you are inside the storm and thinking clearly is difficult.

Some of what the letter said was right. We took it seriously and changed what we could. Some of it was wrong. We said so and moved on. Some of it was a direct attack on the things that made us what we were. We held those things, clearly and without apology, and kept working.

That is the only answer there is. Know who you are. Fix what needs fixing. Keep going.



HONING OUR CRAFT

Thibaut Cantet

Every night somewhere in France, someone was attending their first Dernière Rénovation talk.

In a bar back room, a library, a cold student hall. They had found us through a leaflet, or seen an action on the news, or heard about us from a friend. Something had moved in them—enough to come, not yet enough to act. They arrived nervous, curious, not sure what they were walking into.

The formula was almost ritualistic. One speaker laid out the climate crisis, its implications, our plan, the invitation. Volunteers gave short testimonies about why they had taken action. No open Q&A, which hands too much power to the loudest voices. Instead, small groups with facilitators, where people could share how they were feeling, ask what they needed to ask, and fill out a form indicating which of four steps they wanted to take: help mobilize others, attend a nonviolent action training, sign up for an action, donate.

People cried. They argued. They left with relief, or anger, or both. Sometimes five people showed up. Sometimes fifty. Every meeting was a seed.

We had learned something early that shaped everything we did later. People don't radicalize by reading reports. They radicalize by doing things, by leafletting in the cold, by running a public meeting, by sitting in the road and feeling cars roar past and realizing they aren't powerless. Conviction follows action, not the other way around. The talks were built around that insight. The moment someone expressed interest, the window between curiosity and forgetting was narrow. If they couldn't find us quickly, they wouldn't find us at all.

So we organized as many talks as we could, as often as we could. The system was a self-feeding mechanism: the more talks we held, the more trained people we

Image (left): National Assembly member Sandrine Rousseau joins activists from Dernière Rénovation in Paris, November 2022.

had ready to host talks, and the more talks we could hold. It was the core organizers' job to train newly recruited people to run the meetings themselves, so the work could multiply without burning out the people at the center. In most major cities, paid organizers worked full-time to make it happen: the buzz of nervous energy as people arrived, the awkward silence before the talk began, the cries by the end of it, the sharing of food, drinks, and laughter afterward. The talks were the heartbeat of the movement, the place where it lived.

Interest cools fast, so we didn't let it.

Within forty-eight hours of someone expressing interest, someone would call them. Not an email, a human voice. That call changed everything more often than we expected. People moved from spectators to volunteers in days. One-on-one contact turned out to be our most powerful tool, more effective than any mass communication we ever attempted.

During those calls, people could say what skills they had and what they wanted to learn. This allowed us to match them to something the organization actually needed. Scripts and systems allowed volunteers to make calls themselves, registering people for trainings, actions, or donations when they'd expressed interest but hadn't yet followed through. The social proximity of a personal call was not a small thing. It was the difference between someone joining and someone forgetting they'd ever heard of us.

By autumn 2022, in the buildup to our third wave of action, we had grown from a handful of organizers with a few dozen people willing to face arrest to around 300 organizers and 500 people taking action. New faces kept appearing at meetings, nervous, curious, ready to sit down in traffic and glue themselves to asphalt. It felt unstoppable. It also felt slightly terrifying.

As the movement grew, so did the architecture holding it together.

Local groups had taken root across the country—Paris, Lyon, Toulouse, Marseille, each with its own character. One met in a squat. Another in a church basement. Another in someone's living room. But they were connected. Every so often, everyone logged into the same national calls, faces lit on screens, working to stay united despite the distance. Sometimes we would rent a large venue for gatherings, and more than a hundred people from across all teams would converge for a few days to work, celebrate, remember we were in this together.

The chain of command between local and national was clear. More than ten local groups worked toward common national goals while dozens of transversal working groups handled social media, legal support, partnerships, IT, and more. Each team had defined roles and boundaries. They had ground rules, feedback mechanisms, access to trained mediators when conflicts arose. Each person within them had a specific responsibility, a clear place in the structure.

We were also rigorous about data. After every talk we recorded how many leaflets had been distributed, how many people attended, how many decided to take action, how many signed up for training, how many donated. We measured every tweak we made to see whether it improved the system. As we would often say with slight provocation, *what is not in the database does not exist*. The database became a living map of the movement; every line showing a person, where they'd trained, what they'd done, who had called them. It felt like holding the pulse of something too large to see with the naked eye.

Everything built toward the actions themselves.

People who had trained together were grouped into the same teams wherever possible. They met beforehand to prepare, to bond, to connect emotionally. They debriefed together once everyone was released. Each roadblock had more than ten distinct roles, not just out of operational necessity, but because a specific role transforms participation. A person with a responsibility is not interchangeable. They are needed.

The “bees” were anyone who'd joined an action team for a roadblock or another tactic. “Queens” served as point of contact with the national team, emergency decision-makers, responsible for ensuring every other role was filled. Some bees handled de-escalation with drivers, some created media content, some paid attention to emergency vehicles to ensure they would have a lane to pass through if needed, and some sat on the ground without moving or responding to violence and provocation. Behind the scenes, many more supporters liaised with lawyers and with families, waiting outside police stations, prepared meals at safe houses. These supporting roles were often filled by people not yet ready to sit in the road themselves—a way in, a place to stand while building toward something harder. Gradually they could engage in riskier actions as they became familiar with the organization, witnessing the transformative effects of acting together.

During debriefings, many came back with the same words. *Liberating. Nourishing. Deeply spiritual*. They talked about the particular combination of strength and

open-heartedness that principled nonviolent action produces, the feeling of belonging, the strange sanity of finally saying no to forces of destruction in a world sleepwalking toward extinction. At that point it wasn't about politics anymore. It was about being alive. Fully present. Connected to something real.

The rhythm of it—risk, arrest, release, dinner, tears, laughter—kept the movement alive.

We had built an impressive machine—or grown a spectacular organism, depending on how you saw it.

But systems can become cold. There were moments when what we had built began to resemble the world we were trying to change—performance-driven, relentless, grinding through the people inside it. We remained critical of ourselves, asking constantly how the machinery could be made less exhausting, more human. The alternatives in the radical activist landscape didn't feel right either—too purist, not rigorous enough for what the crisis demanded. We were trying to prototype something that didn't yet exist: an organizing culture that was both efficient and humane, adapted specifically to the conditions of mass civil disobedience and the climate emergency.

We only partially succeeded.

The tension between care and urgency, between human sustainability and organizational efficiency, is real. But I believe it is navigable. All our failures were not inevitable, but the ways to bridge the gap must be found for each context.

Craft alone is not enough. You need ideology, strategy, messaging, the political tide moving in the right direction. When the conditions aren't there, even the most refined system produces nothing.

But when the tide is right, and the waves of change are building, craft is what determines whether your boat rises or swamps. For a few months in 2022, we rode those waves. Despite our shortcomings, we learned, in that time, that organization can itself be an act of love—carefully building a vehicle for the greatest number to participate and encounter meaning in a crumbling world. Doing so while attempting to attend to each person without reducing them to instruments, even while asking everything of them. This was its own form of resistance.

That is worth carrying forward, whatever comes next.



PART III:

Navigating the

Whirlwinds



FROM VANDALS TO MARTYRS

Beatrice Costantino

The officer made it clear from the start that he wasn't going anywhere. He had been assigned to me by DIGOS—the Italian law enforcement agency charged with investigating cases involving terrorism and organized crime—after we threw paint at the Ministry of Ecological Transition in Rome. He wanted me to understand exactly how things stood between us. “I am very stubborn,” he said. He would follow me all night if he had to. If I found that bothersome, he suggested, I was welcome to call the Carabinieri and report him for harassment.

Earlier that morning, I was standing in my kitchen, reflecting on the action that took place the previous day: eight Ultima Generazione activists had thrown paint at the ministry for the first time. Today was now my turn. I thought, *How is it possible, less than 24 hours later, to walk into the same building and do the same thing? The police would be waiting. They knew us now.*

We did it anyway. We were lucky. We sneaked in, climbed a few floors, and threw water balloons filled with red paint before they dragged us out. The satisfaction of it was enormous, even as they were pulling us out through the doors.

At the police station that evening, they told us we were being expelled from Rome and would be put on the first train out. Our lawyers confirmed this was illegal. The officers didn't care. Then something shifted, and I still don't fully understand why; instead of driving us to the station, they walked us there on foot. Four of us, through the city streets. Two seized the moment and slipped away. That left me and one other walking alongside my very stubborn officer, who had by now changed his approach entirely. He complimented us on our moral courage. If we cooperated, he said, he would look the other way at the station and let us go home.

We believed him. We shouldn't have. It was a trap. The agents followed us home.

Image (previous page): Activists from Dernière Rénovation halt stage 10 of the 2022 Tour de France in the French Alps, forcing the climate crisis into one of the country's most-watched sporting events.

Image (left): An activist from Ultima Generazione gets dragged by the police after throwing paint at the Ministry of Health in Rome, Italy. May 21, 2024.

Eighteen of us were now crammed into a small flat, aware that we were being watched, aware that the moment anyone stepped outside they would be taken to the station. We knew because it had already happened to the first four people who tried. For thirty-six hours we stayed inside, packed together, arguing and planning amid an atmosphere of irrational panic that sets in when frightened people are confined in small spaces.

What we decided was suicidal. Half of us would leave at dawn and attempt to throw paint at another ministry. The rest would remain in the flat.

I was in the first group. We reached the Ministry of Finance. I even managed to throw a water balloon—in what I can only describe as one last act of pure, child-like defiance—before they stopped me.

The group at the flat fared worse. Officers entered without a warrant, using COVID regulations as a pretext. A girl inside, forgetting the one rule that mattered, opened the door. The officers rushed in and grabbed everyone. By that afternoon all eighteen of us were together at the police station. Even those who had never set foot near a ministry, never touched a water balloon, were reported for “complicity in vandalism.” The paint found in the apartment was enough.

The following days were filled with misery and despair. We lost the flat. The owners evicted us, afraid of further police attention. Scattered to different friends’ houses across Rome, we were unable to go out because we were all being followed. Our materials had been seized. It seemed genuinely impossible to continue.

Our backs against the wall, we needed to fight back. We decided to stop eating.

Five people would go on hunger strike indefinitely. Five more would join them each day for a sit-in outside the Ministry of Ecological Transition. We were under extreme pressure, and none of us had any idea what we were walking into. We had never done this before, not as individuals, not as an organization. We were not physically or psychologically prepared. Laura, one of the women on strike, had chronic health problems. Yet none of that changed anything. Our anger was larger than our fear, and so we began.

Every day we devised small plans and tricks to get past the police and reach the ministry. Once there, we did nothing but hold our simple cardboard signs with words written in marker: “Citizens’ assemblies now—Hunger strike day #.” Every day we tried to gain a few more centimeters toward the ministry entrance.

On some days we almost reached the door. More often we ended up stopped on the pavement or caught between the flower beds in the car park.

Every day they took us to the station and reported us for unauthorized demonstration and for violating the expulsion order that was supposed to have removed us from the city.

After a few days, only three of us were still on strike. Laura, Peter, and me.

We were still at the very beginning of our movement. Nobody knew “Ultima Generazione.” We had almost no social media following, almost no press coverage. But the story started to move on its own.

Newspapers called our press team. Employees inside the ministry wrote to us anonymously to say they disagreed with the minister’s policies and that what we were doing mattered to them. People from Greenpeace and Legambiente wrote to express solidarity that their own leaders had refused to give; some Greenpeace activists even went further by going on strike against their own leadership. People who had known us for years, people who had followed us online for three days, people who had wanted to participate in something like this but had never found the nerve—all of them started showing up at the ministry, accompanying us to the station, filling the seats around us.

Then Laura collapsed during a sit-in and was taken to hospital. The media attention that followed was of a different order entirely.

On the seventh day, our lawyers received a call from the head of DIGOS asking what we wanted and why we were still going. They offered a private meeting with the minister. We said no. We had come for a public meeting, and we would keep going until one was promised.

On the eleventh day, it was announced.

I still remember that moment. We couldn’t believe it. We would leave our small patch of concrete and our familiar chairs at the police station. We could eat again.

The most amazing thing about this victory was its symbolic value: discovering that acts of civil disobedience could have an impact and be effective, that what we were doing really made sense. This allowed us to continue with even more determination and conviction.

We had not initially intended a hunger strike. We undertook it out of anger and desperation, because we had played every other card we held. That desperation

turned out to be part of its power. We went from being seen as vandals to being seen as people willing to suffer for something they believed. That shift changed everything. Ministry employees who had watched us throw paint with fear and anger wrote to tell us they had changed their minds. The hunger strike, combined with the daily repression, created a backfire that we had not engineered and could not have predicted.

Laura's charisma and her health problems amplified the indignation in ways that no planned communication strategy could have manufactured. The focus on a single target—the minister himself—kept the pressure from dissipating. The daily sit-ins in the same location built gravity, pulling in employees, onlookers, supporters, a city councilor who sat down with us and was taken to the station and sparked his own wave of outrage.

And we had built, almost without knowing it, a way for people to join from a distance—phone-bombing the ministry's lines every day, dozens of people clogging the phones with a single demand: meet with them. It gave people who couldn't risk arrest a way to be in on the action in a way that mattered.

It worked to have a core team that made decisions quickly and an organizational structure that, although in its infancy, allowed us to seize this opportunity, including a press group, a social media group, a logistics group that organized hospitality and support for the hunger strike.

I cannot guarantee that replicating this pattern would work again, but I will always carry this experience and example in my heart, with gratitude and even pride.



WE HAVE
1028
DAYS LEFT

DESIGNER RENOVATION

NOVATION

1,028 DAYS LEFT

Thibaut Cantet, Alizée Le Fur

On a cold March evening, Louis McKechnie climbed a fence at Goodison Park in Liverpool and tied himself by the neck to the goalpost. Everton were playing Newcastle in a Premier League match. For a few minutes, play stopped and millions of Britons watched a young man standing completely still while players and officials gathered around him, uncertain what to do. The roar of the crowd turned to confusion, then anger. Louis was there for Just Stop Oil, protesting new oil fields in the North Sea.

From France, we followed this closely. I, Thibaut, remember feeling my chest tighten, a mix of awe and dread as I watched the first footage of Louis on my laptop.

The design was simple, which is what made it powerful: Interrupt a cultural moment that has the attention of an entire country. Do something shocking enough to stop the event entirely. Put yourself in a position of genuine vulnerability. And show, for a split second on television, a clear path for anyone watching: a website announcing a meeting and accepting donations—a way in.

In the hours after Louis's action, Just Stop Oil received a hundred thousand visits to their website and hundreds of sign-ups for public meetings. For every thousand people swearing at their screens because their match had been interrupted, there were dozens who felt they had just had an epiphany they'd been needing for a long time.

A few days later, JSO called us. They wanted us to do something similar at the final of an international rugby competition in Paris's Stade de France. We were excited. We studied videos of the previous year's final, examined the distance between the public and the pitch, and looked at the security measures between.

Image (left): Activist Alizée Le Fur from Dernière Rénovation interrupts the 2022 French Open semi-final tying herself to the net.

This was very different from the Premier League. We accepted security would be impossible to bypass. We dropped the idea.

But we couldn't unsee what we had witnessed. A single person, tied to a post, had moved an entire country.

Our eyes landed on Roland Garros. The French Open semifinal. Maximum media attention. Manageable security. We bought tickets.

Disrupting the French Open

That last week of May had been a low point. A limp leaflet drop on Wednesday. An empty public meeting on Friday. A seminar on Saturday with five people in the room. I, Alizée, had been working nonstop for months, and it felt like we were going nowhere.

At a coordination meeting someone said, "Guys, remember the Roland Garros tickets we bought two months ago? Who's going?" Three days before the event, on a random Tuesday afternoon, I said yes.

On Thursday, we met at the Cité U in the 14th arrondissement. For two hours we ran through movements until they were muscle memory. Then, late at night, we worked on what to put on the T-shirt. I wanted something like the psychological jolt of the Rebellion of One messaging—sober, raw, not flashy or vindictive. Not talking to our adversaries. Speaking directly to the people watching, eye to eye, asking them to rise up. Something that would make them uncomfortable, because we should all be uncomfortable by now. Something to urge them to action.

We considered the declarations of Professor Sir David King on the time remaining to prevent runaway climate collapse. We converted it into days. A quick calculation gave us 1,028. The number hit us. Every month, every week, every day counted. We finished the T-shirt at two in the morning. When I tried to brush my teeth I felt like throwing up. I collapsed into bed.

The next afternoon I reached the stadium with our media activist. The zip ties I had hidden in my underwear got through security. Our seats weren't together, so we parted. I walked in alone, stunned by the size of it. Nothing like television. Nothing like Google Earth. I found my cheap seat high in the stands, surrounded by loud, drunk men, and sat there thinking: *what am I even doing here?*

I had never been to a tennis match in my life. I learned that there were moments when the audience could stand and moments when we couldn't. I didn't yet know how I would get from up there to the court. What I knew was that we had decided to interrupt the match at 6:30, when the crowd would be at its peak watching Nadal's victory.

It was 3:30. There was time. I found the media activist in the cafeteria. We ate a banana and drank coffee. I lay down on a bench and took a nap.

At 5:30 I went to the bathroom and wrapped the zip tie around my neck. I looked at myself in the mirror of that soulless restroom. On our way back, I heard that Nadal's opponent had twisted his ankle. *Shit. Hurry.*

I ran to see what was happening. The crowd was already standing. The cameras were all on Nadal's face. I texted the coordinator: "What now?"

"No. Don't go. Wait. Wait."

Wait? I had not felt my body in three days. I had barely eaten. I discreetly climbed over the boxes while everyone was on their feet, took photographs of the court layout for the person who would go the next day.

My phone rang: "Stay inside. There's another match." I found a way to stay without a ticket, slipping into a checked box, sitting next to France's most famous weather presenter. I kept my face hard, stared at the court, and prayed no one would speak to me.

At nine o'clock—during peak viewing—I took off my shirt. *Let's go.*

Something rose from my chest and moved through my whole body. No words for it. Just the weight of it—the injustice, wasting my youth while adults told me I was doing the right thing with my life. Anger turned to sadness, and sadness into a flood of screams and tears within me. I climbed over what was left between me and the net.

I jumped. I remember trying to find the balance between speed and precision. I tied myself to the net.

I did it.

No guards came running. They approached slowly, fearing I had a detonator. I told them I had nothing, that I was nonviolent, and raised my hand. I touched the

wooden wall beside me. The people around me who had been sipping cocktails stared, taking pictures. I had become a spectacle. I breathed. The boos rose. I lifted my chest and tried to turn their jeers into strength. Seven guards came to drag me away. I went limp.

A part of me died on that court. A piece of innocence.

Nerves of Steel

The image was everywhere.

Tens of millions of people saw it—live on television, or in the hours and days that followed. T-shirts with *1,028 days left* appeared online within days, sold by opportunists who had never heard of us. Influencers in Hong Kong made YouTube videos peddling conspiracy theories. The image embedded itself in the collective memory, briefly but undeniably.

We had 100,000 visits to our website in 48 hours. Our public meetings went from a handful of people to thirty or forty, people who had come to hear the plan and were ready to commit. We made our first appearances on national television. We had to onboard new people every day—into working groups, into trainings, answering calls and emails at all hours. We barely slept. Our infrastructure was not built for what hit us, and we only captured a fraction of the energy flowing toward us. Most of us burned out within weeks trying to find roles for people faster than we could train them. At some point we accepted that many of them would not be integrated, because we physically and mentally could not handle it.

In the action wave that followed, more than a hundred people were arrested. We could have had many more.

I, Thibaut, lost count of the number of people I met at actions who told me the same thing: *I saw the picture of Alizée at Roland Garros, heard about the 40 hours she spent in a cell afterward, and thought, “If she’s doing that, what excuse do I have?”*

For many of them it created the same kind of psychological jolt as the Tank Man in Tiananmen Square, or Ieshia Evans standing in front of police in Baton Rouge—images that don’t assert an argument but embody one. Images that ask a question you can’t unhear: *If she can do that, are my limitations actually as real as I think they are? How can I leave her to take this stand alone?*

Most of the people who came did not need another fact about the climate crisis. They didn't need another report or documentary. They had the facts. What they needed was to see someone—a real person—break through the fear they felt themselves. When they saw Alizée on that court, neck tied, eyes steady, they recognized something they had been missing from within themselves.

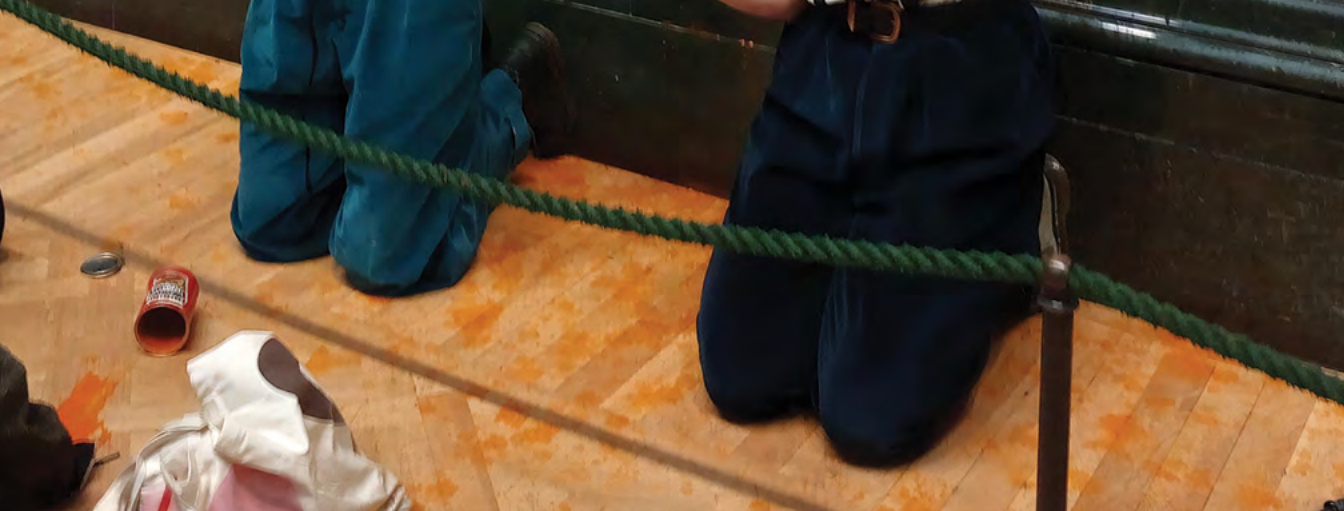
They needed to see courage embodied. Not in words. Not in slogans. In a person standing alone in a place she was not supposed to be, refusing to look away. That was enough. For many people, that was everything.



