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U.K. : Shock after fracking protesters are given 'disproportionate' jail sentences

Tuesday 9 October 2018, by [Charity Today](#) (Date first published: 26 September 2018).

There is public outcry today after three environmental activists become the first people to be jailed for an anti-fracking protest in the UK.

Simon Roscoe Blevins (26), and Richard Roberts (36) were given 16-months in prison while the third man Richard Loiou (31), was given 15-months on Wednesday at Preston Crown Court.

The three men were charged and subsequently convicted of 'causing a public nuisance' after taking part in a four-day direct action protest that blocked a convoy of Cuadrilla's trucks carrying drilling equipment from entering the Preston New Road fracking site near Blackpool.

A fourth man, Julian Brock (47), was given a 12-month suspended sentence after pleading guilty to the same charge.

Dave Timms, Head of Political Affairs at Friends of the Earth, told *Charity Today*:

"This historic sentencing is disproportionate and harsh. Our thoughts are with these protesters who acted out of conscience to protect the planet.

"Tonight, they are behind bars for peaceful actions taken through deeply held conviction in supporting the people of Lancashire who have rejected fracking. For that, they have undeservedly lost their freedom."

Mr Timms is not alone in his views, Greenpeace UK executive director John Sauven said the protestors "deserve our gratitude, not a prison term".

"It's a strange society that massively rewards those responsible for causing more climate change while putting those trying to stop it in jail," he said.

Kirsty Brimelow QC, the head of the international human rights team at Doughty St Chambers, representing Roberts on a pro-bono basis, told the judge it had been a peaceful and political protest. She said the right to freedom of speech went beyond "simply standing and shouting" and extended to non-violent direct action.

Speaking outside the courts after the sentencing, Blevins' mother, Rosalind Blevins, said:

"We are all absolutely devastated by the sentences they have received. My son, like the others, was protesting against fracking because of his deep concern about climate change, which would more appropriately be called climate chaos ... I am proud of him and of them for standing up for what is so, so important for all of us."

Protests have been held regularly near the Preston New Road site since work began.

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