Small informational label on the left wall.



Informational label on the right wall, next to the large painting.



SUNFLOWER SOUP

Hannah Hunt, Anna Holland, Harley F. Brewer

I, Hannah, had spent the evening throwing tins of soup at a glass panel in the shower.

I was testing which variety would cling best. Mixed vegetable was too lumpy. Lentil blocked the drain. I settled on Heinz tomato. The next morning, I met Anna and Phoebe in a quiet corner of St. James's Park, helped them hide tubes of superglue in their clothes, and watched them walk toward the National Gallery. I couldn't go in myself. After my own action there months earlier, I had been banned from every art gallery in the UK. I found a café nearby and sat down with my phone, heart racing, watching Twitter.

None of us had any clue what was about to happen.

The idea had started, as most things in Just Stop Oil did, around a table with coffee and a small group of people throwing out ideas. Most ideas died there. This one nearly did too.

I had been thinking for months about the problem of attention. The roadblocks were working tactically but losing ground in the press. Every day on the roads, the newspapers gave us less. I had watched actions that should have made front pages get buried by competing news. In autumn 2022, Animal Rising shut down milk distribution centers across the UK—a highly effective operation causing real economic damage to the dairy industry. Then the Queen died. Four days of action vanished beneath the weight of national mourning. You cannot plan for that. You can only design for the best odds and accept the rest is roulette.

Image (left): Activists Phoebe Plummer and Anna Holland from Just Stop Oil after throwing tinned soup at Vincent Van Gogh's famous 1888 work *Sunflowers* at the National Gallery in London, Friday, October 14, 2022.

I had also been watching something else: the difference between actions that spread and actions that didn't. Over the summer, JSO had targeted paintings in galleries across the country. The press response was mixed. None of those actions came close to what I believed was possible. But I had learned something from an earlier action I took with my then-partner at the National Gallery. The photograph of the two of us, heads leaning together as if about to kiss, hands glued to the frame of Constable's *The Hay Wain*, reached the front page of *The Guardian*. The action design wasn't radically different from others. But it had a story. It had emotion. People love love, and that image gave them something to feel before they had time to argue.

People want a story with depth and character. Someone they can root for. Humans crave emotion and grit. If you can weave those elements into the design of an action, you can get them to listen.

My original concept for the soup action had been different: Campbell's tomato soup thrown at Andy Warhol's *Soup Cans*, a statement tying food shortages to the climate crisis, a tenuous but present thread connecting food to oil. I loved the absurdity of throwing soup. But *Soup Cans* was hanging in New York, and the *Daily Mail* headline would practically write itself: "Climate Activist Flies to New York to Protest." The idea shifted. If you're going to throw soup, why not throw it at one of the most famous paintings in the world?

I brought the proposal to the core team. The reaction was not enthusiasm.

That's absurd. Ridiculous. What does soup and Van Gogh have to do with oil? How does throwing a can of soup over artwork create support for the cause?

People I had worked closely with for a year were skeptical. The suggestion was made more than once to pull it. JSO pushes boundaries, the argument went, but this was one step too far. I was told on multiple occasions to let it go.

I didn't. I felt it in my gut: if we were going to cut through the noise around the climate crisis, boundaries had to be pushed. I had learned that our actions needed, in a sense, not to make sense. They had to jolt people awake, pull them out of the autopilot of their daily lives. The skeptics' reactions, in hindsight, were a preview of the public storm of outrage that was about to follow. But that outrage was not a problem with the plan, it was the plan.

I also knew who had to carry it out. Young people needed to see someone they could relate to, someone whose willingness to act felt like a reflection of their

own possible courage. I had met Anna and Phoebe in the weeks before, during action briefings for the roadblocks. They were charismatic, principled, passionate. I suspected they were exactly the kind of people who'd be up for something a little out of the ordinary.

I was right.

With a small team of supporters, I met Anna and Phoebe in a park close to the museum to prepare for the action. They headed into the museum. From a café nearby, I was watching Twitter. Within minutes the footage was spreading. By the following days it had 50 million views. It was on news programs around the world.

The Splash Heard Round the World

I, Anna, had been growing increasingly vocal about wanting to do something bigger. Every day on the roads, every day the papers gave us less. One day after a march, Hannah approached me. The details weren't finalized, but I knew it would involve art and be outrageous. I said yes immediately.

When the plan came together—Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, soup—I needed a partner. JSO never let anyone act alone. I thought of Phoebe immediately.

We had met a few days earlier on the morning of a roadblock focused on the disproportionate impact of climate collapse on LGBTQ+ communities. We were in a safe house going over details, preparing for verbal and potential physical abuse—not just blocking a road in Trafalgar Square but doing so as openly queer people—when Phoebe arrived trailing glitter and neon pink hair. Their joy cut straight through the tension. I filed it away.

Tracking Phoebe down took time. Messages had to stay vague. Tech security was always on my mind. When Phoebe finally called back, it didn't take long.

We met the day before the action to visit the gallery and plan our route. Our tote bags held tins of tomato soup and, in case anyone stopped us, bread and salad leaves. We passed through the metal detectors and went looking for the *Sunflowers*. Something drew us straight to the room. I stood for a moment in awe staring at the painting that would, in just 24 hours, become a permanent part of our lives. I noted the guard, the low rope, the glass protecting the canvas.

That evening we stood in the shower and threw tins of soup at a glass panel. The mess was considerably larger than anticipated. We went to bed early, but neither of us slept.

At seven in the morning we woke, ate a few bites of breakfast, and made our way into London. No phones—we had memorized the route. As a local, Phoebe led. In the park near the gallery, we met supporters and a documentary filmmaker who wanted to capture this moment. The camera went up and all the words we had prepared fell out of our heads.

We walked to the gallery entrance. The metal detectors went off. My mind flooded with images of being removed before we even started. We were waved through.

In the toilets we stripped off our coats, our Just Stop Oil T-shirts still hidden below our jumpers. Then we walked toward the painting. I remember nothing of the paintings we passed. I don't know how we didn't get lost.

We turned into the room and stopped. In front of us there was something we didn't expect.

Sitting beneath the *Sunflowers* was a group of 20 schoolchildren, all wearing orange high-visibility jackets. Each child held a piece of paper with a wonky crayon recreation of the painting in their lap. We backed away until a bench caught the backs of our legs. We sat down. We didn't dare look at each other.

There was no way we could do this in front of the children.

We began moving around the room, pretending to study the other paintings. I made a comment about the colors in one of them, my voice coming out unnaturally loud. The schoolchildren moved on. The single guard in the room turned his back to answer another visitor's question.

It was now or never.

We were in front of the painting. My zip stuck. For a moment I thought I would have to do it with my jumper on, the T-shirt hidden. Then it tore away. I handed Phoebe a can. We pulled the rings and threw.

The bright red liquid hit the glass.

We pulled superglue from inside our clothes and pressed our hands to the wall. A crowd gathered. Gallery staff moved quickly, emptying the room. Photographers and journalists who had materialized were the last to leave.

Then silence.

Phoebe's voice cracked as they launched into the speech. *What is worth more, art or life?* Their nerves threatened at every word to silence them. They kept going.

I glanced over. Phoebe was wearing almost as much soup as the painting. They looked back with a grin.

We did it.

Gallery staff wheeled in an enormous contraption and stepped over us to lift the painting from the wall. I spoke up: *We knew there was glass. We wouldn't have done it if it wasn't protected.* No one replied. The frame came off the wall, and for a moment, something perhaps only dozens of people in history have seen, the reverse of the *Sunflowers* canvas was visible. I had recently finished reading *The Goldfinch*. The sight sent chills down my spine. Then the painting was covered, secured, and wheeled out. As the doors swung open and shut, I caught a glimpse of the adjacent room packed with people trying to see them.

It is a feeling unlike any other, being as much on display in a gallery as the masterpieces around you.

Dozens of police officers filed in. *Why did they need so many?* The debonding team arrived—those specialists in removing people glued to things, who had been extremely busy in recent weeks. One of them recognized me from previous actions. We chatted while he worked to free my hand, my palm slick with soup, while I mostly pretended to still be stuck to delay the process as long as possible.

We were handcuffed, arms twisted behind our backs, taken through the bowels of the building, and spat out into a delivery area. The journalists found us before the police van. I can still feel the jolt in my shoulder where my arresting officer yanked me out of sight of the cameras.

In the van Phoebe and I talked the whole way to the station. At the front desk, going through the familiar process, the weight of the last four hours finally landed. We answered their questions, occasionally glancing at each other to lean into our resilience. Then we were led to our cells.

Home for the next 24 hours.

What Did Van Gogh Do to You?

A month earlier, 50 JSO supporters were jailed for peacefully sitting outside an oil terminal in Warwickshire. They had harmed no one, damaged nothing, and paid a serious personal price. By any moral measure, their action was the more noble. Everyone should have heard about it, yet it received a fraction of the coverage the soup throwing did.

This is not a comfortable fact. But it is a fact, and it points to something important about how attention works—not how we wish it worked, but how it actually works.

Why would someone throw soup on a Van Gogh? He loved nature. The gallery has nothing to do with oil. It makes no sense.

That was precisely the point.

An action that makes sense is an action that can be categorized, filed, and forgotten. The action that doesn't make sense lodges in the mind. It spreads because people can't resolve it. The question *why would anyone do that?* is not an obstacle to the message—it is the message. Because the answer, once the outrage settles and the noise dies down, is that the situation must be truly desperate if two young people are willing to risk everything, even prison, to make the world pay attention.

And it was desperate. It is desperate.

The truth of the climate crisis is that our society is very likely to collapse over the next 30 years. Billions of people face death. Much of the world will become uninhabitable. Many people know this. Many more are aware enough to be frightened without having looked directly at the numbers. A vast majority of young people in the UK say climate change affects their mental state. A large proportion think about it every day.

But we are not talking about it together. We are not in the streets. Everyone acts normally, so everyone else acts normally, even though the situation is not normal and everyone knows it. This is social repression—not a conspiracy, not a choice, just the accumulated weight of conformity pressing down on what we already know.

Throwing soup at a Van Gogh doesn't break that repression with logic. It breaks it with shock. It creates a rupture in the ordinary day, a moment where millions

of people are suddenly arguing about climate change, not because they were persuaded but because they were jolted. And in that argument, however heated, however contemptuous, the reality of the crisis becomes slightly more present in the world. Slightly harder to ignore.

We never expected people to love us for it. We expected outrage. But outrage travels, and somewhere inside the outrage—for a small percentage of the millions watching—something else was happening. A recognition. A door, briefly open. In the days after the soup action, hundreds of people signed up to take action. During a similar action disrupting a snooker match, thousands did.

Anna and Phoebe were eventually sentenced to two years in prison for damage amounting to a few hundred pounds to the frame. The painting was fine. They had always known it would be. The glass had been there the whole time.

With two people, a few tins of soup, a journalist from *The Guardian* with the exclusive, and a willingness to go to prison, millions of conversations were held globally about climate change. Organizations with hundreds of paid staff have spent millions and achieved less.



BACKFIRE IN BAVARIA

Carla Hinrichs

In the fall of 2022, Last Generation ran a targeted campaign in Bavaria. As a federal state led by a very conservative party, Bavaria is known for its harsh repression of protests. Inspired by the US Civil Rights Movement, we decided to go exactly where repression was likely to be strongest, knowing an overreaction by the state could create a backfire moment. If the state exposed itself by reacting harshly to peaceful protesters, people might realize it had no real answer to the climate crisis.

The idea emerged from an international network of scientists who had decided to protest together in Germany and publicly denounce political failure on the climate crisis. They chose Bavaria as a hotspot for the denial and distortion of scientific facts. When they blocked streets in their white lab coats, they were taken into preventive custody for two weeks.

A brave group from Last Generation then decided to continue the protest the scientists could no longer carry out because they were imprisoned. Their predecessors in lab coats had given the group a certain legitimacy. To show how serious they were, the activists announced publicly that if released, they would repeat the road blockades for 30 days. Bavarian law allowed for preventive detention of 30 days—the maximum under local law—and when thirteen members of LG were arrested for continuing the protest, a custodial judge ordered exactly that.

Inside Last Generation, there had been skeptical voices questioning whether Bavaria would really be provoked into such an overreaction. Indeed, the preventive imprisonment of peaceful protesters triggered widespread outrage. Bavaria's police law had already been criticized nationally. It had been tightened in 2017

Image (left): On one of Germany's biggest public-TV talk shows, Carla Hinrichs confronts the federal justice minister and Bavaria's interior minister with the faces of 13 Letzte Generation activists then held in preventive detention in Bavaria for a road blockade they had vowed to repeat. November 2022.

under the pretext of combating terrorism, extending preventive detention to the new 30-day maximum, at one point made virtually indefinite through endless extensions before mass protests in 2021 forced a rollback to only one extension. But the existing controversy was reignited. NGOs including Amnesty International and Green Legal Impact expressed serious concern. Members of the Left and Green parties spoke out. A window opened for public debate about both the treatment of protesters and the government's failure on climate.

Within Last Generation, the arrests shook people, but the shock fueled solidarity. More people than ever signed up for protest trainings and actions. Many felt that if others were willing to spend a month in jail, the least they could do was take to the streets. The emotional connection with those imprisoned in Bavaria unleashed a force in the movement that weeks of ordinary protest had not produced.

The arrests also landed at a moment when Last Generation was receiving more public attention than ever before. The outrage over the Bavarian police law amplified that attention further.

I was invited onto one of Germany's largest talk shows. Four million viewers watched live as the German Minister of Justice and the Bavarian Minister of the Interior demonstrated they had no answer to the climate crisis beyond imprisoning those who protested their inaction. Both politicians called for an even tougher approach toward Last Generation, but they were challenged by other guests. I steered the discussion toward the climate crisis itself and toward the core legal issue: that the government was violating the constitution through inadequate climate protection.

When I felt like the discussion was again leading away from the core issues as the politicians tried to increasingly criminalize our protests, I reached into my shirt sleeve and pulled out a piece of paper bearing portraits of the imprisoned activists. I held it up to the Bavarian Minister of the Interior. The contrast between the state's harsh repression and the harmless images of peaceful people behind bars spoke for itself.

Later I was told that the activists had been watching the show from their cells. When they saw their photographs held up on national television, they began banging on the walls and cell doors in celebration.

A few days after the broadcast, the activists were released a week early. Prison staff came to their cells at night and asked whether they wanted to leave immediately or wait until morning. No explanation was given. They had made no statements about ending their protests.

The media later reported a possible connection to a Last Generation press release announcing that no protests were planned for the following week. The organization needed time to train and integrate its large number of new supporters. It seems likely that public pressure on the Bavarian state had become so intense that officials seized on any available pretext to release the prisoners. There was no other explanation that held up.

But the campaign did not end there. After their release from jail, the activists shared their experiences widely. With good preparation, the detention had been bearable for most of them. Days later, fueled by courage and conviction, a new group traveled to Bavaria, blocked a street, and announced the same strategy. Some were sentenced to 30 days by the same judge, this time over Christmas.

The courage they showed and the attention they generated through this targeted campaign resonated through the movement for months. They had gone where repression was strongest and invited it to expose itself. In doing so, the Bavarian government handed the movement exactly what it needed: a demonstration, visible to the whole country, that the authorities had no answer to the climate crisis beyond punishment, and that even punishment could be turned against them.



THE CYCLIST

Carla Hinrichs

In early November 2022, a cyclist was run over by a concrete mixer in Berlin. A few days later, she was declared brain dead.

Last Generation was holding its largest protest phase to date in the city, blocking Berlin's urban motorway—Germany's most congested—several times a week across a month. Simultaneously, a group of European scientists was detained in preventive police custody for two weeks after they protested in Bavaria. A group of people from Last Generation was just about to join them, knowing they could be detained for up to 30 days.

On the day of the accident, two members were protesting on a gantry above the motorway. They had climbed up and glued themselves to it. Police closed two of the three lanes to get them down.

Quickly, the media accused Last Generation of delaying the rescue of the cyclist because a special vehicle had to drive through the resulting traffic jam. Within hours, and over the following three days, the story escalated. There was almost no coverage of the accident itself—which would have been tragic enough to make the news on its own—and almost exclusively coverage of Last Generation's alleged guilt. Germany's largest news program, *Tagesschau*, reported on a Last Generation protest for the first time ever. Every major newspaper linked our protests to the injured woman.

When the cyclist died a few days later, the reporting mushroomed. Germany's largest far-right newspaper ran the headline: "Cyclist brain dead, and it's your fault, climate activists." A professor tweeted: "The first death of the Last Generation." Journalists from the public media called us murderers on the press hotline.

None of them reported that the accident happened four kilometers from the blockade. None reported that traffic had been stopped by the police, not the

Image (left): Letzte Generation activist Carla Hinrichs blocks a road in Berlin in spring 2023, during the movement's biggest wave of action yet—more than 30 roadblocks sustained over several weeks.

protesters. None reported that protesters had previously informed the fire brigade to redirect rescue operations—every protest includes a safety plan and an emergency lane. No facts, just smears.

We had several options:

We could say nothing. The media would continue reporting sensationally and inaccurately, public perception would associate Last Generation with blame for a woman's death, and that association would justify future repression and delegitimise everything we were trying to do. Without setting the record straight, our goal of saving lives would be eclipsed by this tragedy.

We could explain what actually happened—set out the facts, show why the accusations were unfounded. But that would have made us look defensive, appearing to justify ourselves at the expense of a tragic death. We did not want to do what the media and politicians were doing: exploit the accident.

Or we could go on the offensive. Criticize the media system for using her death to destroy us.

It was clear that if we were going to respond publicly, we needed to do it quickly. I had already taken a call on the press phone in which a journalist I knew well called me a murderer.

Many within Last Generation were unsettled. The coverage had dominated the national dialogue for days. People were questioning whether it was right to continue protesting. Those who had been part of the organization from the beginning decided to carry out a road blockade themselves, demonstrating for the movement that protesting was still right. That decision had a strong ripple effect.

We went on the offensive.

We wrote a public critique of the media. We explained why we were protesting, why it was necessary, how our actions followed nonviolent principles, and how our protests always include emergency lanes and careful safety planning. But the core of the statement was a direct accusation: the media had used the death of the cyclist to portray our protest in a bad light without bothering to establish the facts. They had all jumped on the same easy, morally charged, click-worthy story. This was not journalism about her death or the responsibilities of protest groups. The media had manufactured an angle to destroy our standing.

At the same time, activists in Bavaria were risking a month in custody under a

police law originally introduced to fight terrorism. Their courage would have been buried entirely if we had allowed the cyclist story to go unanswered.

The response to our statement was larger than we expected.

At first, more indignant articles appeared, announcing that we would continue protesting despite the cyclist's death. Then, the next day, an expert report emerged showing that the emergency doctor had not needed the special vehicle, and that the cyclist would have died regardless of the traffic. Some media outlets reconstructed the incident and criticized their own profession for sensationalism. While a conservative politician demanded harsher penalties and compared us to the Red Army Faction terrorists, Left-wing and Green politicians pushed back. The tide turned.

This was only possible because we had communicated honestly. By criticizing the media while expressing genuine grief, we presented the situation without exploiting her death.

The long-term impact on us was significant. Public outrage over our alleged complicity could never be fully erased. Even today, despite all the facts, some people continue to believe we were to blame. But what the incident revealed was something larger than Last Generation: how the German media system works. It rewards the sensationalisation of failure over the reporting of success, because outrage attracts attention and generates clicks. In a democracy that calls the press its fourth estate, that failure is serious. The media—including public outlets—did not report accurately. This event exposed how far they were from fulfilling the role they claim for themselves.

The cyclist's accident was the first event that could have discredited Last Generation on a massive scale. We do not dismiss that public protests carry inherent risk. Freedom of assembly exists precisely to disrupt public life and draw attention to what is otherwise ignored. There is no disruption-free existence in a vibrant society. Every construction site and delivery vehicle disrupts traffic. Protest movements must minimize risk through safety measures, which we always did. But they must also be prepared for the unforeseen.

In a moment of real uncertainty, we trusted our values and that's why we went on the offensive. I appeared on a talk show to defend the protests, and in doing so reinforced my own connection to Last Generation and my conviction that we were doing the right thing. Afterward, the organization received more attention than before, and the bond within the group grew stronger.

We had been called murderers. We came out the other side more certain of ourselves than when it started.



I THINK WE WON

Pierre Taieb

It was ten at night, and I was walking home from headquarters, on my way to meet my girlfriend for the first time in over a week. I was steps from Père Lachaise when my phone rang. It was Nicolas, Dernière Rénovation's press manager.

"Hey man. Guess what?" he said.

I stayed silent and waited.

"I think we won."

Our teams were exhausted. Our initiative had been running for six months. We were in the middle of our third wave of action, by far the biggest yet. What had begun as a small group in Paris had grown into a large national organization, with hundreds of people working every week to organize the resistance. In the previous three weeks, we had lowered the national flag from the Panthéon, interrupted rugby games in Toulouse, and disrupted an opera performance. More importantly, we had carried out almost 20 road blockades in nearly as many days.

Organizing that many actions, sustaining that momentum for months, had taken everything. Work was all we were doing. I had not seen my friends or family in weeks.

Dozens of us had already endured so many costs: police custody, legal proceedings, police violence, insults in the mainstream media, humiliation. Some had broken down. But after months of campaigning, there were now enough of us that no seat remained vacant for very long. Every time one fell, someone else took their place. Many road blockades were still to come. The action wave was supposed to last three more weeks.

Image (left): Activists from Dernière Rénovation block traffic outside the National Assembly in Paris, demanding the government keep two amendments to the 2023 budget that would allocate €12 billion to the thermal renovation of housing.

We had massive media attention. Every week we were invited onto talk shows watched by millions. They didn't like us, but we were news, and we had the chance to talk about the crisis and our demand: a state-led mass home insulation program that would lift millions of people out of substandard housing while drastically reducing the country's carbon footprint. Live news channels told our story after every action we took. Journalists were no longer treating this as breaking news—they were treating it as a major social issue, embedding with action groups, publishing long investigations. Even *Paris Match*, one of the most famous celebrity magazines, ran a four-page report. Dozens of videos went viral on social media, gathering millions of views each time.

In autumn 2022, Dernière Rénovation was the biggest thing happening in the climate movement in years. Together with experts like the Fondation Abbé Pierre—which had been fighting housing inequality for decades—we exposed one of the French government's dirtiest lies. Before our campaign, they claimed to be renovating 700,000 homes per year, as required by the Paris Agreement. The real number was about ten percent of that. We repeated it everywhere, in every interview, every talk show we were invited to: 2 out of 20. That would have been the government's grade on its Paris Agreement exam. We triggered a two-hour prime time investigation by *Cash Investigation*, one of the most-watched programs in France. The Minister of Ecology got bogged down in her lies. People knew the truth now. The government's response to the climate crisis did not exist.

And now we had won. Nicolas continued.

The French Parliament had just voted for 12 billion euros to fund what would have been the biggest climate action ever taken by our country, perhaps by any in Europe: 700,000 homes renovated per year. Emissions reduced. Millions of lives improved, especially those who needed it most urgently. I had been so focused on the daily work that I hadn't even seen the news coming. It was our demand, word for word, all of it.

I felt it in my chest. Everything we had gone through had been worth it. Ordinary people taking direct action were not powerless. Together, by acting like the truth was real, we did have the ability to change the world. And if we could win this in six months with a few hundred people, what could we do in a year or two with thousands?

“But—” Nicolas said, just as the emotion was building up inside me.

There was a catch.

“The government might use the 49.3 very soon to block it.”

Article 49.3 of the French Constitution allows the government to bypass a parliamentary vote by staking its own survival on the bill, telling elected representatives: if you want this law to actually be implemented, you’ll have to bring down the government. MPs must choose between the new bill and triggering a political crisis. They almost always back down, too afraid of the crisis coming with bad outcomes for their political party.

“What do we do?” Nicolas asked.

We knew the answer: everything we could. We had to defend our victory, so we immediately set up a crisis meeting with action designers, mobilization crew, strategy team, communications. *All hands on deck*. Our political allies thought the government would act within two days. We had 24 hours to react and start to build up public attention on what was happening in the fog of parliamentary debates.

That night, four of us would carry out a symbolic action in front of the Prime Minister’s office—lock ourselves to the building, boost momentum for the next day. I was one of the four. We planned it at four in the afternoon. By six we were on the subway with bike locks, T-shirts, equipment. Two of the most prominent journalists in the country were coming to cover it.

We walked through the streets. We arrived in front of the building with its gigantic doors. The edifice embodied the overwhelming power of those working against the population and, right now, us. Two of us would attach ourselves to the entrance, physically and symbolically blocking any exit.

It was time. “Okay, go.”

We were ill-prepared. The police guarding the entrance reacted too quickly. We were arrested before we could act. Then we were held for hours for police control. It felt like we were already losing. The big action was the next day. If that failed too, we would have nothing.

After a long background check that ended around 1 a.m. and a very short night, I went to meet everyone in a park near the National Assembly at 7 a.m. the next morning. I didn’t know if we’d have 20 people or 50—it had all been decided last

minute, messages sent only to supporters, many of whom didn't live in Paris, and some of whom couldn't risk missing their work shifts.

More than 100 people were already there when I arrived. I was stunned. By the end there were more than 200. Everyone came without knowing the plan but knowing the risks: police violence, arrest, charges, trial. Every television channel in the country had sent cameras. There were dozens of journalists. Even national politicians had come to stand with us.

The police were there too. They had been informed. Dozens of officers waited outside the park to make sure we wouldn't reach Parliament.

Because we had politicians and hundreds of cameras with us, the police were polite this time. Alizée and I went to negotiate our way out of the park. They agreed quite quickly—we could walk to the metro station in front of the Assembly and then leave by subway. We agreed to this. We didn't know the plan at this point, but were just happy to get out of the park and closer to Parliament.

As we walked, I saw Alizée with tears in her eyes, furious. I moved toward her.

“Are we really just going to walk for ten minutes and then leave?” she said. “Is that really the plan? This is bullshit.”

She was right.

Quietly, as we walked, we spoke with others and formed a plan. When we reached the intersection in front of the Assembly, someone would shout: “Everybody, sit down!” We would block the road, all 200 of us. If they wanted to gas us, beat us, arrest everyone, so be it.

We were on the bridge leading to the intersection. I saw the police chief I had negotiated with staring at me. They knew that we were not going to follow their advice and leave through the subway station. They must have felt the energy shift. But it was too late.

As soon as we stepped onto the crosswalk, someone screamed: “We sit! We sit!” I repeated it and sat down. Everyone sat. Not one person hesitated. We knew why we were there. It was illegal—we knew that. Many of us were already facing trials, risking fines and prison. But no one thought twice. In less than a second, every one of the eight car lanes was fully blocked.

We waited.

Nothing happened. No gas. No punches. No shouting. Just a moment of calm—deep and pure—in which we looked in each other’s eyes and saw the same feeling within our own hearts: the certainty of being exactly where we were meant to be. That day, this was what trying our best felt like.

Because of the cameras and the political figures with us, we stayed there for several hours. Eventually the police began arresting people one by one. They took 15 or 20. The others slowly dispersed. Most of us claimed that we had what we wanted. We had massive media coverage and had built up momentum. There was no need to go further and get our most dedicated 200 people arrested all at once. Especially when we didn’t know what would happen in the next few days with our law.

That evening, late at night, the government invoked Article 49.3. Parliament did not censure. We won everything and lost everything within 48 hours. We felt it deep in our guts. The government announced it would increase the annual insulation budget from one billion to two billion euros. From history, we already knew it was bullshit.

Looking back three years later, I realize I hadn’t understood how rare that feeling was—being so deeply convinced that what I was doing, with all those people blocking that road at that exact moment, was right. We had all done direct actions before. But direct action during perfect momentum, with the perfect people, and moreover with the feeling of actually being able to influence the course of events—that we could actually change something, here and now—is something else. If I had known how rare this feeling is, I would have pushed beyond “We sit.” I would have refused to move, refused to obey, refused to bend. To avoid that feeling of compromise with my deepest intuition. I would have stayed as long as I could. I would have gone to jail that day. All 200 of us should have refused to follow police orders, because what we were doing was defending a parliamentary vote against an authoritarian move. We should have followed our guts and started a hunger strike that day, like the German team did.

I know now that momentum is incredibly rare. You must never let it go. Follow your heart and your gut all the way, for as long as you are alive and still daring. Moments like that day in November are like holding a nugget of gold in a torrent. If you let go, it’s over. And who knows when the next one will come.

The truth is we built an extraordinary amount of media pressure on the government—on its climate inaction, on its home insulation failures. A small number of people achieved greatness. But it was only media pressure. It was enough to make parliament vote, but when the government decided to erase it, we were powerless. Our best was not enough.

I take one thing from this story: the bad guys are bad. And we need to understand that, completely and without illusion. Some media pressure—however large, however well executed—won't change this. Governments that condemn their own people to a future of death and suffering do so for strong reasons. They are protecting the immediate interests of a minority, and they won't let it go because of bad press. They will continue to do so while they remain in power. Any victories achieved through media or reputational pressure are partial and will be systematically dismantled.

We already knew what was needed before. A22 was never a project of public pressure. It had always been a mass mobilization project. Now we felt it in our guts. We need to build counter-power. Media coverage is a recruitment tool, not the goal. We are not protesting. We are not raising awareness. We are recruiting—to build a massive movement capable of long-lasting pressure and coercion rather than request. We knew this, but we hoped for a shortcut. There isn't one. To reach these kinds of systemic changes, there is only one path, long and steep.

We have to take it. We must build popular power.



HAPPY NEW YEAR, SENATE

Laura Paracini, Chloé Bertini

I, Laura, hadn't slept at all the night before.

The action was set for 7:30 a.m. At dawn, I got out of bed. I was exhausted yet hyper alert in that way that comes with no sleep. Before every action there is that absurd moment of trying to walk normally through the street, to look like anyone else, while carrying something that will change everything the moment you use it. The fire extinguisher was extremely heavy, stuffed into an old Invicta backpack from elementary school, with a small lever mechanism that needed activating. I had reviewed the plan so many times that the city felt unreal around me—like a stage I already knew by heart.

When we arrived at the Senate, there was no one there. No police, no Carabinieri, no security guards at the entrance. We learned later that DIGOS agents had been following us but had probably assumed we were planning a roadblock and were waiting to see. Davide and I were feeling paranoid. With a calm nonchalance, Alessandro walked to the front of the building and emptied the fire extinguisher from the first drop of paint to the last.

It was like a lucid dream. At some point I found myself spraying something from my hand.

Then the DIGOS arrived, running. It was over. But the worst had already been done.

It was New Year's Day 2023, and we had just thrown orange paint onto the façade of the Italian Senate.

Image (left): Activists from Ultima Generazione occupy Piazza Barberini in Rome, protesting against workplace deaths and heat-related fatalities, May 2024.

By the end of 2022, we had made our first television appearance and were beginning to gain name recognition as *Ultima Generazione*. We decided to set the national conversation for the year by trying something new, disrupting the illusion that all was well while most people were still celebrating.

The action was unusual for us. Until then, our actions had occurred during concentrated phases lasting two to four weeks, using repetition to maximize disruption. Outside those phases, people didn't hear much from us. This broke that pattern deliberately, creating unpredictability. It also broke from our strategic focus on public disruption—mainly roadblocks, followed by art-focused actions—which had been at the core of our approach. The purpose of public disruption was twofold: to interrupt the status quo of everyday life and, symbolically, to ring the alarm on humanity's demise. But it was also because, given the level of systemic corruption, decades of protests directed at decision-makers had proven ineffective. What remained was to create pressure impossible to ignore, through high media attention and public debate that increased general engagement through polarization.

This action was unexpected, well-directed, and—finally—supported by the public, since we were targeting politicians rather than disrupting traffic or art museums. We had previously thrown paint on an institutional building—the Italian investment bank—during an earlier action phase and concluded that integrating occasional targeting of institutions alongside public disruption could have positive effects on mobilization and messaging. We determined four equally compelling high-profile institutional targets. The Senate was chosen by drawing lots.

The plan was ambitious. We had conducted no site visit to assess feasibility. We were betting that the New Year festivities would leave fewer people around, reducing surveillance. This bet paid off. In the two days before, far from Rome, the fire extinguishers were loaded with paint. Two people then traveled four hours by train to the capital to deliver the equipment to the group executing the action, passing it between contacts in stages, a secret relay, to avoid suspicion and conceal where they were staying.

I was new to UG. Inexperienced, even a little clueless. I had done my first two actions only a few months before, largely because I felt the pressure to do the right thing in front of my peers, so many of whom were sacrificing so much, risking everything. I had no reservations. In fact, I couldn't wait to target the seats of power.

I loved the idea of throwing paint and only striking our target, even symbolically. This was the action I liked the most, the one I would do again, the one I support more than anything. For me, there's nothing immoral or disrespectful about mocking power in that way—especially with Meloni as head of government and Ignazio La Russa as president of the Senate. La Russa is notorious for keeping a bust of Mussolini in his home—this should be illegal and unacceptable for any politician in a country that has anti-fascism written into its constitution.

We ended up carrying out the action on the morning of January 2 rather than New Year's Day itself because it was a Monday. Some people would be at work, leaving the potential for dialogue and the greater probability that the media would respond promptly. The action made the noon newscast. We had ensured that 2023 began with climate action as one of the first pieces of news Italians would see.

I experienced the preparation with emotional detachment, almost disassociated. This probably helped. The target and plan gave me strength. I was calm.

We spent New Year's Eve together at the house that had become our headquarters. A drink, the terrace, nothing extravagant. The focus was entirely on the action: reviewing, repeating, evaluating every possible scenario down to the smallest detail. I insisted on planning for every possible configuration and number of guards. The building was the Senate. Security could be anywhere.

My biggest fear was that they would stop us before we could even begin. Fortunately, the DIGOS officers didn't get to us until we were done.

I didn't expect to be arrested, but I wasn't surprised. What mattered was not letting them see my surprise, staying composed in front of the police. In their custody, the hours passed slowly, as they typically did after an action. But we were happy. Satisfied to have hit a bigger target for the first time. A sense of accomplishment, even a hint of vindication, without the underlying guilt that other actions could sometimes bring.

The next day at the court hearing, I was filled with joy to see everyone again. Many supporters were there. It fueled my reflections about whether it was worth it—what I'd given, what had been taken from me, the sense of completion—whether I would continue with greater determination and conviction.

This moment was a turning point.

It widened the Overton window on what the public considered acceptable for climate activism. Attendance at our weekly online recruitment calls surged. In the weeks that followed, we were getting 200 participants in each of our recruitment calls—so many that we had to create two separate links and mobilize people from across the organization to manage breakout rooms and provide testimonials.

We entered a period of sustained national television visibility, appearing as guests on live programs. Before this action, such exposure had happened once, which had already been exceptional for climate activists like us. After it, we were invited consistently—sometimes more than once a week. Media attention was not an end in itself. It provided the opportunity to articulate our demands, denounce government complicity in endangering countless lives, reach new supporters willing to participate, and gain financial and logistical backing. It also lent legitimacy to our work, facilitating lobbying with parliamentarians and even reinforcing support among friends and family who saw tangible results, alleviating some of the personal conflicts we had been experiencing.

But looking back, this new high also started the countdown to the crash.

How could we top what we'd done? Although the action was well-executed and produced the desired results, our media impact peaked too early without mobilizing enough people to sustain momentum in public disruption. We now raced to maintain visibility and escalate nonviolent conflict, searching for the next shocking action. We realized too late that our mobilization growth was not congruent with the increase in media attention. This left us dangerously exposed. Repression would inevitably follow high visibility, and we would need large numbers to keep from being crushed by it.

Leveraging visibility to grow participation in direct action requires a well-oiled machine: meticulous mobilization design, a culture that fosters rigor while meeting participants' psychological needs—creativity, ownership, self-determination—and a sense of purpose, direction, and concrete efficacy across the organization. We were still building that machine when the media clock began running down.

The conservative government responded with criminalisation. That year, two new laws were created specifically targeting our actions: one penalizing art actions with fines between €10,000 and €60,000 for what was called “inappropriate use” of cultural assets, even without actual damage, and the other against

roadblocks. The trial for the Senate action took over a year to conclude. Laura, Alessandro, and Davide, who had sprayed the Senate with orange washable paint, each received eight-month suspended prison sentences and a total fine of €60,000, supposedly for cleaning costs—a punitive sentence designed to deter future actions.

But it did not stop us. When the climate crisis brought catastrophic floods to Italy later that year, we staged a second Senate action to frame the tragedy and demand change.



DIE WISSENSCHAFT
STEHTS WINTER DER
LOTSTEN
GENERATION

DIE KLIMA-
ZEITRECKE
TRÄKT!!!
(A. Z. 2019/2020)



**LETZTE GENERATION
VOR DEN KIPPPUNKTEN**



TRAINING LEADERS, FINDING ALLIES

Henning Jeschke, Carla Hinrichs, Cécile Bessire

When large numbers of people enter a movement, the question is never just how to absorb them. It is how to turn some of them into leaders who can coordinate and inspire the ones who come after.

In 2021 and 2022, Last Generation had worked with national working groups and local groups across Germany. Over time it became clear that local groups needed to be connected into regions that could cooperate more effectively. In early January 2023, we put out a call: who would be willing to lead a regional team? Our training space in Berlin had capacity for 40 people. Seventy applied.

We reviewed their written applications—who they were, why they wanted the role. We prioritized commitment above experience. We began with one week of in-person training. After that, teams of three to five people began working across six regions.

This process is key to how we grew. Our plan was deliberate and effective. We did not grow blindly. By designing growth intentionally, we created more leadership, more activity, and deeper roots. We supported people who had strong motivation but little experience, or who were even afraid to step into leadership roles. These regional leaders became points of reference for the local groups around them. Their journey didn't end once they found a role in a single action. Organizing now went deeper: discussions about principles, about the long tradition we are part of, about how to carry and share a flame with others. It meant operating within a network of trust and taking real responsibility.

Image (left): Scientist Rebellion Germany supporters stand behind a Letzte Generation blockade in Germany, affirming that the science backs warnings of climate tipping points and collapse.

Regional teams, in turn, empowered local activists. They organized mobilization tours, groups of a dozen people traveling from group to group to help with leafleting, small actions, talks, and trainings. They also developed action plans. As described in the Engler brothers' book *This Is an Uprising*, movements need more than disruption and sacrifice, they need escalation. One action must be followed by absorbing new people and preparing the next—always thinking not just about a single moment, but about how each step is part of a larger sequence.

By the end of 2023, we could count more than a thousand in-person talks held during the year. Each attracted an average of 10 to 15 people. Every event brought in at least a handful who offered help or joined the movement.

But was that enough?

There is an important difference between activating people, mobilizing them for a single event, and integrating them so that they change their lives and contribute their skills to the mission. In 2023, we mobilized many people, but we struggled to integrate all of them.

In February 2023, right after the regional structures were established, new people were joining the central mobilization team. Instead of analyzing all the data alone, we relied on members with more expertise. They invited me to a call and showed me a graph of new contacts in our system—people who had visited our website or attended a talk and expressed interest in participating.

“Look,” my friend said. “Our theory of change works. You can see it clearly here.”

He was right. In autumn 2022, after we reached national visibility, 2,000 people had signed up for radical action within a single week. Many people who had previously been invisible would step forward once momentum existed.

“But,” he continued, “we’re not prepared well enough to onboard them, to integrate them properly, even to call them once, listen to their skills and needs, and invite them in.”

We already knew this. We needed more capacity. With the next surge of activity and new recruits, we would need enough leaders ready to pick up the phone and help newcomers join. We expanded our calling teams so we could reach new people even as numbers increased. This worked reasonably well during the following month’s mobilization.

In April, we were deep into the next action phase in Berlin. High-intensity action requires full attention, and it becomes difficult to mobilize people from across the country when everything is centered in one city. Still, we brought 700 people onto the streets, more than double the numbers from the autumn actions.

We introduced a new concept: *Stadtstillstand*—city standstill.

In the mornings we gridlocked highways. Later we organized slow marches. This allowed participation from people who were not willing to glue themselves to the road but still wanted to take part. We assigned poster designing to the mobilization group, and they printed thousands featuring an image of a roadblock with the large word “Stadtstillstand” beneath it. We put these up across the city. The media began writing about it—discussing how people would get to work if the city were to stand still—before any action had even taken place.

It became the largest protest phase in Last Generation’s history. On the first day, 35 blockades occurred simultaneously across Berlin, causing massive traffic disruption. The planners had deliberately avoided the largest roads, which Last Generation had mostly targeted in previous phases. Instead, they designed blockades to reinforce each other and close off bypass routes. It worked.

Although only five to ten blockades took place simultaneously for most of the five weeks that followed, the media reported daily on another city standstill. It became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Not only did our own members believe in it and feel motivated to contribute to another day of disruption, society focused for weeks on the idea that the city would stand still due to our blockades. A particularly large announcement cannot only boost mobilization; it can make the goal seem inevitable before it has even been implemented.

When the police raided our houses in May 2023, we had another opportunity for growth. Unfortunately, this happened just as our central action phase was ending and many people needed time to recover. Around 10,000 people signed up on our website, but we were only able to contact 10 to 20%. Still, we executed an immediate popular response: the largest slow marches we had ever organized, with around 2,000 participants nationwide.

During the summer we developed a plan for spontaneous moments. We created an emergency protocol. People in the structure could trigger an emergency button and declare, “NOW.”

We defined two types of actions following different trigger levels. The first harnessed momentum without a complete societal shock. These would follow events like police raids on activists' homes or personal attacks by the chancellor. All local groups were expected to act immediately in their cities. The second aimed for societal rupture. These would follow events like the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Hamas attack on October 7 and the subsequent genocide against Gaza, extreme droughts, food shortages, large-scale power outages, or extreme weather events like the 2021 flooding in the Ahr Valley of West Germany.

The plan was simple: go into the streets the same day. Each local group would designate one person responsible for organizing transport. The next day, people would converge on Berlin to shut down the government district. Imagine a week later—police admitting they could no longer manage the situation, politicians considering deploying the military domestically. At that point, the system would be operating on its last legs.

Mobilizing Sector by Sector

In Germany, we built outward from the inside—training leaders, expanding capacity, preparing for moments we knew would come. In Switzerland, we tried something different: building inward from the outside, starting with the people society already trusted and working from there toward the movement.

We tried two methods, which at times were in tension. The first was proactive: identifying influential people in different communities and approaching them directly, asking them to support our demand. We met several political party leaders and went to parliament to speak with deputies. This approach was not particularly successful in getting people to take action on our behalf. Its main impact was demonstrating that we were serious people open to dialogue.

The second approach was to wait for people to come to us, attracted by what we were doing. Most of the meaningful connections we made happened this way, or through friends of friends who already had an indirect relationship with us.

One of the most important people who joined our campaign was Julia Steinberger, an IPCC scientist already involved in activism and unusually clear about her political positions—which is not the case for most scientists in Switzerland. People close to us suggested contacting her before the campaign launch to ask for a statement supporting our actions. Her statement was included in our press

folder to lend legitimacy from the start. Later, Julia participated in our second action phase. When she glued herself to the road it went viral because of her status and international connections. It sparked a wide media debate about the political positioning of scientists and public figures. Can a university professor engage in civil disobedience? The question itself reinforced our message: the crisis must be very serious if a scientist is willing to glue herself to the road.

Another supporter was Marc Müller, an engineer and public figure known for his radical views on energy transition. We contacted him during our first action phase for advice on our demand. He took our work seriously and intervened in the media to discuss thermal renovation, helping to give credibility to our demand and enabling deeper discussion about our messages rather than just our tactics.

In October 2022, just before our second action phase, we organized a large mobilization event, a talk in Lausanne with Steinberger, Müller, and “Papa on Hunger Strike” Guillermo Fernandez alongside one of our members. The opportunity to meet experts and prominent figures was a strong incentive to show up. More than 100 people attended. Several were mobilized for the next action phase.

Public figures help in two main ways: they bring legitimacy to our organization and its messages, and they attract new people by spreading our message through their own networks.

Since then, we have developed several formats to keep building those connections. The Climate Emergency Talks invite scientists to discuss specific issues. The Climate Comedy Club collaborates with comedians on shows about the climate crisis. Meet and Greet events invite artists, filmmakers, and activists from other organizations to talk about their work. Each of these events concludes with a presentation of our organization and information on how to get involved. Together they allow us to reach audiences we would never find through direct recruitment alone.



SWEPT UP IN THE PENSION STRIKES

Thibaut Cantet

In 2023, President Macron decided to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64. The response was immediate and enormous. Millions took to the streets. General strikes swept multiple sectors. Garbage piled up in Paris. Train stations filled with frantic travelers. For weeks, the whole country moved to one rhythm—anger.

For Dernière Rénovation, it opened a door we weren't sure how to walk through.

DR had not been conceived as a generalist movement. Even though in theory it wanted to be a steppingstone toward future, larger assaults against the system as a whole, in practice it was still a campaign built to win a specific, attainable demand: better state support for home insulation. That laser focus was the source of much of our strength. It gave people hope, a concrete, winnable fight amid the enormity of the climate crisis. It kept all our energy channeled into running the campaign rather than debating ideology. The only prerequisites for joining were supporting the demand and being willing to engage in civil disobedience. That was it.

We had no framework for interpreting what was happening in the streets around us, no shared ideological grid for reading another social movement and deciding what it meant for our work. The organization had been built to win a demand. Unlike for instance, Marxist, eco-socialist, or libertarian organizations, it did not have a strong, shared ideology to analyze societal events and give them meaning in a way that would be collectively accepted. And now one of the largest social movements in years was unfolding around us, pulling in a large chunk of our own activist base, dominating the media, and raising a question we had no clean answer to: what do we do?

Image (left): Activists from Dernière Rénovation block and spray-paint the Iena bridge near the Eiffel Tower in Paris. October 14, 2023.

It seemed impossible to simply continue our work as if nothing was happening. We also didn't want to widen the gap between ourselves—mostly young urban climate activists—and most French citizens whose main concern was now their pension.

Despite being ill-equipped for it, we reoriented our resources to support the movement from the background rather than as leaders. Some of us felt proud to join the strikes. Others feared mission creep would profoundly change our organization. Meetings grew tense. We were no longer sure who we were fighting as, Dernière Rénovation members or angry citizens in the crowd.

We mobilized hundreds of people for actions around the pension reform—supporting picket lines, blockading infrastructure where workers were striking, showing up in large numbers at the marches, and communicating against the reform through our social media channels. It was also an opportunity to build relationships with union leaders, to create trust between the workers' movement and the climate movement, to understand how each operated. We believed the cause was right. We genuinely wanted to support the social movement for the system-change potential it carried.

But we were also faced with a pragmatic reality: none of these efforts generated the short-term resources that kept the project alive. No money. No new recruits. We were a young organization with little to stand on, and we couldn't do this indefinitely.

Our involvement in the pension movement brought even greater challenges. We were now attracting people who were looking for a generalist environmental movement ready to reorient itself to new causes as members saw fit. Unconsciously, without a clear vision from the leadership or the implications of the cascading effects, we were drifting in a new direction.

For some members it was crystal clear why Dernière Rénovation should take part in this uprising. They had a strong ideological grid that had guided them both toward DR as well as the protests against the pension reform, and a clear sense that the destruction of our natural habitat and the degradation of our social security system were two sides of the same coin. Some felt that any attempt to protest in the streets against the ruling class should be supported. From a certain angle, it made a lot of sense and had a lot going for it, both politically and strategically. But on the other hand, it simply wasn't the basis on which some of our members had first decided to join, and this was creating many tensions in the organization.

What could have been a transition toward a something different—a climate and social justice collective rather than a single-issue campaign—ended up making us fragile. Partly this was because we had poorly integrated the recent influx of new people. They didn't share our history, our language, our culture, or our understanding of the project's boundaries. Partly it was because the leadership team was chronically exhausted—physically, mentally, emotionally—on the verge of burnout and in desperate need of a break. That spring, confusion seeped into everything: meetings, friendships, our sense of purpose. People disappeared without saying goodbye. You could feel the center giving way. The deeper weakness the pension crisis exposed was our lack of ideological foundation. Without one, a general atmosphere of “if this, why not anything else?” took hold and undermined the legitimacy of the core team. Most participants had joined because they were scared about the climate crisis or angry at the elites, and because we were the new thing—with a plan, media attention, and funding to pay people. Our mobilization strategy had been fast, shallow, and primarily based on virality. Much of our ideological framing happened during a 40-minute public talk. With few committed core members who were ideologically grounded, our strength had always been how easy it was for people to explain why they were involved: DR had momentum, attention, and more participants arriving all the time. But trends are speculative by nature. Subject to mass panic, they rise fast and decline faster.

We were no longer at the center of social movement attention. And we couldn't figure out how to position ourselves in a way that would support the pension movement without further destabilizing our collective at its most vulnerable moment.

What intensified all of this was that many participants had attached a significant part of their identity to the organization. Many of us were very young, looking for reference points and communities of belonging in a chaotic world. For many, this was the first place that had made sense of the world again. It was easy to cling to it as something total, a complete identity rather than one part of a life. Accepting that the organization might not meet all aspects of our needs and political values, that we might need to split our time between different spaces and groups, that we should have other interests and other communities, this was genuinely difficult.

When the organization started to wobble, some clung tighter. Others quietly left. It took me months to understand that a movement can't be our whole identity. It must be a place we pass through—not the ground we stand on.



PART IV:

Dancing with

the Pillars



CLIMBING THE GANTRIES

Harley F. Brewer

It started with dawn raids.

The Sun newspaper had infiltrated our planning meeting for a protest to block the UK's busiest motorway. In exchange for being allowed to film the arrests, handed a recording to the police. In the early hours of the morning before the action was due to happen, Roger Hallam—co-founder of Extinction Rebellion, Just Stop Oil, and the A22 Network—was arrested at his home. He would spend nine months on remand in one of the worst prisons in the UK, HMP Wandsworth.

The Sun ran the headline: “Just Stop Foiled.” The action seemed to be over before it began. Half a dozen others had been arrested, and *The Sun* and the police all thought it had been stopped.

But the next day, it happened anyway.

Before the morning rush hour, around 15 people climbed gantries over the M25—those metal frames that support the overhead signs. Police shut the London beltway beneath them. Horns sounded. Drivers shouted. Then silence. Hundreds of thousands of people were delayed. Every major newspaper ran it on the front page. Every news channel led with it. The activists pulled it off despite a deliberate police operation to prevent it.

The next day it happened again. Several of the UK's largest police forces had launched a joint operation across all 117 miles of road. Some activists were arrested before reaching the gantries. The motorway stopped anyway. The story had moved beyond protest. Cooking shows mentioned the delays. People on buses were talking about it. It was no longer just a story. It was the ground on which other stories sat.

Then a third day, and a fourth.

Image (previous page): Berlin police drag a protester by the wrists to force him to his feet.

Image (left): A man emerges from one of the tunnels under roads leading to UK oil terminals.

By then the government was on television demanding police get tough. The media were lambasting the police to make it stop. The police responded through Chief of Protest Policing Chris Noble, who stated plainly that “you cannot arrest your way out of the climate crisis.” The only way to stop the protests was political action on the crisis itself. Criminalizing those demanding change would not solve the problem.

Within four days, a rift had opened between the government and the police—one of their key pillars of support. Certainly, business leaders were adding to the pressure, as hundreds of thousands of people were now regularly late for work. We had achieved what we had been fighting for: a national crisis that would force the government to act on the climate crisis they were ignoring. The state was shaking under extreme pressure, but the government’s responses grew increasingly desperate.

By the fourth day the joint police operation was one of the largest in British history, involving half a dozen different forces. Still people climbed the gantries. Still it was the front page.

I genuinely believed the government would be brought to the negotiating table. Those four days were the closest I ever felt to believing we could win.

Only 60 people had been willing to go that far—knowing prison was likely, knowing they would disrupt the lives of thousands and become hated figures for much of the country. Who knows why it was them and not others. But those 60 people, that tiny number, shook the power structure of one of the richest countries on earth. They were students, mothers, fathers, 18 years old up to their late sixties. Another hundred, and the police might have given up, exhausted by the futility of giving a criminal answer to a political question. The government, stripped of its tools of repression, would have had to negotiate. Or perhaps they would have called in the army, as Boris Johnson had threatened during the peak of Extinction Rebellion.

The lesson is clear: The government is not a monolithic power we are forced to submit to. It depends on the police, the media, the courts, the business sector to prop it up. When governments fall, it is because one of these pillars of support withdraws—the army refuses orders against civilians, civil servants refuse to implement new laws. We don’t need to wait for some imagined moment when conditions are perfectly aligned. We can act whenever we are willing to risk it.

It is the job of serious activist groups committed to changing governments and policy to sever the connection between the government and these pillars.

The outcomes, though short of forcing the government to the table, were real. Major banks including HSBC and Lloyds announced they would stop investing in new oil and gas. Every major party except the ruling Conservatives came out in support of ending new oil and gas licensing.

There was also a surprising trigger effect: support for more moderate groups rose. Social Change Lab data showed a 2.6% increase in support for Friends of the Earth, around 1.75 million people. Part of the theory behind Just Stop Oil's actions was to move the Overton window, to push beyond the limits of acceptable political action and increase support for climate action—regardless of whether it translated into direct support for JSO. These statistics confirmed we were being effective.

Then it stopped. In the aftermath of the M25 blockades, the courts came down hard on the protesters.

Accused organizers of the actions received four-year sentences. Roger Hallam received five. The judge called him “the spiritual leader of the group,” though the evidence suggested he had done little more than others. In court, the defendants were banned from mentioning the climate crisis to the jury, but they did it anyway. They became known as the Whole Truth Five, after the oath “to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” Every time they tried to explain to the jury why they had acted, the judge stopped them, cleared the room, and threatened contempt. They continued despite his threats, and police were called seven times to arrest the defendants within the courtroom. Before the trial ended, four out of the five ended up imprisoned for contempt of court for their attempt to tell the whole truth to the jury.

The courts have argued that the climate context is irrelevant to the charges and cannot constitute a legal defense. But this is a political decision, not a legal one. We know what happens when a jury hears the truth. In a separate 2025 trial, protesters who had climbed the gantries were permitted to explain themselves and the truth of climate collapse. They were acquitted. During one of their speeches about the horrors of the unfolding crisis, members of the jury were seen crying.

The courts showed other fractures too. Hundreds of legal professionals signed a letter under the name Lawyers Are Responsible, refusing to prosecute climate

protesters or work toward new oil and gas approvals. They were not enough to create a crisis, but they were enough to show that the pillars of state power can be undermined due to creative and courageous action.

That year around a thousand people were involved with Just Stop Oil. Only a thousand—not even double the student body in my small-town secondary school. And yet that number shook the British state, changed the position of every major party but one, and contributed to a shift in government policy when Labour was elected in 2024. The methods work, even if imperfectly.

This is a taste of what is coming. We pushed when public appetite wasn't there, when the crisis hadn't yet hit people's daily lives in ways they couldn't ignore. What happens when there are food shortages, uncontrollable wildfires, coastal towns going underwater? When that moment comes, blocking a motorway will seem moderate.



POLICE VIOLENCE AND SMART REPRESSION

Pierre Taieb, Cécile Bessire, Harley F. Brewer, Carla Hinrichs,
Henning Jeschke

For eight minutes, 30 of us blocked the Champs-Élysées.

Usually our roadblocks last 15 to 20 minutes, sometimes hours. The Champs-Élysées is the most famous avenue in France, which also makes it the most heavily secured. We hadn't thought about that. Police arrived after five minutes. I was sitting on the road in front of cars and trucks when an officer snuck up from behind, grabbed my arms, and dragged me along the ground. A few meters from the action, he told me he would break my arm and made clear he meant it.

For those eight minutes, we were jailed for 32 hours. Most of the officers were calm, but some were horrible enough to make the whole experience feel deeply unsafe. One man in my cell had his arm broken by police. The officers made fun of him. He was suffering and they did not call a doctor. Another person in our group vomited for half an hour from the stench and the poor food, until they fainted. The officers laughed.

Following other actions, police threatened us, tackled us, humiliated us, punched us, urinated in our food, and sexually abused us.

In January 2023, we splashed orange paint over the places of power. During the second of three consecutive actions, a 20-year-old woman walked up to a government building and began to spray. Ten officers jumped on her simultaneously—ten large men attacking a young woman carrying out a nonviolent action.

Image (left): Hamburg police pin protester Arne Springorum, an arm and fist pressed against his head as he cries out.

With many hands, they grabbed her and dragged her away from the press. Some threatened her, saying they would have beaten her to death if there had been no cameras.

Those officers then accused her of assaulting police. They would lose in court—everything was caught on film—but the accusation was never about winning the case. It was about making her suffer. She lost sensation in her hand after their assault. It did not return.

Physical violence is the crudest form of repression. It is also the easiest repression to backfire on the state—it has a face and a story, a clear injustice that can ignite outrage. The harder forms to manage are quieter.

The French government chose carefully. Rather than trials which create media attention—and ultimately martyrs—they issued fines. No judge. No courtroom. No public story. No chance for us to win. Just administrative penalties of 800 to 1,600 euros per person per blockade. With 1,000 people taking action, that amounted up to 1.6 million euros every six months, and would reach tens of millions if we met our mobilization goal of hundreds blocking roads every day.

This form of repression had another effect: it created serious disagreement inside the organization. Many people, especially newcomers, thought road blockades were holding us back because they were so unpopular. More experienced organizers argued that it was precisely because the blockades were strange and unpopular that they sparked discussion, and because they sparked discussion that they fueled mobilization. After lengthy internal debate, we moved away from the tactic. That was a mistake. We should have raised money to cover the fines, used the fines as trophies, refused to pay and turned it into a second level of civil disobedience within civil disobedience. Instead, we abandoned what was working without finding a new tactic that was as effective.

In Switzerland, repression was calculated and invisible. Fines were assessed against income and assets, sometimes drawn directly from tax returns. The wealthier you were, the higher the fine. In normal circumstances, progressive penalties make sense. In ours, they punished people for continuing, charging higher fines for subsequent violations. Many of the first activists were retired, from privileged backgrounds, with houses and savings. A retired teacher who blocked a road for 15 minutes was fined 15,000 Swiss francs—nearly twenty thousand dollars.

This kind of repression is effective precisely because it resists being made visible. You can photograph someone going to prison. You can tell a story about a trial. It is much harder to generate outrage about a letter arriving quietly at home. And without the fines being exorbitant, many people considered the penalty reasonable.

One person did choose prison rather than pay. They wanted to make the repression tangible, to give it a face. We built a narrative around it, and it worked to a degree. But the story the public received was that he had gone to prison for refusing to pay a fine, not for taking action.

Repression can also undermine actions before they even begin. In the UK, Just Stop Oil had been running slow marches—technically legal, made illegal only if police ordered participants to stop. The punishment for continuing was minor: a fine small enough that penalties accumulating from hundreds of arrests would never result in prison. An action phase was designed around this: overwhelm the police with hundreds of people willing to be arrested repeatedly. Around a thousand people committed to it, many preparing to take action up to five times.

A couple of weeks before it began, the government released a new law using a mechanism hundreds of years old that bypasses parliamentary debate to make the marches punishable by up to a year in prison. Eventually, there was a legal challenge about the constitutionality of this law; but in the short-term, the numbers collapsed. Hundreds of people went through the courts. Activists were receiving community service orders. The state's repression was not physical. It never materialized in a violent confrontation on the street. But the threat was enough for us to lose the high participation we would have had for this initiative.

In Germany, the Berlin government tried fast trials, a procedure reserved for clear-cut cases. It became obvious almost immediately that nothing about these cases was clear. How long had someone been on the road? Did the police recognize the right to assembly? Lobbying wasn't effective against the climate crisis, so did the defense of necessity apply to civil disobedience? The judges were not happy. The fast trials were ended almost as quickly as they had begun.

After a year of our blockades, the state got smarter. Activists' homes were searched on the grounds of forming a criminal organization—using Germany's anti-Mafia law, a provision the Nazis had once used against protest movements and trade unions. Actions that had not previously been punishable became punishable ret-

roactively. Donating five euros could be treated as a criminal offense after the fact. I personally received a suspended sentence of two months for a single road-block. I wouldn't have to serve my time for three years. Four days after the verdict, I went back into the street knowing I would probably have to serve those two months. My decision to return reassured both myself and many others. The story was covered by every major German outlet, portraying us as an organization immune to repression.

The best response to the criminal-organization law was solidarity. Not everyone who had ever been involved could be imprisoned. As a creative response, thousands of people reported themselves to the public prosecutor's office as members of the supposed criminal organization Last Generation. It was, in the end, deeply empowering.

In the UK, the situation is different and more precise. People carry suspended sentences of two to five years. There's no immediate punishment, but any small violation can send you to prison for half a decade. There is no media drama, no shock, but the effect is surgical. The most courageous people, those who took the greatest risks, are now stopped from doing anything at all. It cuts the movement off from its strongest members.

This is the hardest thing to manage—not the punishment itself, but the fact that the ground keeps shifting. As a leader, you can no longer tell people who are about to take action what will actually happen to them. That uncertainty is its own form of repression. It is demoralizing, and it demobilizes activists when they don't know how to anticipate the costs they will incur.

The only way through it is to act again, to find out what actually happens when you take action under a suspended sentence, and to raise expectations, opening people's minds to what is possible. The question is whether you have leaders willing to walk through that door first.

Repression doesn't have to be violent to be effective. Using absurdly long prison sentences, it seeks to strip you of your agency, the ability to live the life you choose for yourself. And in the extreme, it can ruin you financially.

But even financial ruin is manageable. You simply cannot personally own a house or a car. Your friends or your collective owns them. It is a kind of poverty oath: agreeing to live on less than 1,500 euros a month. That is not even poverty; It is normal for nearly half the world population.

It is frustrating to manage. But if you can get through it, you are free. If you block an airport and a logistics company claims you cost them a million euros, what can they do? If you own nothing, there is nothing to take. Living this way makes us strong.



LEAVE ME HERE

Chloé Bertini

One of the core principles you encounter when you study nonviolent conflict is making repression backfire. What it actually takes to do that, however, is not straightforward. After several rounds of repression, some of it becomes routine. But repression is designed to destabilize, to take you by surprise, to instill fear and uncertainty inside organizations. Keeping a clear head and making sound decisions in those high-stakes moments is everything.

In autumn 2023, Ultima Generazione had been building out local chapters across Italy, focusing on mobilization and decentralized leadership. The action phase reflected this: for a month and a half, we divided the country into four regions, each taking a one-week relay of actions in turn. The goal was to build local momentum and integrate new people before converging on Rome for the second part of the phase.

Rome is where we always go to bring disruption to the center of political and media power. By that point we knew the city's police stations well—which ones cram you into a small claustrophobic room, which ones let you wait in a courtyard, which ones hold you in a cell with a terrible smell and scribbles covering every wall. We recognized some of the officers. They knew us even better. Some of the police cars we were carried in still had paint marks from our previous actions.

The first action of the Rome phase was a road blockade. After two years, the whole sequence—the action, the detention, the paperwork, the release—was familiar.

Twelve people blocked the road that morning. Once we received word that they were in place, photos and videos started coming in. One clip was unsettling: an enraged driver refused to stop, pushing forward, nearly running over my friend Bea. It is often harder to watch an action from the outside than to be in it. I'm not

| Image (left): Activists from Ultima Generazione organize a flash mob to demand the Reparation Fund for damage caused by natural disasters.

sure whether the camera amplifies the violence, or whether being present in the moment quiets the violence. Maybe it is simply painful to watch people you care about being treated heartlessly. When the action ends and people are taken to the station, you can at least relax: the action succeeded, everyone is safe.

Then it becomes a normal working day. The communications team focuses on amplifying the action. Others move on to unrelated tasks. People are usually held three to eight hours before being released—time enough for the officers to prepare paperwork, document the legal infractions that will go to court, and issue the standard fine of 1,333 euros.

By mid-afternoon it became strange that no one had been released. We contacted the lawyer following the action to find out more.

Then the news came: all twelve had been arrested. They were being held in three separate prisons. No hearing date had been set. No release time was known.

Typically, when we were arrested for high-profile actions, we'd be in a cell for one night. The stench, a cement bench to sleep on, a dirty blanket, a dry sandwich. But with each morning would come our release. This time, all we knew what that they legally could not be held for more than three days.

Amid the silence, all teams mobilized to make the repression backfire.

Our strategy has never been to avoid repression. The most successful movements in history have turned repression to their advantage, and we aimed to do the same. Within twenty-four hours, we reached out to sympathetic journalists, influencers, other movements, and public intellectuals, creating a media environment in which everyone was talking about what had happened and why it was wrong. The fundraising team launched a crowdfunding campaign for legal expenses; in three days, supporters raised more than 5,000 euros. The mobilization team organized sit-ins outside the prisons and in the activists' home cities to show those inside they were not alone, to engage new people, and to strengthen local groups. A dedicated support team stayed in daily contact with the families and partners of those arrested: scared, angry, full of questions, and receiving every update we could provide.

The truth is we were operating with very little information. Muffled underneath the organized response, our worry was real. For some of us, it was a partner or a close friend behind those walls. For all of us, it was people we cared about. We knew one prison had a dangerous reputation with hostile inmates. Some of

the arrested activists were transgender or gender non-conforming, which creates specific vulnerabilities—being assigned to facilities based on legal documents, the dysphoria that produces, the heightened risk of abuse.

After another day of uncertainty and exhausting work, the hearing was finally scheduled: two days away. Three nights in total.

During this time, the core team began thinking about what this meant for the actions still planned. The government of Giorgia Meloni had introduced a proposed “security decree” that would have criminalized road blockades with sentences of two or more years, even for peaceful protests. Matteo Salvini, then Deputy Prime Minister, was already promoting the measure on social media as though it were settled law. It wasn’t. But the question hung in the air: was this connected?

On the day of the release, some of us waited outside one of the prisons. Journalists were there too, and a live national television interview began on the spot while we waited. What unfolded showed how easily power creates narratives that justify repression after the fact. Other guests argued there was nothing irregular about the arrests, citing Salvini’s proposed decree as though it were already in force. Our spokesperson had to hold the line: the law had not been ratified; if government decrees are implemented before passing through any process, democracy has a serious problem. She kept returning the conversation to the point that mattered: our actions are a response to the government’s failure to act on climate collapse, and criminalizing dissent will not stop us from saying so.

This is why the communications work done in the preceding days mattered so much. Without the counter-narrative already established, the television debate could have been a rout. Journalists do not reliably push back against criminalizing narratives. You must build the context in advance and have multiple voices already defending it.

The television spot finished, we stood outside on this December day, our boiled blood cooling, when the lawyers finally arrived with the terms of release. The judge had imposed restrictive measures: all 12 were prohibited from leaving their towns of residence and required to check in daily with local police, indefinitely. There was no end date established.

This was the part that stung. The uncertainty left us feeling powerless. How do you make strategic decisions in this Kafkaesque climate? They didn’t get the standard night in prison, but an open-ended restriction on their lives. Heavy burdens

on the twelve activists, a bruised morale on our team, and a real threat to the momentum of the ongoing action phase.

Eventually, we saw one person emerge from behind the gate. Then two, then three, until all nine from that prison had come through. Our designated troubadour had brought a guitar. As they walked toward us, we started singing a song that over the years had become our soundtrack, played at every gathering, sung as police dragged us from roads, sometimes even inside the station.

*Leave me here
Leave me be
Leave me like this
Don't say a word that
Isn't of love
For me
For my life that
Is all I have
It's all I have and it's not over yet
Over yet*

As they crossed the threshold there were hugs, tears, smiles, and warmth. The other three had been released from a different facility; we ran there to give them the same reception but arrived too late. Later, we all reunited and shared a meal, listening to their stories.

It might sound sentimental or campy, but it isn't. Making sure people feel the community around them in these moments is a direct counter to what repression is trying to achieve—breaking their spirits and making them feel alone and afraid. The meal, the stories, the banter are therapeutic.

The stories varied widely. One activist had become friends with his cellmates who each had stacked convictions. Another had spent the time alone, praying continually. Some were never allowed out of their cells for fresh air; others could socialize and play board games.

The week after, we organized a call for them to share their experiences with the wider community. They were the most energized people on the call, urging everyone to keep going. It restored the morale of the larger organization in a way that no message from leadership could have done.

The harder challenge was the strategic decision now facing us.

We could continue with the planned actions. Our culture of disobedience ran deep, and people were still willing to act despite what had happened. But if the same restrictive measures were applied after each subsequent action, we risked most of our active members losing their freedom of movement before the phase was over. Scaling down, on the other hand, would signal externally that repression had worked. Internally, it would cut against everything we had always said about being prepared to face consequences rather than be stopped by them.

This was supposed to be the easier part of the two-month phase: routine blockades, building toward one day of mass participation. We were instead navigating this while emotionally wrung out, with 12 of our people under daily police check-in requirements and no end date in sight. We had a delicate choice to make, balancing our responsibility to our small activist community with our commitment to our vision.

After the core team and action team consulted the coordination group and the next people in line for action, we decided to test the ground rather than either retreat or charge forward. For the next few actions, we staged what we called “rebellions of one”: a single person in the middle of a road holding a cardboard sign. This preserved the disruption, maintained the pace, and limited the risk of losing several people at once. The participants were chosen deliberately: a woman in her sixties who is a chemistry professor; a man in his late fifties who spoke as a father afraid for his daughter’s future. This was not incidental. The media had long framed Ultima Generazione as a youth movement, a framing that reduced public empathy and, with it, solidarity when repression came. These choices complicated that narrative. It made our actions innocuous, strengthened our legitimacy, and countered their infantilisation of us.

After two actions with no further extraordinary consequences, we returned to the original plan. By the end of the phase, we had carried it through.

Repression is often as much psychological as it is legal or physical. The arbitrary, unpredictable quality of what happened to us was the point: uncertainty is a tool used to stir up panic.

One framework worth understanding is DARVO—Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender—the manipulation by which corrupt power, when held accountable, reframes itself as the victim. We saw it in real time on national television.

Understanding how repression functions allows you to wield your own power against it. Instead of panicking, we can take these opportunities to mobilize wider support while strengthening community bonds.



**Wir rasen in den
Faschismus – #MerzMo**

**Neue 
Generation**

JOYFUL SUFFERING

Henning Jeschke

Is it scary to rebel? Yes—or maybe yes and no.

I can only imagine how that sounds to someone reading it from the outside: the fear of police violence, of sitting in a cell, of losing control, of fines, of being physically attacked. I have some sense of how people experience these things because I am surrounded by people who face them, and everyone reacts differently.

I can say honestly that I am not afraid of prison. Even before my journey really began—in 2019—I spoke openly about being willing to give my life. That sounds extreme, perhaps disturbing. But this is how change has always worked. Progress has required people willing to risk everything, not because they calculated the odds, but because they believed it was right.

I am a head-driven person. I overthink. I analyze. Before I joined, I wanted the entire strategy laid out on paper. I needed to understand it intellectually.

Something changed along the way. It may have begun when I read the XR handbook describing people's actual prison experiences and then spoke with activists from Just Stop Oil about incarceration. I asked them how they got through it.

Their answer surprised me: by enjoying it. Prison strips things away and brings you closer to your deepest self—and, for some, to a spiritual connection with all existence.

That may sound strange. But please don't dismiss it. Don't tell me I lack empathy because I don't always respond to someone going to prison by saying, "That's horrible." It is part of the experience. I accept it. If the other person is okay, then it is okay. If I am in prison, that is okay too.

Image (left): Letzte Generation activist Henning Jeschke blocks the Berlin Autobahn in 2026, standing atop a motorway gantry beside the traffic signs, holding an orange umbrella in the group's color and a banner warning against the chancellor's far-right policies.

The hunger strike was a life-and-death experience. Some protests were too, when people beat you or threatened to kill you. But we also know that harm was already coming. I am already harmed when people in the Global South are harmed. I am already diminished when children—my own or anyone’s—will face a struggle for survival in 30 years.

This is why I believe that what lies ahead will only be achieved through people giving something of themselves. Through suffering—not in the sense of self-destruction or despair, but in the sense of conscious, even joyful acceptance of what the struggle costs.

Is that a position of privilege? Perhaps. Others face immediate death or torture, and I do not. But I was moved to my core when XR said, “*We cannot be arrested quickly enough,*” when it became clear we were building something that embraced prison not as a tragedy to be mourned, but as part of the struggle.

The fear does not disappear. But fear does not make the decisions.



NAVIGATING THE MEDIA

Cécile Bessire, Pierre Taieb, Carla Hinrichs

The first internationally coordinated action of A22 was planned for Monday, April 4, 2022. In Switzerland, our action would be a roadblock on a major motorway near Lausanne. I had no experience in press work. An older man excited by our campaign had given me a list of 500 journalist contacts and told me to call ten of them. The spokesperson for the German campaign had spoken with me and shared her best practices. I still spent ten minutes preparing before each call, working up the nerve. It took all my courage, but it turned out to be easier than I expected. Many journalists were interested. We offered one newspaper, *24 Heures*, the exclusive.

The night before the action, someone brought the day's issue to our briefing location, where 15 of us were preparing for the two weeks of actions ahead. The newspaper was lying on the table while we ran simulations—one group hitting and insulting another group sitting on the floor, practicing staying calm, practicing empathy. And on the front page: Climate activists are going to block the motorway.

I didn't sleep that night.

The next morning I left the house with an empty stomach. My role as press contact was to accompany the journalists to the site. I asked them all to meet me in a parking lot nearby at seven in the morning, still dark, and stood there alone with ten of them. I was supposed to deliver a sensational story, but I didn't know whether our plan would actually work. I told them where it would happen and asked them to be discreet. They seemed excited and left.

I arrived on-site a few minutes after them. My heartbeat had doubled and I was completely drenched in sweat. I felt like I could die of stress.

Image (left): Simone Ficicchia, activist of Ultima Generazione talks to the press ahead of the hearing at the Court of Justice of Milan, Italy.
January 10, 2023.

From a bridge above the motorway I could see our small group of action-takers trying to reach the road, ten journalists with cameras following them, and a police car coming toward everyone. I was convinced everything was ruined, and I already felt so ashamed for having sold a botched plan to the press. I was already composing the apology in my head.

Then the action-takers reached the motorway, stopped the cars, and sat down just seconds before the police arrived. Journalists took their pictures. The whole thing lasted about ten minutes. Within an hour it was everywhere in the news. I was speaking on French television that afternoon.

After four days, we did a second action in which we glued ourselves to the busiest road in Geneva. This action paralyzed the city for nearly three hours. The journalists were there again, and it was all over the news. My stress and anxiety had not diminished one bit. The same pattern happened with the two remaining actions that we did in Bern and near Lausanne over those first two weeks.

What worked, we learned quickly, was the combination of disruption and symbolism. We chose locations that were both highly disruptive and visually significant. Switzerland's press is localized, so by moving actions across different parts of the country we could always find journalists with a reason to cover it. We were also telling a story that differed from the ordinary climate movement. By focusing on thermal renovation, we gave specific demands and engaged concrete issues, all while deliberately appealing to values that reached beyond the traditional left.

Our visual identity helped. Our logo was consciously modeled on Rivella, a well-known Swiss soda—red and white, associated with mountains and skiing and a source of Swiss pride. Everyone recognized it. The reference was humorous and landed immediately, and the media had a story within the story.

It didn't take long before the CEO of Rivella got involved. The company contacted us, said we were damaging their brand, threatened legal action, and invited us to a meeting. Three of us sat across a large table from the CEO, the marketing director, their lawyer, and a fourth company representative, in a room with a view of the Federal Palace in Bern. It was surreal—not least because we felt, sitting there, that we were nearly on equal footing. They were seriously afraid of our actions. We changed the logo in the end, because fighting over it wasn't worth our

time or money, but we left that room understanding something about the kind of power we were accumulating.

By October 2022, during our second action phase, that power was visible. We ran ten actions in one month. Swiss companies were now using our visual identity in their advertisements. Political parties were responding with proposals to criminalize protest. The name of our campaign was listed as one of the top five words of the year in Switzerland. One in two people in the country had heard of us.

The buzz fed itself. An IPCC scientist joined one of our roadblocks and the moment spread through climate networks internationally. A famous Swiss comedian parodied us on TikTok and got millions of views. The FDP, the second-largest right-wing party, used an AI-generated image of one of our roadblocks in their political campaign. Each time, people saw the same visual signature—the orange vest, the glued hand, the Rivella banners, the people sitting in front of cars. It became a thing.

In 2023, we took our success as an opportunity to test new tactics. Two actions were very successful.

The Gotthard Tunnel roadblock was organized by new recruits with no experience, which was part of a deliberate effort to train people and pass on knowledge. It took two months to organize and went viral internationally, bringing in more donations than anything we had done before. The action itself was not particularly disruptive—people were already stuck in a traffic jam—but it was deeply symbolic. Easter traffic jams at the Gotthard are a national event in Switzerland, covered every year. What the activists revealed was an absurdity: furious drivers, stuck for hours anyway, pulling activists off the road by the arms.

The second was a classical music concert in Lucerne, where two activists walked on stage and interrupted the performance. The conductor, Vladimir Jurowski, let them speak and asked the booing audience to be quiet and listen. The video garnered millions of views, shared by figures across the classical music world and beyond.

But the model had limits.

Renovate Switzerland had built everything around media attention, and in the beginning it rewarded us. Dozens of articles per action became the standard. When we began decentralizing and training new people to organize locally, they carried that benchmark with them. When their smaller, less disruptive actions received

little or no coverage, some of them took it as failure. The demotivation that followed was real. When you begin at that pitch, sustaining it is nearly impossible. The relationship with journalists shifted too. In the beginning it was equal: we offered sensational stories, they offered a platform. As the actions became repetitive, we had less to offer while still depending on them. Some journalists began refusing to come. Others who personally supported us faced pressure from editors not to cover us at all.

A Lost Opportunity in France

In France, Dernière Rénovation did not understand how to use the very strong media coverage we had.

The actions were dramatic, visual, exactly what the media wanted. Coverage came. We were delighted to have the visibility, but we didn't understand how we could maneuver their interest for our purposes, using our momentum to build movement capacity along the way. While some independent journalists were selling our images and making good money, we were giving our images away. We could have been using the drama we generated to build our own infrastructure: social media following, email lists, our own channels, our own access to public attention. We should have been creating multiple avenues to bring as many people as possible into the movement.

The moment I, Pierre, understood this clearly was a night in November 2022. We had just won a parliamentary demand for 12 billion euros for home insulation. We knew the prime minister would do everything she could to block it, so we organized a small action in front of her office—five people, meant mainly to build attention before a larger action the next day which would result with a sit-in near the parliament. The police moved too quickly. It failed. We sat on the street for a couple of hours and were arrested, along with two well-known French journalists who were covering the story.

While we waited, I heard the journalists talking to each other. One said, “This kind of action—it's just not profitable to cover these people because it fails two out of three times. This other group has better ratios.”

They were talking in business terms. We were risking our freedom. The distance between us was enormous.

We Were the Story They Wanted

When Last Generation began in 2022, I, Carla, was the press contact. I was thrilled every time the phone rang. We celebrated every article. Climate had essentially disappeared from German media after the momentum of Fridays for Future faded, and every piece of coverage felt like proof that we were pulling it back.

But in another way, that made us dependent. When actions went well and coverage followed, I felt rewarded. When journalists didn't respond, I felt powerless. I was waiting for their permission. I often felt like being at the mercy of fate.

Then I received an email from a freelance photographer, angry that I hadn't invited him to our actions. He said I only contacted the major agencies, ignoring photographers like him who made their living from this work.

At that time, it was our practice to prioritize inviting the major photo agencies. There was always a real risk that an action wouldn't work if too many journalists were present. With a photographer who had broad distribution we could be sure the photos would appear in multiple newspapers after the protest. Reaching as much attention as possible was one of our main goals. However, the freelancer accused me of being capitalist, saying that we favored those who already earned the most and ignored the exploitative system behind these agencies.

Reading the email, I was very angry. It wasn't my job to manage his income. My job was reach. I wanted to save our world from running into climate hell, not fix the structural problem behind being a freelance photographer in a capitalist world. But I read the email again, and I realized something I hadn't seen before: we had become a financial resource for journalists. Photographers needed our actions to sell pictures. Reporters needed actions for their articles.

I started to dig deeper and learned that, as our actions gained attention, some outlets had created dedicated positions just to cover us. They needed us.

That realization changed everything about how I worked. I understood that while we needed the media, they also needed us. It became clear that I—not the journalists—was in charge of the situation. I felt much more confident and independent. I learned to face journalists with self-assurance and achieve the best possible outcome for our organization.

I started negotiating. I realized that by giving interviews and access to our protests, I could negotiate and set conditions. Things that are considered part of good press work in Germany—like authorizing written interviews, which most journalists are naturally reluctant to offer—I began to demand confidently. I stopped allowing myself to be pushed around, asked to run between locations for a single cut, or pressured to perform on cue. Our actions gave journalists something to report. That meant we could ask for something in return.

I also started building real relationships. In the early weeks of the roadblocks, I would stand by the highway in the dark, guiding journalists to the right place. Hiding in bushes in the freezing early mornings, waiting for actions to start, you develop a particular closeness with people. I saved every journalist's number. I kept notes on each relationship: how conversations felt off camera, whether someone seemed emotionally accessible, what they had said when no one was recording.

Once trust was established, I would ask them directly: how do you feel about your work in the context of the climate crisis? Most expressed frustration. They felt the media system was failing on climate, that neutrality requirements were constraining what they could say. I didn't lecture them about responsibility. I shared my own story of stepping outside my comfort zone and let them draw their own conclusions.

Those relationships compounded. In moments when we wanted to announce something on a large stage or quickly release information to the public, I could rely on them. They trusted me—they would answer the phone late at night or recognize that the information I provided was important. Photographers gave us images for free that we could use on social media. Videographers stayed until the very end of actions, filming long after they had enough material—partly because they understood that the footage controlled the police's behavior. Their presence could sometimes prevent brutality.

Through those relationships I could also shape what questions got asked to politicians and institutions. Their answers became public statements we could use. The pressure fed itself. Establishing personal contact with journalists is a crucial networking effort for a political movement. Recognizing journalists as people and treating them as such enabled me to achieve a great deal in my role.

What I had to hold onto, through all of this, was professional distance. Personal warmth, but not friendship. I watched for manipulation—journalists sometimes use closeness as a tool, and being a young woman meant I was often underestimated by older, male journalists. I made a conscious effort to see myself as equal to them and to behave confidently. I addressed people in formal German, which set boundaries.

When I started this work I sometimes couldn't bring myself to answer the press phone when an unknown number called. I was shy and had no experience and felt the weight of what was at stake every time I picked it up. Yet I was always aware of why we were doing what we were doing. I felt deeply connected to science and the necessity of peaceful civil disobedience to shake up a society that was sleepwalking into climate hell. I had underestimated the attention that the step into protest by a few committed individuals could generate.

What I came to understand was that we were generating something valuable, and that the people on the other end of the line needed it as much as we did. The media does not do us a favor by covering us. We give them something worth covering. That shift from supplicant to provider is not arrogance. It is an accurate reading of the situation. And it changes what you can do. Today, I'm not afraid to pick up the phone and answer every critical question from a journalist in the way I deem most appropriate. I've learned self-confidence and an awareness of a media system that depends far more on people doing something worth reporting than we depend on them reporting on it.



UNEXPECTED ALLIES

Henning Jeschke

Action draws out people you never anticipated. You cannot plan for them or recruit them. You can only act seriously enough, and publicly enough, that they find their way to you. What surprised us was where they came from.

Our hunger strike in Berlin brought Jörg Alt into our circle. Jörg was a scientist, campaigner, and Jesuit priest based in Nuremberg, decades deep in activism. He had helped ban landmines internationally and had spent years fighting for immigrant rights in Germany. He was not a man who needed convincing that the world was broken. What he needed was a place to put his energy, and our action gave him one.

He was skeptical at first about the highway blockades we had begun organizing in January 2022. Blocking roads seemed to him a step too far. But he kept watching. A few months later, when we called him again, he told us he understood. The disruption creates visibility. Visibility stirs emotion. Emotion opens conversation. Without the disturbance, there is no discussion—only silence and the slow forward movement toward catastrophe.

Jörg helped us organize a blockade in Nuremberg. We glued our hands to the road to slow the police response. The press had taken to calling us the Klimakleber—the climate gluers.

In December 2021, when we demanded action on food waste, Jörg walked to a supermarket bin, pulled out the discarded food, and called the police on himself. The story went everywhere. His Twitter following went from two thousand to twelve thousand in days. The legal system, suddenly facing a public debate about whether throwing away edible food should be a crime, quietly dropped the charges.

Image (left): Jesuit priest Jörg Alt is interviewed by Bavarian television during a road blockade in Nuremberg, 2022.

No and Amen

Many local communities in the Protestant Church were supportive when we asked for a meeting room or a conference space. In the early days, this practical help went far. But getting people of faith to actually sit down in traffic was a different request, and it required something that couldn't be rushed: consistent presence, direct conversation, the slow work of connecting with the individuals within those communities who were already drawn toward action but hadn't yet found a way in.

Those people existed. They always do. We found them partly through connections that Extinction Rebellion had already built inside religious networks, but also because we showed up repeatedly until the relationships were real.

One action crystallized our collaboration. The “No and Amen” event framed the climate crisis explicitly in the language of faith, bringing together Buddhists and Christians in a slow march through the city. Participants cited the biblical prophets, the tradition of bearing witness, and Pope Francis, who had spoken directly about movements like ours—saying that groups being portrayed as radicalized were in reality filling a space that society as a whole had left empty, that every family ought to understand the future of their children was at stake.

The march opened doors that our road blockades hadn't. Church leaders began placing us inside a longer tradition. They described Last Generation as standing in the line of apocalyptic thinkers—the prophets, even Jesus himself. Ruben Zimmerman, in his book *Would Jesus Be a Climate Activist?*, wrote that the prophets too had been met with incomprehension, ridicule, and hostility, and that their contemptuous and violent ends were the key to understanding the crucifixion of Jesus—the death of a political dissident on the cross.

Whether or not one shares the theology, the effect was real. We were invited to speak at the EKD Synod, the Protestant Church's annual week-long conference. At the *Kirchentag* we stood on stage alongside the vice-chancellor. When our members were imprisoned in Munich, we were granted a private meeting with the Bavarian Minister of the Interior, mediated by the leader of the Bavarian Protestant Church. We disagreed on almost everything. But we were in the room, making our case directly: the movement would not stop.

Scientists on Our Side

Most scientists stay inside the boundaries of their profession. They publish. They appear occasionally in media that actually reaches people. They choose their words with the careful neutrality of those who understand that their credibility depends on not being seen to care too much, maintaining the appearance of detachment from the very findings that are keeping them up at night.

But some go further.

In 2019, a group of German scientists founded Scientists for Future, an initiative to publicly support Fridays for Future, the campaign by youth skipping school for climate demonstrations. It was a meaningful step that lent institutional credibility to a student movement that some dismissed as naïve.

After two years of weekly climate protests, questions began to surface among them: was voicing support enough? Was it time for something more? From that debate came Scientist Rebellion, originating in England and taking root in Germany. These scientists had decided the answer was no, support was not enough, and that their lab coats did not excuse them from the obligations of citizenship.

They came to Bavaria and sat down in the road in Munich.

We had planned it together, a coordinated phase of direct action in which the scientists would travel to Munich, occupy the streets in their white lab coats, and force a public confrontation with what the government was failing to do. When they were detained, we amplified the story from Berlin and used it to push further actions. The sight of scientists in handcuffs, in the same coats they wore to peer-reviewed conferences, arrested the public's imagination. I remember watching one of them in custody, talking loudly and with unrestrained emotion about the world his child was growing up into. His example broke through in a way that arguments alone never had.

Soon, 30 members of Last Generation followed the scientists into the road. They sat for a few minutes. When police asked if they would do it again, every one of them said yes. They were all imprisoned. The scientists had gone first, and we had followed.

Some scientists publicly endorsed our actions through statements and interviews, stepping beyond what their institutions sanctioned and absorbing the criticism that followed—labeled alarmist, accused of compromising their objec-

tivity. But there is another way to understand objectivity. It is not detachment. It is honesty about what the evidence shows. And when the evidence shows what it shows, acting as though it matters is not a departure from scientific credibility. It is the only thing that earns it.

One scientist followed Last Generation closely. Hans Joachim Schellnhuber had founded the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and spent decades as one of the world's most respected climate scientists—advising governments, addressing the United Nations, and shaping the frameworks through which policymakers understood what was coming. He had spent his career translating the findings of climate science into language that power could hear. But although power had heard, it had chosen not to act in a meaningful way.

After I had been on hunger strike for 24 days, he published a statement endorsing our message, saying that it was fully true. Recognizing that doing a hunger strike remains a difficult choice, he declared that if after ten years nothing had changed, he would do his own hunger strike. Further, he urged his colleagues in the scientific community to sign his statement. Here was a man with authority who publicly stood by what we were doing, helping to validate the urgency we were declaring to Germany and to the world.

Finding Cracks in the Police

In progressive organizing, talking to the police is often treated as a betrayal—a signal that you have made your peace with the machinery of repression, that you are willing to collaborate with the people who show up to drag you off the road. The instinct is understandable. The police exist, in moments of disruption, as the physical embodiment of the system you are trying to change. But in our understanding of nonviolence, the line is drawn differently.

No matter how the officers treated us on the streets—sometimes twisting our hands to the point of breaking wrists—we kept our anger pointed at the system and not at the individuals serving it. We invited the police to join us. The reasoning was not sentimental. In moments of genuine state crisis, the question of which way law enforcement moves is not a peripheral one. We wanted to prepare police officers for the possibility of radical societal change—to make sure that when that moment came, they would understand what was at stake.

We even built a website addressed directly to officers. Every time we were arrested, we handed out small cards explaining that we needed them on board for society to survive what was coming. Most refused the cards. Some took them. A few picked them up quietly from the table at the station after we had been processed and left the room.

Chiara was a policewoman who had spent years fighting injustice inside her own profession. She had spoken out against colleagues who mistreated immigrants, absorbed the harassment from superiors, and was even reassigned as punishment. When our hunger strike began, she followed it closely, from a distance.

That distance eventually closed. When Last Generation grew, she helped arrange talks at police academies and universities across Germany. We spoke in front of more than 500 officers-in-training about climate chaos and the collapse that continued fossil fuel dependence was making inevitable. Some regional governments tried to ban us from speaking to the trainees. It didn't always work.

Thirty-five officers eventually wrote a letter to the chancellor endorsing Last Generation, saying plainly that political action, not harsher punishments, was the only thing that would end the protests.

Chiara went on to co-write the only book ever written jointly by police and protesters. It documented the disciplinary proceedings she faced for supporting the movement and examined the traumas that extreme police violence leaves in its wake.

Fridays for Future

In 2019, I had been part of Fridays for Future in Germany, the movement started by Greta Thunberg in Sweden and spreading across Europe. Friends from my school years had helped build it in our town. For a while the school strikes felt like a genuine rupture—students walking out, week after week, forcing politicians to at least face the cameras and explain themselves. There was real pressure. But pressure requires escalation to survive. Without it, it dissipates. And inside FFF, the appetite for escalation was dying.

I watched it happen from the inside. Those who objected gave sincere arguments: Civil disobedience would alienate the public. It would give politicians an excuse to dismiss the movement as extremist. It would hand ammunition to the right. Better to keep the coalition broad, to maintain access to the table, to work with

sympathetic politicians rather than antagonize them. These were the voices of people who had fought hard to build something and were terrified of losing it. I understood that fear, but I didn't share it.

After two years of weekly demonstrations, FFF had become a fixture. Fixtures don't create pressure. Politicians who had once been alarmed by the strikes were now showing up at marches for the photographs—fossil fuel politicians standing beside students, looking concerned, doing nothing. Young leaders got invited to high-profile panels to discuss green energy policy. The movement was being absorbed, slowly and politely, into the machinery it had set out to challenge.

We began discussing civil disobedience, but when it came to a vote, 70 percent of local groups supported a non-disruptive path. The motion for disruption needed a majority and didn't get one. Lobbying from members aligned with green politicians had done its work.

FFF in Germany was dying. That was when Last Generation began building itself as the answer to marches that asked nothing of anyone.

In Switzerland it went differently.

The *Klimastreik*, the Swiss FFF, released a video announcing it was time for civil disobedience, in the original spirit of Greta Thunberg. I watched it repeatedly. Beyond what it said about climate tipping points, one line cut straight through: *We have been insulted and ridiculed by the right, used and lied to by the left.*

I got on a train.

Four hundred young people had occupied the plaza in front of the Federal Palace in Bern. Most of them had never done anything like this before. They sat on the stone in the cold and held their ground as police moved in to clear them, arresting them one by one, and the ones who were arrested came back.

That is what a movement looks like when it is still alive. When it is still willing to ask something genuinely hard of the people inside it. When it trusts that disruptive action is not a weakness but a way to wield power when the institutions try to co-opt your movement.

This is what we had found, in churches and lecture halls and police academies and plazas: that the willingness to pay a cost is itself a form of power. Suffering is a signal that cannot be faked. It tells people watching—the priest, the scientist,

the police office—that the stakes are real, and that someone has decided to act as though they are. That decision, made publicly, is an invitation. And some people will accept it.



PART V:

Now What?



MEHR DEM  KRATIE-
GESELLSCHAFTSRAT

RESTORING MOMENTUM

Pierre Taieb

February 2023 was a dark period for Dernière Rénovation.

For several weeks, infighting and interpersonal tensions were becoming increasingly prevalent in the organization. Externally, momentum had stalled. After the previous autumn's peak and a victory in the National Assembly that the government had stolen, nobody knew what to expect politically. The next budget vote was months away.

On top of everything else, a few weeks earlier, the government had passed a law against us allowing police to impose very heavy fines on people blocking roads. This was theoretically a reduction in repression. We were no longer facing prison for our actions. But it destabilized us: it removed our hope of winning in court and threatened the movement with hundreds of thousands of euros in fines. We had no consensus on how to respond.

Not helping the matter, most of the movement's leaders were burned out, exhausted by months of work, external pressure, and internal dynamics that consumed our spirits.

Yet, the fourth wave of action was only days away. We were higher than we'd ever been, but we were not ready for another wave. For the first time, it felt as though the plan was coming apart. We had been riding the exponential mobilization curve but now felt at risk of dropping the trend.

We knew one thing: we needed to restore momentum to unleash the mobilization again and refocus everyone on our shared mission. One night, in a small Parisian flat, a team of six met to attempt a last-ditch operation. Most people present were taking on this level of responsibility for the first time. They stood up because the movement needed them to do so.

Image (previous page): Letzte Generation blocks Hamburg's largest bridge in February 2022—one of several simultaneous blockades that cut off traffic to Germany's biggest port for more than five hours.

Image (left): Activists from Letzte Generation give speeches and sing during a blockade on Frankfurter Allee in Berlin.

It was nine in the evening when I walked up the stairs to that little flat under the eaves where the meeting was held. The people in the room would be the ones to decide what happened next. Doing nothing, we always said, would be the real risk.

To begin the meeting, the head of action design laid out a few ideas with high media potential. Most sounded completely stupid and impossible to me. After an hour of brainstorming, we agreed on two very ambitious actions. First: infiltrate the César Awards ceremony, the French Oscars, in two days. Second: directly call out the President himself at the Salon de l'Agriculture, the one event of the year where he moves through a public crowd, in three days. Seventy-two hours. Three days to restart the machine.

We needed people. Who would interrupt the Césars? This was a one-person job, but we needed to have the right person. We talked about a few people, made a few phone calls, but nobody believed it was doable, that it was not worth trying.

Nina then raised her hand. Everyone agreed immediately. She had already done difficult actions. Nothing this complicated, this uncertain, but she was trustworthy and completely dedicated. She was still with us even though, on her last action, police officers had threatened to kill her, tackled her so hard she lost feeling in one hand. She was by far the best option we had.

Who would approach the president? Jeremy raised his hand. So did I. We had no idea what the Salon de l'Agriculture actually looked like, and we knew our chances were slim. We would need more people to blend into the crowd, reinforcements to give us as many attempts as possible. We put out a call on our action groups and waited to see who responded. The meeting was over. Now was time for action.

Crashing the Césars

The Césars was the first challenge. The ceremony brings together the biggest names in French cinema and is broadcast to millions of viewers. That scale of attention comes with a scale of security to match. We had no contacts on the inside, no way to learn how it worked, no lead on how to get close to the stage. We searched, but with so little time there was no way in through normal channels.

So we went with the plan of people who have no plan: show up and try. Lean on audacity alone. Two people did reconnaissance in the afternoon. That evening, Nina was dropped off in front of the Théâtre du Châtelet, where the ceremony

would take place in 24 hours. The technicians and security were already active everywhere, setting up everything for the big night. Everyone was busy. Nina walked straight ahead without hesitating, past the security guards without looking at them, and kept walking.

And, just like this, she was in.

The action coordinator's assessment: we had overcome the first main obstacle, our chances of success had just raised to 20 percent. Nina still faced two obstacles: She needed to stay inside for 24 hours without being found. And she needed to position herself close enough to the stage when the moment came.

She spent the night in a bathroom cubicle, crouched on the toilet bowl, her feet pulled up so they wouldn't show under the door. She checked in with us every hour. In the morning she blended in with the crew preparing the ceremony, telling anyone who asked that she was the niece of a very famous French star that I won't name here. She ate lunch with everyone without losing composure. As the ceremony drew closer, the "niece" narrative was not enough anymore. She needed access backstage. She talked her way through, presenting herself as a technician.

Finally, after a full day of undercover operations, she got herself into position at the artists' entrance, her printed t-shirt concealed under her clothes, and discreetly sent us a message asking when to move. She didn't want to go during an ad break, and from where she was she had no visibility of the broadcast. She waited through minutes that must have stretched longer than the entire preceding 24 hours, until she received the signal: "Go, now, as soon as you can."

On February 24, 2023, at 9 p.m., Nina walked onto the stage at the César Awards in front of the country's most famous faces and hundreds of thousands of live television viewers. She was wearing a t-shirt that read: *We have 761 days left*. The moment lasted barely ten seconds, just long enough to hear the two presenters laugh at her.

Suddenly, the broadcast was cut. We didn't know yet whether there was an image strong enough to travel, or even a video. I was handling communications for this action. Those were some of the longest minutes I had experienced. First, nothing. Then a single photo on a random Twitter account. Then a video. It was spreading. Then a torrent: dozens, then hundreds of posts, articles, reactions from journalists and celebrities. The machine had started. We were back.

By chance, the image looked like a scene from *Don't Look Up*: a young woman interrupting a television event, a Black man and a bleach-blonde woman on stage laughing at her. People made the connection themselves. That amplified the virality even more. A prominent filmmaker used the moment to unsettle the French cinema world and raise awareness about climate chaos. The image kept generating discussion for weeks, reaching corners of public life our usual tactics never touched.

Nina had done it. Without a real plan and with almost no chance, we had brought back hope.

Half the job was done. We didn't think it would work, and we had no time to celebrate. We had to focus on the next day's action confronting the president. It would be my turn to act.

I woke at seven the next morning after a few hours of sleep, too much turning over in my mind to rest properly. We had a meeting at eight to prepare.

Face to Face with the President

Sixteen people responded to the call. We formed eight teams of two, each with two roles: a chaperon and an action taker. The chaperon's job was to move the action taker as close as possible to the president. The action taker's job was to find an opening and start a conversation.

We spent a couple of hours preparing for something none of us had ever done. The action leader gave guidance on moving through dense crowds. It felt like a children's game. It did not feel like we were planning to get past the security around the most protected person in the whole damn country.

The action leader said my duo would go first. The seven other teams would try next. If we failed, fourteen other people would be trying after us anyway. I liked this position.

If I'm honest, nothing in me believed we had a chance. Maybe I needed to believe it wouldn't work. Maybe I could only go through with it by telling myself this. I wanted to feel I had done everything I could, but did I really want to stand in front of the country's most skilled political communicator and embarrass myself on camera?

Anyway, we were done with the training, and the action lead interrupted my doubts: “We have to go.”

While designing the action the previous day, we had agreed on something important: we would not try to win an argument with him. He is one of the sharpest political communicators of his generation. He wins those exchanges, especially against us. This whole event was a communication exercise for him, and we had no interest in playing that game. Instead, we would use what the day offered: he would be surrounded by every camera in the country, and his ego would not allow him to dismiss young people without a response. If he felt like he just lost, anything we said would be amplified, by his reaction afterward. So the plan was: We would say the thing that was never said on national television. Then we would leave. Nothing more.

My chaperon and I took the metro to the Salon de l’Agriculture. She handled everything on the way; my only job was to breathe and focus. I kept telling myself I just had to try, and that it probably wouldn’t work, so there was no point being too stressed.

When we arrived, the scale of the setting hit me hard. More than 60,000 people were there. Twelve enormous hangars. And just the two of us in the middle of this gigantic crowd. I had not understood before arriving how large this event was. I felt very small.

We learned the President hadn’t appeared yet. If he had, it would already be live on every news channel. We had no idea which of the twelve hangars he would move through. We waited and wandered there for around half an hour. Then a piece of information came through from the action team: he might come out in Hangar 6. To this day I don’t know where that intelligence came from.

Hangar 6 was the biggest, with perhaps 10,000 people inside. We moved through it, looking for signs. There were more security personnel than in other places of the Salon. My stress was rising.

I needed a moment alone. I went to the bathroom and locked myself in a cubicle. *Breathe in, breathe out.* I had an idea. I watched a video I had saved for moments like this: seven Black civil rights activists from the US speaking about their struggle with total conviction. They were the best spokespersons I’d ever seen in my entire life. Watching them speak from somewhere beyond strategy, beyond ego, beyond fear, put me in the right frame of mind. I didn’t know what I was going to

say. I knew where it needed to come from. Not my head, my gut. Our government was forcing an entire population to walk toward a collapsing world, demanding silence, punishing dissent, and doing all of it with full knowledge of what they were promising to my generation and the next ones. That wasn't negligence. It was a premeditated decision, the most horrible one. This was why I had been organizing direct actions for months. This was why I chose to be here today.

My chaperon knocked. It had been ten minutes. "Is everything alright? Do you need something?" I opened the door, walked out and looked at her. We had not known each other before that morning, and now we were in this together—roughly the same age, the same fire burning in our hearts. That look was the last thing I needed to feel ready to go. We walked back into the hangar. She took my hand and led me through the crowd. I put my headphones in and let her navigate, fully trusting that she would get me into position.

She spotted a concentration of people forming in the middle of the hangar. That was where he was. That was where we were going.

We moved closer, working through the density the way we had practiced three hours earlier. Weirdly, it worked. We reached one row from the pathway security had cleared for the president. He was less than 100 meters away, moving slowly, stopping to shake hands and speak with people, trailed by cameras.

One row too far. In front of me there was a stroller with a 2-year-old girl in it. We couldn't push through without literally pushing her. My chaperon said: "We're good. Now we wait." So I waited. I looked at the small girl. She looked back at me and smiled. It seemed right, in some way, that she was there.

The President was now 30 meters away. I needed to reach the front row but still couldn't move weirdly. There were ten security guards immediately ahead. I couldn't look suspicious. I was very close, but not close enough.

Then, a miracle happened. A few meters up the pathway, a man stood on a table and called out: "Hey Macron, come here, my friend." The president went over. This was the exact kind of popular moment he came to these events for. But going to his new friend, he went out of the security pathway. The guards pushed everyone, and the crowd shifted to follow.

I was still focused on getting to this first row. I thought, *This is my chance. No way I move.* I held my position against the movement. The crowd surged and then settled back, and I was in the front row.

But the crowd movement was larger than it had looked. In under ten seconds I had passed through the security line, and I was standing among the journalists and officials. I froze. No clue what to do: *if I go back with the people in the crowd, I'll have to pass security the other way and will attract attention; if I stay here I will be unmasked at some point.* I was dressed in black. Perhaps they assumed I was security.

In the meantime, the president was coming back to the designated pathway. He was 20 meters away now. I could see his face. I was almost perfectly placed, just on the wrong side of his bodyguards this time.

I noticed two security guards looking at me. I was not where I should be and it started to become quite obvious.

He was 10 meters away. Five seconds. I slipped under one guard's arm, back into the crowd, into the front row. The guard stared at me in shock: "You, where the fuck did you come from?" He was yelling. I didn't answer. In three seconds, I would be in the camera's frame, and nothing would matter anymore. I was praying he wouldn't do anything before then.

Finally, the president was in front of me. We shook hands. I started speaking. I pulled off my black jacket, revealing the t-shirt that had become our movement's trademark. My motion was perhaps too sudden, and in under a second the guard who had spotted me tackled me and pinned me to the ground. I let myself fall. I knew I had already won. The cameras were rolling. The President wasn't going to walk away from this.

I was on the ground, a gorilla holding my whole body down, in the middle of the crowd's feet. I knew what was coming. I'd never been more sure of something. And it came.

"No violence. I will speak to this young man."

I stood up. Two guards clasped my wrists. And there he was: this little man, carrying enormous power over all of us. I started talking. Everything came flowing out. Fear for the people I loved. Anger at the innocent people who were already suffering and would suffer more because of decisions he was making. Disgust at the betrayal, not ignorance, not miscalculation, but deliberate choice. The scientific files were on his desk. He knew. That was what made it not incompetence but active crime.

It all came out, without insults, without theatrics. “We are here to tell you that we will not stand for this, that this is too serious. We are Dernière Rénovation, and we will not stop before you take action. I’ve said what I had to say. This is not a debate.”

Then I left, as we had agreed.

From behind me, I heard: “You don’t have the courage to listen to a real answer!”

Already walking away, I called back: “We already know your answers!”

My chaperon was gone. I stood alone, overwhelmed, heart slamming, head turning. Then suddenly, hands are on me again. The two security guards had followed me. They forced me out of the hangar. They said they would need to verify my identity.

I gave them my ID and kept talking. I had decided I would be the one asking questions, as many as possible, for as long as possible, rather than answering theirs. “Don’t you agree with what I said? You know it’s true. You have children. What about their future? What do you do for them?” I continued talking until one of the guards, with his boss on the phone, said quietly: “A lot of us agree with you. But this is our job, you know.” It sounds unreal, but he said that.

Eventually they let me go. I called the communications team. “You did great. It’s on. The whole thing is going crazy. Call us when you’re home safe.” I canceled everything I had planned that weekend, walked home, and got back to work. We had a lot to do.

That day, three more teams managed to reach the president with messages on their t-shirts. Nobody else had spoken to him directly. Jeremy was knocked violently to the ground and bitten by a security guard while speaking to the President. To cover it up, the president’s office leaked a fabricated “terrorist file” to justify the violence used against a young man who had come to speak about our collective future. It was obviously false. They also made up a “terrorist file” on me for 3 years after this day, for telling the truth without any kind of violence.

Dernière Rénovation and its demands led the national news all day. The footage ran in loops on the major channels. Exhausted as I was, I was sent to the country’s main news channel for a live interview that evening.

By nightfall, the president had invited our movement to a meeting at the Élysée Palace. We responded publicly, by Twitter and formal letter: we would only come

if the conversation happened in front of the citizens of France. We were done with arrangements made behind closed doors.

We never heard back. That was fine. We had not expected to. We knew there was nothing to wait for from them. Power belongs to the people. What needed to happen was for people to wake from the sleep they had been lulled into. Our actions, alongside so many others, were working toward exactly that. He was just a tool.

In seventy-two hours, with two actions and a small team, most of whom were carrying serious organizational responsibility for the first time, momentum returned. The feeling was back that we could achieve anything together. Energy moved again. Mobilization resumed.

Jeremy had been assaulted and defamed publicly, so he chose to step back for a few months to recharge. He came back to the struggle soon. I gave interviews for another few days, then had my first burnout, sleeping 20 hours a day for three weeks, proud but too depleted to continue. A month later, I was back and fully active. Nina became a figure of the climate movement and took more responsibilities after this action.

We had done what had seemed impossible. It provoked more pressure from the media. But a few weeks later, the internal dynamics that had been grinding us down returned. The brief high did not resolve the deeper structural problems. Several months later, the movement launched an internal process to rebuild its strategic and human foundations, to try to break through the ceiling that had been limiting us all along. This process did not stop the internal collapse of our movement.

We tried bringing back momentum. We succeeded for a moment. We tried addressing the deeper structural and internal concerns. But it was not enough.

Many other ambitious movements have found the way to last long while seeking ambitious changes. Since the collapse of *Dernière Rénovation*, I've spent a lot of my time learning more in depth about them. The Black Panther Party, the Zapatistas, the Civil Right movement, the historical revolutionary political parties, the Suffragettes. As a generation of activists, we should look back more to those who went through the same roads before us. That could prevent us from intuitive, and sometimes naive, responses to very complex situations.

Standing on the shoulders of giants is a good way to broaden our horizons.



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POLIZEI

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Henning Jeschke, Carla Hinrichs

Disruption exerts pressure, but pressure alone has never been enough. Every movement that has burned bright and collapsed has proven this. The harder question, the one most movements avoid because it is slower and less visible than a road blockade or a headline, is what you are building while you are disrupting. What structures will remain when the peak passes? On what foundations is your organization standing? And what kind of democracy are you actually fighting for? The answers to these questions determine everything about how you fight.

These were the questions Last Generation was forced to confront, and they arrived not as abstract strategic problems but as concrete pressure: elections approaching, a network straining under the patriarchy, a political vision that had been sitting quietly on a website waiting to be spoken aloud.

By December 2022, we had been organizing in Germany for over a year. We had brought a “Saving Food Law” into public debate, then fought for cheap train tickets and a speed limit on the Autobahn. People were beginning to engage with these specific demands, but almost nobody was noticing the larger vision we had carried from the beginning. It was on the website, but it needed voices to bring it to the forefront.

After a year of protests, we took our demands and storytelling to a new level. We had pushed minor reforms, none of which had been implemented. Our larger vision—updating democracy through citizens’ assemblies—had always been in the background. We had not spoken publicly about it very much. The vision was fundamental: removing the fossil fuel oligarchs from power and replacing them with people chosen by sortition—randomly, but representatively.

Image (left): Two activists from Letzte Generation protest against Elon Musk and the far right in front of a Tesla store in a Berlin mall, after painting it light blue, the color of the far-right AfD party.

One of the most galvanizing things I encountered when I joined XR in 2019 was their third demand: *the people decide*. Citizens receive information, deliberate, and find solutions that work. It asks a clarifying question of everyone who hears it: do you trust ordinary people? In my eyes, it is the only real democracy.

In winter 2023, we decided to make this the center of our public message. From the experience of previous movements, we knew that real change required three things to happen in society simultaneously, one of which was the acceptance of genuine alternatives to the existing system. Demanding a fundamental power shift away from entrenched interests and toward the people distinguished us from previous climate movements like Fridays for Future. It let us address the systemic roots of the crisis, not just the crisis itself, while offering a concrete vision of something better.

For a year we had been telling the doomsday story: the devastating consequences of climate breakdown, the failure of the state. It was time to add a direction. This shift created real energy inside the organization. It gave us a new, larger story to tell, and it repositioned us publicly as a movement offering a path forward, not just an alarm.

So how do you bring a demand for citizens' assemblies into the hearts and minds of society? You start with language. We created a new word: *Gesellschaftsrat*—society council. It was a deliberate departure from the existing *Bürgerrat*—citizen's council—because the tools built under that name had consistently failed. People were consulted and then ignored. Consultation without co-creation is not democracy. It is theater.

We arrived at *Gesellschaftsrat* by testing different words with people around us—what stuck, what traveled. We put it at the center of our communication just before our peak moment in spring 2023. In television debates, our spokespersons laid out what this revolutionary thing was. Politicians responded that existing institutions were functioning perfectly well. The contrast was stark, and people could judge for themselves.

Making Power Visible

But naming a thing is not building it. We needed to construct prototypes to make the idea something people could feel rather than only hear about. Alongside Last Generation, we launched the Humanity Project, which held 25 assemblies across

six cities. We began with mini-assemblies—small gatherings of five to ten people in living rooms—and worked toward building a new organization.

That eventually became New Generation. It kept the disruptive protest and the symbolic confrontation but added a branch dedicated to building assemblies at real scale. In autumn 2024, we announced that Last Generation would end. The crisis was not ahead of us. We were already in it—climate chaos, tipping points being crossed, dominoes falling. It was already too late for much of what we had hoped to prevent.

So we had to become the New Generation.

With its launch in February 2025, we announced that we would fight for a nonviolent revolution until we had one, and that a revolution would happen within ten years regardless. The question was whether it would be ours or someone else's. The probability of a fascist one was high. That was why building people power was not optional.

We did two things to make that power visible.

The first was an action that exposed injustice through humor. When our homes had been raided by police who claimed we were a mafia-like criminal organization, we had been passive recipients of that framing. We now reversed it. We carried out our own raids on lobbyists' offices and party headquarters. We called the network of ultra-wealthy actors controlling German politics the MerzMafia—after Chancellor Friedrich Merz. When I entered one of their offices in October 2025, I found handwritten notes on a desk that mapped political connections: *Minister of Economy: pro us. Head of the conservative party: on our side.*

Outside, people had cordoned off the area with police tape marking the “ongoing investigation against the MerzMafia.” There were signs and banners. The best moment was the cardboard box, which our team carried in for a single purpose: so the police would carry it back out on camera. It read: *Incriminating evidence against the MerzMafia.* It was as if it had just been seized in a house raid and loaded into a police vehicle.

Second, we built a *Parlament der Menschen*—a parliament for people—not for big-profit interests. Through sortition, we assembled 60 people in Berlin under a large geodesic dome constructed to look exactly like the glass dome on top of the Bundestag: fair representation across genders, migration backgrounds, and ages, from under 18 to over 80.

Power has not yet been transferred to this body. The revolution still has to happen. But building the structure in advance is important. It makes the alternative concrete and imaginable at a moment when authoritarian forces are offering only hierarchy and fear.

On October 6, 2025, we attempted a symbolic revolution. We went to political buildings, some television crews following us. We told the officer at the entrance, “Let us through, and we will transfer political power to the people through assemblies. This is the only way out of the crisis.”

“Oh what,” the officer said. “That wasn’t part of the agreement. Let me ask.” When he returned he said, “No.”

“Do you not want to, or are you not allowed to?”

“I don’t want to.”

“Okay. We will be back on April 23, 2026,” I said. “We will ask again. A revolution is our only chance.”

Going Electoral

Naming a vision and building prototypes are not the same as anchoring it in institutional life. Movements that exist only in the streets are vulnerable to repression, to exhaustion, to the inevitable ebb that follows every peak. In January 2024, we began thinking seriously about whether to engage the electoral cycle: to become a party, or even to stand in elections as a movement.

The idea had been circulating for months, the way the hunger strike had circulated before we committed to it. A politician from the left told us she would welcome the attempt, because her own party’s candidates had no real understanding of tipping-point dynamics, extinction risk, or the lived reality of what was coming. The governing parties were even further from it.

Movements work in cycles. Peak intensity cannot be sustained indefinitely. There needs to be work that seeds new structures between disruptions. Getting people elected—not primarily to wield institutional power, which remained firmly elsewhere, but to establish a stable presence, create ongoing resources, and hold assemblies—was one way to build through a quieter period without losing ground.

At first, we were afraid of failure. Then we realized that even the attempt would be a success. We had to try. We tested the capacity: could we recruit 100 volunteers to collect signatures in one week? Could we raise 50,000 euros?

We did both in a single day.

What followed was a logistical ordeal. To get on the ballot, a small movement must build a structure almost from scratch: candidate list, official forms, local verification of every signature, centralized submission within a narrow window. Nationwide, 4,000 valid signatures were required. We collected nearly 10,000.

Before the election we put up posters, held an action in Brussels, and organized local and national assemblies to shape the platform. We spoke with other small parties competing for Germany's 96 EU Parliament seats, where roughly 200,000 votes—about 0.6 percent—were needed to win one seat. Collaboration would have been interesting, but those parties had finalized their programs and candidates six months earlier.

On election day, we sensed we had not done enough. Media largely ignores movements that are not visible in the streets, and we had not been visible enough.

We received 104,000 votes, about half of what we needed. We did not win a seat, though in some cities we reached up to 1.3 percent of the votes.

The process brought the movement back into national news simply from our participation. It reinvigorated supporters. It revealed that there is explosive potential when people believe in a worthy challenge. And it produced an amusing vindication: Germany's main electoral questionnaire tool matched a meaningful portion of users to our movement as their top choice. When the newspaper *taz Die Tageszeitung* tested what ChatGPT would recommend based on policies, it aligned with voting for our movement.

The inside–outside game is real. A movement is capable of operating in multiple registers simultaneously. It makes it harder to ignore and harder to repress than if you only ever stand in the road. In all, 104,000 people voted for a vision of democracy that does not yet exist. That is the beginning of a constituency.

We still have a long way to go. It is not a revolution that's coming, and everything is change. We have to change within ourselves. We as humans have to change. I think that's the only way we can change everything. It's the only true revolution we can create.



CLOSING A CHAPTER, OPENING ANOTHER

Cécile Bessire

Movements are not machines. They do not run indefinitely on willpower and urgency. They are built and held by specific people who have specific limits, and when those limits are ignored—by the organization, by the people themselves—the movement and the people pay the price.

After a pivotal crisis in January 2023, Renovate Switzerland turned its attention inward. The previous year had been spent pouring everything into actions and mobilization. What had been neglected was everything underneath: a sustainable fundraising system, trained new people, distributed leadership, a clear organizational DNA that could articulate the long-term vision and theory of change. These foundations had to be built while the movement kept moving. This is much harder than building them from the start.

By December 2023, the campaign was showing its age. We returned to road-blocks after experimenting with other tactics and found that media attention had softened. Actions that had once generated real drama now landed more quietly. More troubling, the central demand—renovating building insulation at a national scale—had begun to lose meaning and relevance for our activists. There was a growing gap between the modest, achievable framing of the campaign and the radical transformation we had come to understand was necessary. The demand had served its purpose. It was time for a radical nonviolent revolution. We needed innovation.

Image (left): Göschenen, Switzerland. April 4, 2023. Climate activists from Renovate Switzerland block the entrance to the Gotthardtunnel at the start of the Easter Holidays in protest of the Swiss government's climate policy making.

Our goal was twofold: to bring fresh energy into the organization, renewing motivation and attracting new media interest; and to demonstrate that we had become more than a single-demand campaign—that we were now an organization capable of launching and sustaining multiple efforts. We kept the slogan *Act Now!* as the connective tissue between projects. First appearing on our orange vests and t-shirts, it would now be the name of the organization itself. In Switzerland, everything must work across three languages. A name that functioned only in French, German, or Italian would have excluded someone. English, imperfect as a choice, was the best compromise. The words were simple, widely understood, and already established.

To emphasize continuity from Renovate Switzerland, we homed in on a small, achievable symbolic demand. We chose to focus the new campaign on transport, the largest source of CO₂ emissions in Switzerland, just ahead of the building sector our first organization had targeted. A major national referendum on new highway construction was approaching at the end of 2024, and many environmental organizations were already concentrated there, which created an opening for alliances. After long discussions and feedback rounds across the organization, we settled on the campaign name: Liberate Switzerland. We called on the government to ban the sale of new fossil-fuel cars and invest heavily in public transport.

In March 2024, the canton of Geneva announced 500 million Swiss francs to renovate all old buildings. Our calculations showed it roughly matched what we had demanded nationally, scaled to the territory. We declared a victory for Renovate Switzerland—not claiming sole credit, but presenting the decision as a significant step forward that our two years of action had helped make possible. Between April 2022 and December 2023, more than 2,100 articles had mentioned our campaign. It felt like the right moment to close that chapter.

For the new campaign, we wanted to form a team that combined experienced organizers with people who had little or no prior experience, so that the campaign would not once again depend on the same small group. For the first action phase, we organized a mix of high-visibility launch actions and local, accessible actions to encourage broader participation.

Before launching Liberate Switzerland, we reached out to political, environmental, and social organizations working on fossil-free mobility. We met with the organizers of the referendum campaign opposing new motorways. They expressed

a familiar concern: that our actions had cost the Greens seats in the 2023 federal elections, and that roadblocks before the November 2024 vote would push people toward supporting new highways by associating environmental organizations with disruption. Their strategy depended on not irritating the public, and they believed we would undermine it. They told us, “This is not the right moment to take action.”

Sitting in front of my screen, I wanted to jump out of my chair and scream. The year before had not been the right time because of elections. Now the coming year would not be the right time because of a referendum. There will never be a right time. The right time was decades ago. I regret having stayed quiet during that call. I bottled the anger and moved on.

In April and May 2024, we carried out ten actions under the new campaign—paint thrown on a Porsche dealership, orange powder on cars at a major auto dealer, national and international media coverage, then less disruptive local actions, then a repetition of the Gotthard roadblock over two consecutive Easter weekends. The organizers of the Gotthard actions expected the same impact as the previous year: massive international press coverage, strong social media spread, thousands of donations in days. The design was repeated. The impact was not. The action was reported, but it did not resonate the same way. The images were striking, but the moment had passed.

During the second Gotthard action, participants were hit, dragged, and insulted by drivers. One activist was the victim of an attempted kidnapping—two men carried him and tried to take him away in their van. The movement was running on depleted human resources, and as a result we could not communicate publicly about the violence participants had endured, nor provide them with adequate legal and psychological support. Some felt abandoned. They withdrew gradually from this kind of action.

In May, following the first action phase, my doctor put me on sick leave. I could no longer get out of bed in the morning. I spent hours crying. The feeling I described to a close friend was that I was a dirty old rag lying on the floor.

Since January 2022, I had given everything I had to try to force change within what we believed was a narrow window of two to three years. I chose immense sacrifices because I felt an overwhelming responsibility for what was happening

and for solving it. I was terrified about what the climate crisis would do to me, to the people I loved, to everyone.

“When I think about my future, all I can see is a big black hole”—That was the title of an article quoting me after one of our actions. To fill that hole, I worked almost seven days a week. I gave talks to audiences in the hundreds, though I had once been the girl who blushed crimson when asked to speak in front of classmates. I gave dozens of newspaper and television interviews, took part in debates where I was portrayed as a terrorist, a hypocrite, an unreasonable child, a naive young woman. I endured intense conflicts and criticisms from inside our organization, and received mockery from friends. I watched my closest friends burn out. I stopped hiking, sewing, drawing, knitting. I stopped going out. I stopped asking friends how they were.

I do not say this to present myself as a victim. I say it because all of this was accumulating inside me, and I was not processing any of it. I was too focused on the emergency to notice what it was doing to me. It affected me to know so much about what was coming—the uninhabitable zones, the starvation, the displacement. It affected me to believe so deeply in people power and collective capacity while facing so much violence, so much passivity, such little seriousness from most of the people I encountered.

How can it be that a close friend sits in a room where I explain that 70 percent of the Earth will become uninhabitable, that billions of people face starvation and displacement and violent conflict, and then she tells me that blockading a road is violent, she returns home, and she continues as before.

All of this was inside me. By May 2024, it became too much. I had seen it coming, but I believed my will would be stronger. I was so determined to shake society and force change that I could not see I was not solely responsible for the fate of humanity.

After I stepped away, the new campaign did not continue beyond a handful of isolated actions. The fact that I left—and could not simply be replaced—played a significant role in that outcome. One person should never bear that load.

What happened to me, and to the organization during my illness, brought me to two paradoxical truths that still coexist inside me.

The first is that I am more powerful than I ever knew. I discovered in myself an extraordinary energy and a seemingly endless reservoir of love—enough to over-

come my deepest fears and insecurities in service of something I truly believed in. That realization carries responsibility: to keep that energy alive, to cultivate it rather than burn it, to offer it to the world as something sustainable rather than as a final expenditure.

The second is that I am not responsible for everything. I have limits. Not everything depends on me. Even when I do my absolute best, the rest of the world will follow its own course. I had to learn to listen to those limits. A person who has destroyed herself cannot take care of anyone else, or the Earth, or the future.

Finally, I learned to live with the climate crisis. I allowed myself to feel the sadness, the anger, the despair, the long grief. I acknowledged what it would do to me and my family. I made space again for the parts of myself I had dismissed as indulgent—the hiking, the sewing, the drawing, the friendships. They are not distractions from the work. They are what makes the work possible.

When I began, I understood sacrifice as loss, giving up everything that mattered in service of a greater cause. I understand it differently now. Sacrifice is not self-erasure. It is offering the best of what you have: your time, your knowledge, your experience, your energy, your conviction, your belief in what people are capable of when they choose to act together. You can only offer those things if you have kept them alive in yourself.



WHEN THE CRISIS CAME HOME

Chloé Bertini

During the first two weeks of May 2023, the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy was devastated by floods. Persistent rains, overflowing rivers, and landslides tore through the area. Conventional and digital media filled with surreal images: cars carried away by streams of muddy red water, hills crumbling, homes inundated to thigh level. It was a scene we were usually privileged to observe from a distance. It was happening here, in our country, in the middle of our action phase.

A complex mix of feelings rose inside me. Heartbreak at the devastation. Anger, knowing the increased frequency of such events had long been predicted. Indignation, because 94.5 percent of Italian municipalities are at hydrogeological risk—landslides, floods, coastal erosion, avalanches—yet those responsible for public safety had consistently failed to respond at the scale the threat demanded. Fear, because it is a different experience entirely when the danger you have been warning about arrives violently at your doorstep. And somewhere underneath all of it, a dark sense of validation: the gaslighting by media and climate denialists, the everyday dissociation of most people we encountered, can make you feel incapable of communicating the truth. Now it was visible to everyone. Seventeen deaths. Countless families' lives destroyed. Ten billion euros in damages. What we had been screaming about through our actions was finally here, and the manifestation was catastrophic.

While most of our planned actions continued, a new opportunity appeared. A man reached out on social media saying he had “litters of mud ready for us to throw on the Senate again.” Strategically, it was a perfect moment. Our action teams had clear guidelines, heightened purpose, and the necessary materials. The recent floods, following months of drought elsewhere in the country, made the outrage behind the action impossible to dismiss.

Image (left): Just Stop Oil protesters block a busy road in Newcastle city center.

A week later, five people were ready for the Senate, Part Two. Two sprayed the building with muddy water from fire extinguishers. Beatrice and Carlotta poured mud over themselves, topless, in front of it. “This is the mud of Emilia-Romagna,” they declared. “The social contract with our government is broken. We need to disobey.”

Law enforcement arrived and immediately covered their chests. They grabbed them by the wrists and dragged them across the cobblestones with no regard for their bodies. Beatrice told me afterward that she was screaming that she was in pain. A police officer replied, “*You deserve it.*” Once dropped in a corner where she wouldn’t disturb the politicians crossing that street, she was mute and trembling from the shock of all that violence. They eventually called an ambulance. That violence was deployed to protect the sensibilities of those people elected to power—to shield them from the consequences of their own inaction—and avenge their shame of failing to prevent our action.

Away from the cameras, some of us went to the worst-hit localities to shovel mud and sort through ruined possessions—moved by instinctive solidarity, like hundreds of others across the country. Much of the aid communities received was organized by grassroots organizations and unions managing logistics, transportation, and donations of tools. Volunteers were divided into teams, given shovels, and sent by car or bus to their assigned towns. The scenes were dystopian: high water marks on walls, dried mud covering streets like desert sand, emptied cellars, homes stripped bare. Children’s toys sullied on the floor. Books scattered and ruined. One volunteer shared an image of three cars piled on top of one another. We spent our days in rain boots, armed with brooms and plastic bags.

The media, as always, depoliticised the disaster. Coverage emphasized the beauty of self-organized solidarity rather than analyzing causes, responsibilities, or long-term consequences. Giorgia Meloni appeared in the affected areas, shaking hands and offering encouragement, while saying nothing about the government’s systematic neglect of the growing threat from extreme climate events.

We were invited onto national television. Even with images of the devastation visible in the background, a climate denialist was given an hour-long platform. I walked out of the studio in protest. The response was a wave of solidarity and shared outrage at how the segment had been set up.

In early June, we held a leadership gathering with the most committed members of the group. The discussion turned to the floods. Why had we not all gone to help? Why were we unprepared? What would have been the most effective response? In a movement organized entirely around the climate emergency, why did we not have a plan for when the emergency arrived?

Part of the answer was structural. Our internal narrative of “two to three years”—the compressed timeline we had imposed on ourselves—had paradoxically dissociated us from the reality that climate collapse was already happening. We were organized around a future crisis while a present one unfolded around us.

There is also a deeper discomfort that anyone organizing around climate eventually has to confront: thinking strategically about tragedies feels predatory. You can feel like a vulture, attempting to capitalize on others’ suffering. How do you approach a disaster with the intention to organize while maintaining genuine empathy for the trauma people are living through? Is it even appropriate? Or is the right response simply to go, humbly, and do the dirty work?

There is no simple answer. Whatever choice is made, it is delicate. What is true is that the reason we organize massively and radically is precisely because tragedies are already unfolding daily, worldwide, as a direct consequence of political inaction and corporate extractivism. Every day that passes, business as usual increases both the frequency and intensity of extreme events.

This is the central challenge of organizing for climate justice. Most of the time, the work involves making visible those threats that seem distant or abstract. Society is broadly dissociated from the reality, and messaging that matches the actual scale of the problem is routinely dismissed as exaggerated or fatalistic. Then there are moments when the truth becomes so overwhelming that those most affected are paralyzed by grief and shock, while those watching from a distance are compelled to help. The organizing challenge in those moments is different, and a climate movement in this decade must be prepared for it.

What that requires is a politicized narrative maintained at both levels simultaneously: at the local level, planting seeds with affected communities; at the national level, using actions and media to communicate the larger message. Not the same mobilization tactics as on a normal day, but not silence either. A year after the Emilia-Romagna floods, spontaneous protests arose in the most affected communities, driven by inadequate government support for rebuilding.

These reflections eventually reached the international level, where we began developing tactics and medium-term strategies for organizing around climate disasters as they became more frequent.

What We Build When We Act Together

Our strategy had been built on a theory of the ecosystem: that radical, disruptive actions would push the boundaries of what was acceptable, allowing the entire spectrum of climate activism to shift, while less radical groups would contribute their capacity for lower-risk, more frequent actions to a joint effort. We had attempted to share this vision with Fridays for Future. A core team member organized a series of calls, starting with former FFF members who had joined Ultima Generazione, then expanding outward through each round of attendees until the calls were reaching large numbers of people. It seemed promising, but it did not translate into practical collaboration or the synergy we were looking for.

After two years, we had to face the conclusion: we could not function as a vanguard group because the broader movement was not following. As repression increased, the urgency of larger numbers grew. We needed to find a way to reach and activate the many people who supported us from a distance but would not participate in high-risk actions.

For the final day of our long action phase in autumn 2023, we organized something different—a public gathering for all our supporters, announced in advance through all our channels, authorized and carrying no legal consequences. It was publicized openly as a day to show support for the campaign, unlike our usual secretive actions.

We spent the first hours in activities designed to let people express their feelings about climate collapse in different ways: drawing, sharing circles, movement. Then we had other plans.

When we arrived at the authorized square, it was already surrounded by police on every corner. It was a strange scene—that many officers simply watching people talk, eat, and move. Participants were of mixed generations. Friends and family members of Ultima Generazione activists were there, experiencing one of our initiatives in person for the first time.

After the first hours of planned activities, we communicated to everyone that the goal was to move out and begin swarming the road—briefly occupying the

crosswalk, then releasing it, gradually increasing the duration each time. We explained the potential legal consequences so that everyone could make a conscious choice.

What followed was an absurd dance. We moved toward one gate at the edge of the park and were met by a wall of police. We kept the energy up, chanting, speaking our truth, and we moved to another gate. Another wall of police blocked the second gate. We feared we might fail, but we kept going. Third gate—another wall. At the fourth, after negotiation and singing and addressing both the police and the passersby watching, we were eventually let through. They had presumably also understood they couldn't block our exit onto a public space indefinitely.

Once through, we moved to the main road and began swarming the crosswalk, slowing traffic. Then the escalation: the word spread to sit down, again with the legal consequences explained to newcomers first. Two blocks of roughly 30 people each formed on either side of the road. Little by little, the space between them was occupied. Some supporters who were not used to this remained on the sidelines, observing and encouraging rather than sitting.

The police were not pleased. They warned that a large bus was coming and everyone would be taken to the police station. We did not stop. One person took the microphone and explained what came next: we would use the time and space we had created to hold public assemblies, discussing the reality of climate collapse with questions prepared in advance. Circles formed on the road. People began talking.

By that time, more than a hundred people were sitting on the road, sharing tea and snacks on a December evening, discussing the choices ahead. Looking around at the new faces, the participation, the conversations happening in the cold, it was a concrete embodiment of what we had been working toward: calling people to stop, face reality together, and act from that shared recognition to make the urgent, necessary changes.

Our actions had always been an invitation: to stand together with dignity on the right side of history, to commit to truth rather than obedience, to remember the power we possess when we decide to no longer follow orders that favor the profit of criminals over the protection of our ecosystem.

By the end of the assemblies, the police had begun to leave.

For a moment, democracy, humanity, and solidarity were winning. It was so affirming to experience the power we have when we come together. Even high-risk actions lose some of their risk when numbers are high. All the images our supporters had seen of us being dragged away, outnumbered, isolated—those outcomes were not inevitable. They were the product of small numbers. What this day demonstrated was the other possibility.

How much violent authoritarianism will overtake our democracies as social pressures intensify? This remains uncertain. But the logic of civil disobedience at scale has always been the same: when enough people refuse, those enforcing executive power must eventually choose which idea of justice they serve. That is the moment when the architecture of state power becomes visible for what it is—and when it becomes possible to build something else.



THE FUTURE IS NOT SET

All Authors

When we started, most of us had little idea how to do this work. We only knew it needed doing and that no one else seemed willing to do it. We were naïve about what lay ahead—the burnout, the strain on relationships, the fear, the weight of state repression. We did it anyway, and we achieved victories.

This work has taken us on a journey. We have met people who changed us. We have faced our deepest insecurities and learned more about ourselves and the world than we thought possible. We earn little. We are waiting for verdicts in dozens of court cases. Much of society still sees what we do as useless, dangerous, or naïve.

And yet most of us have never felt more free, more at peace. Each day we wake up knowing we are building the world we want to live in. We are a little less bound by the norms we inherited. We have found our own strength and direction. We carry love and gratitude for what human beings can give one another. We believe in the power within each of us to change. We trust that together we can make this world more beautiful when we decide to be honest about what is happening.

That honesty was always the starting point. Not a shared ideology, not a shared background, but the willingness to look at the greatest threat facing the world and not look away. That is what brought us together.

Much has changed since we began. The image of Western democratic governments now shows cracks too deep to ignore. Belief in their commitment to human rights and justice is collapsing. The far right is gaining ground across much of the world, including Europe and the United States. Laws governing protest are becoming harsher. The space for dissent is narrowing.

Image (left): The movement's most committed organisers gather at a private house for a retreat on A22's core identity and emerging strategy.

At the same time, the first tipping point for coral bleaching has been crossed. Coral reefs are the largest living structures on Earth. They sustain at least a quarter of all marine life, support one billion people, and protect coastlines from the sea. Their loss will be devastating and largely irreversible. Climate and social breakdown are not distant threats. They are here, now, in the present tense.

We have passed 1.5 degrees of warming. Two degrees is now almost certain before 2050, and we are heading toward three to four by the end of the century. The Paris Agreement has failed. The window many of us believed was still open when we began has now closed. What was once a warning about the future is becoming the texture of the present—and as hundreds of millions die and billions are displaced, the sense of safety that so many still take for granted will erode.

We have to treat this reality as true. Not because it is comfortable, but because denial has never moved anyone to act. And not everything is lost—which is precisely why it matters what we do.

This is not a moment for despair, but it is not a moment for illusions either. The crises we feared are arriving. The systems built on domination are tightening their grip as they decline. The task now is to organize, build solidarity across borders and movements, and defend what is worth defending while working to replace what must be replaced.

We made mistakes. Our models had limits. But they allowed us to begin and advance the work of our elders and mentors—to root our lives in truth, to build communities of committed people who are still creating projects and testing strategies to challenge and change existing systems of power. That work continues, nationally and internationally, carried by people who have given a great deal and are still willing to give more.

The choice in front of us is not subtle. Healing or war. Regeneration or destruction. Shared wealth or deepening dispossession. People-powered democracy or corrupt authoritarianism. These are not rhetorical opposites. They are the actual directions available to us, and which one prevails will depend on what enough people decide to do.

Deep down, most people know what kind of world they want to live in. Not a world organized around the accumulation of material wealth, but one shaped by love, connection, and safety, by strong bonds among people and with the living

world. That desire is not naive. It is the most powerful force available to us, and it has driven every genuine transformation in history.

Look around you. There are people already fighting for this—in courts, in streets, in prisons, in community halls, behind computers, in the slow and unglamorous work of building movements that can last. Support them. Join them. Give your time and resources to what you believe in. If you want to go further, go further. Build new forms of democratic participation where you live. Do it out of love for the world, out of love for yourself.

No one is coming to save us. You might feel inadequate for the job, but we are all we've got, no matter how unfit we feel. We were not born knowing how to do this. We chose it. We decided, one by one, who we were going to be. The only people who are going to do it are people like me and you, who has read this book all the way to the end.

The old world is ending. What comes next will be shaped by those willing to stand in the uncertainty and act anyway. People alive today hold a genuinely extraordinary power, the power to shape the conditions of life on Earth for hundreds of thousands of years.

These are dark times, and they may grow darker before they turn. But we still have our lives ahead of us. We still have our energy, our love, our capacity to act together.

If you feel the quiet voice telling you it is time, then get out there.

AFTERWORD

You may not know the people who came together and wrote this book, but you know what they did. You saw it on TV, read about it in the newspaper, or heard people arguing over it. Say what you will about them, their tactics are probably the most well-known nonviolent direct action of our time. These tactics earned them the slur that gives this book its title, and yet there is far more here than action alone. There is plenty of it, make no mistake. There are stories to rival the most imaginative heist or spy novels, but there is also analysis, sharp and unapologetic; and there is introspection, deeply personal and thoughtful.

This book is the unexpected outcome of a collective self-reflection process I was asked to facilitate. Activists from climate movements across Europe—groups such as Letzte Generation, Just Stop Oil, and Dernière Rénovation—came together in France to look back at the last several years of intense mobilization around a range of climate-related demands. They were at the tail end of campaigns that generated buzz, directed pressure toward tangible gains, and, most importantly, changed the political climate in their countries and beyond.

After years of intense mobilization, the time had come to pause, sit down, and take stock of what worked and what hadn't, compile lessons learned and chart a path for the future. But as we moved through this process, I felt like something larger was taking shape. I remember one of the first sessions vividly. We had stretched a long rope across the room to represent the passage of time, and people were attaching slips of paper to it with the dates and events they remembered. The goal was to build a shared timeline spanning events in France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, and the UK. But the rope couldn't hold it all. There were so many actions, each more remarkable than the last, that soon the slips of paper began attaching to one another, cascading downward until the rope had become a curtain.

But that was just the tip of the iceberg. Every challenge the groups had faced along the way was unpacked, from internal weaknesses to the unique circumstances of each country. And then people began opening up about what this had meant to them personally, and how it had changed them. I knew this needed to be recorded in their own words for other activists to hear, and for anyone facing the necessity of political action.

This is why, in the middle of the self-reflection and against my better judgment, I proposed something unexpected: they should write a book. Together. How would we even do that, they asked—we are not from the same country, we don't speak the same language, how could our stories be woven into a single coherent narrative? It seemed impossible.

Enter Bruce Pearson. My colleague and a friend, the man behind People Power Publishers, and the developer of a methodology for collective writing. Bruce would bring members of the same movement together, get them to write and share what they had written, then again and again, one short blurb after another, until a common story emerged from the collective mind.

Bruce came to France, they all gathered on the outskirts of Paris, and they wrote the book you now hold in your hands. And I am so glad they did!

I was an activist myself, a member of the Otpor movement that helped bring down Milošević in Serbia back in the nineties. I wish we had done something like this, sat down together and written our account. But we didn't. Others wrote books and made movies about Otpor, and I have seen them all. But let me tell you: none of them captures what it was to be inside the movement, how it actually looked and felt from within. This is why I'm so glad that Bruce sat down with Chloé and Thibaut and Carla and Henning and Cécile and Pierre and Harley, and that other authors who could not be there sent their contributions too.

After the initial writing there were several rounds of edits, and months passed without me seeing the manuscript. Then one day Bruce said it was ready. I printed it out and started reading, and for the next two days I couldn't put it down. I was late for meetings. It had everything: stories, analysis, introspection. It captured the glory of being part of the European climate movement and carried lessons for anyone who will come after. But more than anything, it was written by those who had actually lived all of it. And let me tell you, in these postmodern times, when so much is falling apart and so little makes sense, what these guys did—and the story they now get to tell—is as close as we will get to what legends and hero stories once were.

– **Ivan Marovic**, one of the leaders of Otpor; author of *The Path of Most Resistance: A Step-by-Step Guide to Planning Nonviolent Campaigns*



POLICE

NO NEW OIL
TERMINATION NOW!



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to take a moment to be grateful for all the ones that have taken care of us and continue to do so—all the people in the households, at school, in the field, at the hospital, in our communities, who supported our upbringing, have grown the food we eat, have been looking after our health, have provided emotional support when needed and much more. This work is often done behind the scenes with little recognition—yet it is what has made possible for us to be alive, and be able to commit to this much needed political work today.

We are grateful to all of those who have fought before us and showed us with their bodies and lives that it is possible to stand for justice with strategy and devotion, and to create change in this world—all of those whose actions inspire us today to be better and bolder.

We are also grateful to all the activists, organizers, militants and life defenders with whom we have had political and strategic discussions, who have contributed to our learning and given us the strength to see with our own eyes that another world is possible.

We are grateful to all of those who invested energy into the projects that made those stories possible: to all of our comrades from Dernière Rénovation, Just Stop Oil, Letzte Generation, Renovate Switzerland, Ultima Generazione, that we were a part of, but also to all of those who took part in Återställ Våtmarker, Declare Emergency, Letzte Generation Austria, Stopp Oljeletinga, Save Old Growth, and Restore Passenger Railway. Without the relentless work and dedication of our comrades in the A22 Network, this book would not exist and there would be no story to be told.

For the A22 as a network. For Roger's determination and visionary work, which inspired many to take action igniting the spark behind the international project. For Conny's steadfastness and daily work holding the network together, supporting the campaigns and creating a space where international exchange was possible. For Rhodri and Becky who helped grow and hold this space with dedication.

| Image (left page): Just Stop Oil activists face off with police while blocking critical oil infrastructure in Purfleet, April 2022.

This book is the outcome of “Understanding the A22 Network” (UA22), a two-year process that has had many steps and people involved. This process wouldn’t have been possible without the financial support given by the Climate Emergency Fund and the Center for Nonviolent Conflict Research.

Thanks to our facilitators, Bruce Pearson, Mariana Rodrigues, and Ivan Marovic who helped create containers for us to talk to each other, listen to each other, disagree with each other, and learn together.

Thanks to the editing team behind People Power Publishing, in particular Bruce Pearson and Maeva Alagna for their fine-tuned expertise in collective writing for activists and their work in turning a clumsy collection of accounts and reflections into a cohesive flow we could call a book.

Thanks to all those who committed some of their precious time to learn from the A22 experience together and translated in a form that could add value to the wider movement. Some stayed involved all the way through to the writing workshop that gave birth to this book, others contributed how they could and left when it felt right.

For Beatrice Costantino, Sasha de Laage, Jesper Lagerman, Helen Wahlgren, and Lars Werner, who joined in the online sessions, which mainly served as a way to identify the common topics we had together.

For Sasha Cantet, Bertrand Caltagirone, and Alizée Le Fur, who contributed to the online sessions and also joined for the three-day in-person gathering in Burgundy where we were able to deep dive, discuss, debate, elaborate, and disagree on the recurrent themes we saw as part of our shared experience.

For Cécile Bessire, Harley F. Brewer, Carla Hinrichs, Henning Jeschke, and Pierre Taieb, who, after showing up for the online sessions and in-person gathering, accepted to participate in the writing retreat in the outskirts of Paris which eventually gave birth to the early manuscript of this book.

For Beatrice Costantino, Anna Holland, Hannah Hunt, Laura Paracciani and Alizée Le Fur, who accepted our last-minute invitation to contribute to this story by sharing their perspectives on things we felt needed it.

Finally a special shout out to Ivan Marovic, for believing in the project since the beginning and giving us the confidence that this was worth investing in, and that our stories were worth being heard.

– **Thibaut Cantet and Chloé Bertini**

Editor's Note: Thibaut initiated the Understanding the A22 Network project, invited people to join the process, and mobilized the resources needed to make it a success. Chloé encouraged the initiative from the start and joined her efforts with Thibaut as soon as it launched. Together they designed and coordinated every step of the project, making sure it would stay on track, aligned with its purpose, and that it would be as easy as possible for others to participate. Without their deep commitment to the project, their care and wisdom, this project could not have happened. A heartfelt thank you to them both from everyone at People Power Publishers.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Chloé Bertini is an Italo-Guadeloupean organizer with a multidisciplinary background in dance, neuroscience, and art therapy. She started with a focus on climate justice as part of Ultima Generazione and is now integrating that with social justice through different projects. Her work is dedicated to organizing civil resistance as well as fostering long-term coordination across movements from an ecofeminist perspective aiming at radical system change. Beyond practical organizing, her efforts are grounded in profound reverence for Life and a dedication to exploring both new and ancestral practices to foster deeper connections between people and with the broader ecosystem.

Cécile Bessire is a co-founder of Renovate Switzerland and Act Now!, a full-time nonviolent activist and organizer since 2021, and a photographer in her spare time. She quit her job as a speech therapist; she felt like a traitor teaching animal names to children while everything around them was going extinct. She lives in a small village in the Jura Mountains of Switzerland where she grew up. She used to be the girl who would blush like a tomato when asked to speak in front of her classmates, yet she found herself everywhere in the media, giving dozens of interviews and talks about the climate crisis and nonviolent action in front of hundreds of people. For a little over a year now, she has found a balance between living with the climate crisis, acting accordingly, and her “pre-crisis awakening” dreams and life. While you are reading this, she will undoubtedly be balancing motherhood with full-time activism, striving to set an example that she lacked during her own journey.

Harley F. Brewer is a British activist who was born in Yorkshire and studied philosophy. After experiencing a “Damascus moment” upon seeing bleached coral reefs, he has spent the last ten years of his life working to address the climate crisis. He has been involved with Extinction Rebellion, Just Stop Oil, the A22 Network, and Animal Rising. Brewer has been arrested six times and is currently awaiting sentencing for causing £250,000 worth of damage to British Petroleum property, where he faces up to ten years in prison. Outside of activism, he loves comedy and once warmed up for Stewart Lee.

Thibaut Cantet is an organizer who sourced and co-founded Dernière Rénovation, a leading French climate campaign, part of the A22 Network. Growing up between the Savoyard Alps and Paris, he is currently based in a small town of Burgundy. In 2017, he spent time living, working and bonding with local communities in the Philippines. After finding out they were likely to be forced into death or exile because of the climate genocide driven by the global north, he decided to get involved in climate activism in France. He has been arrested multiple times and has led more than 100 public talks mobilizing people to take proportionate action on the climate collapse and engage in civil disobedience. When time allows, he loves playing music, getting lost in the mountains, and studying Buddhism.

Beatrice Costantino was born in 1993 in Northern Italy. In 2018, she graduated in Veterinary Medicine, and around the same time, she began to experience intense anxiety about climate and ecological collapse. In 2019, she joined Extinction Rebellion (XR), participating in the activities of a local chapter. In 2020 and 2021, after the end of the lockdown, she joined an affinity group, participated in actions with greater legal risk, and helped organize the mobilization for XR for the 2021 Milan PreCOP. Shortly thereafter, in October of the same year, she helped found Ultima Generazione, which would later join the A22 Network as an Italian chapter.

With Ultima Generazione, she participated in numerous actions, was part of the leadership team, and coordinated the Actions/Logistics and Mobilization group. She is currently active in training and alliances. In 2024, she joined the organization Resilient Uprising.

In life she is passionate about the mountains and is interested in nutrition and agroecology.

Carla Hinrichs grew up in Bremen, in northern Germany. She felt the pain of a collapsing world from a young age, which led her to participate in Amnesty International and pursue studies in law. In 2019, she joined Extinction Rebellion, realizing that the climate crisis could not wait until she finished her studies. When some of her friends started a hunger strike before the 2021 election, she supported them. Following the hunger strike, she became part of the Last Generation. Even though she loved libraries and solitude, she became a spokesperson for the group. Today, she is accused of being the leader of the so-called criminal organization Last Generation and is facing a long court case, which could result

in up to five years in prison. In February 2026, she published her first book, *Meine verletzte Generation*.

Anna Holland is a poet and community organizer based in the North of England. With seven years' involvement in activist spaces, they were most notably involved in Just Stop Oil, making headlines by throwing tomato soup at Van Gogh's Sunflowers. They received a 20-month custodial sentence and now uses this experience in their writing.

Hannah Hunt has been campaigning to protect the environment for almost seven years with Extinction Rebellion, Insulate Britain, and Just Stop Oil. She now works in mental health justice and dreams one day of living on the land with animals rescued from factory farms.

Henning Jeschke was born in 2000 in a German town on the Baltic Sea coast. He once considered becoming a teacher, but with human extinction on the horizon, he devoted his life to peaceful revolution. His path to the streets was inspired by Greta Thunberg and his work with Extinction Rebellion, culminating in a 27-day hunger strike that brought the climate crisis into the news right before the 2021 elections.

He co-founded Letzte Generation Germany, the most talked-about climate and democracy movement in the country.

The threat of up to five years in prison won't stop him—in spring 2025, he co-founded the follow-up project New Generation to help build a people-powered democracy.

Careful when arresting him—he will likely sing many songs in his prison cell.

Alizée Le Fur works at the intersection of bodies, resistance, and collective care. Her journey moves between civil disobedience, collective learning, and lived solidarity at the borders.

Alizée cofounded Dernière Rénovation, a nonviolent civil resistance campaign in France calling for large-scale building renovation to address both social and climate change. The campaign mobilized over 500 people in public spaces to challenge government inaction. Those two intense years taught her how to make decisions under pressure while taking care of collective dynamics.

Alongside this, she has facilitated collective learning spaces with Fertiles, a French organization focused on social transformation and collective intelli-

gence. There, she supported more than 200 people in exploring how we relate to one another and how we build society, sharing tools to listen, cooperate, and move through conflict together.

Today, Alizée is based in Calais, a key border zone between the UK and mainland Europe. There, she engages with the realities of migration, seeking to understand the political dynamics at play while supporting local forms of resistance and solidarity. Through these experiences, she continues to explore how we act, resist, and care together.

Laura Paracini was born in Rome in 1996. In 2022, she interrupted her university studies to join the Ultima Generazione movement, where she works primarily in the communications department and as head of the press office. She has participated in numerous nonviolent civil disobedience actions, including the painting of Palazzo Madama, the seat of the Senate in Rome, on January 2, 2023.

Pierre Taieb was born in France in 1996. He took action and helped organize the French A22 project in all the ways he could. Mainly working on its communication and general strategy. He joined the movement in June 2022 and left it in November 2023, a few months before it collapsed. Since then he has been involved in other militant organizations. Still trying his best. The A22 project was his first experience in a mass movement succeeding in some ways, hopefully not the last.

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"Why would these people choose to get arrested, attacked, jailed, screamed at, and even deported when they could be peacefully looking at beautiful paintings or watching tennis?"

THE ANSWER IS MORE POWERFUL THAN ANY ARMY, POLICE, BILLIONAIRE, OR OIL COMPANY."

— **ADAM McKAY**, writer and director of *Don't Look Up* and *The Big Short*, from the Foreword

You saw the soup on the Sunflowers. The young woman on the tennis court. The paint on the Roman Senate. The bodies on the motorway. You almost certainly formed an opinion.

Written collectively by twelve organisers from the **A22 Network** — the coalition behind Last Generation, Just Stop Oil, Dernière Rénovation, Ultima Generazione, and Renovate Switzerland — *Soup Throwers and Super Gluers* is the first inside account of the movement that made civil disobedience impossible to ignore.

Part movement memoir, part strategic guide, this book is bracingly honest reckoning with what the actions cost the people who took them. Prison sentences. Police violence. Burnouts. Relationships that did not survive.

They chose what they chose knowing what it would cost. They knew exactly what they were doing. They are ready to be understood.

"Climate' is not a thing — it is an everything. If we allow this 'everything' to be destroyed, we go extinct. This explains the intensity of passion and commitment that flows out of the pages of this book. There are no words to comprehend the cost of failure."

— **ROGER HALLAM**, co-founder of Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil

"Part political thriller, part strategic analysis, and part *cri de coeur*, this book brings you inside the most energetic and prominent climate movement in recent years."

— **MARGARET KLEIN SALOMON**, Board Chair, Climate Emergency Fund; author of *Facing the Climate Emergency*

"This book doesn't just tell you why climate activists take direct action — it shows what it actually costs them. And it shows how taking action, even imperfect, difficult action, can turn grief into agency and isolation into solidarity."

— **ROBYN GULLIVER**, University of Queensland; co-author of *The Advocates*

"A movement memoir written by activists who have already done the strategic thinking themselves — and have no intention of leaving it to the historians."

— **CARLOS SAAVEDRA**, Founder, Ayni Institute

"A rare inside account of how movements are built, the dilemmas activists face, and the courage required. Honest, thoughtful and often deeply moving — it deserves to be read by activists, policymakers, and anyone who believes another future is still possible."

— **KUMI NAIDOO**, President, Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative; author of *Boiling Point*

"A22 did something almost no one has ever done: it incubated mass protest movements in multiple countries at once. Every activist should be studying this — and there are vanishingly few documents that explain the experiment as clearly as this one."

— **PAUL ENGLER**, co-author of *This Is an Uprising*

"An important testimony to the courage, contradictions and human cost of nonviolent civil resistance, this book is an urgent call for societal introspection and not only to resist repression, but to recover the moral courage required to confront it."

— **FRANCESCA ALBANESE**, international legal scholar and human rights expert

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