Picturing the rebellion

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INSIDE CHINA'S CRACKDOWN ON YOUNG MARXISTS
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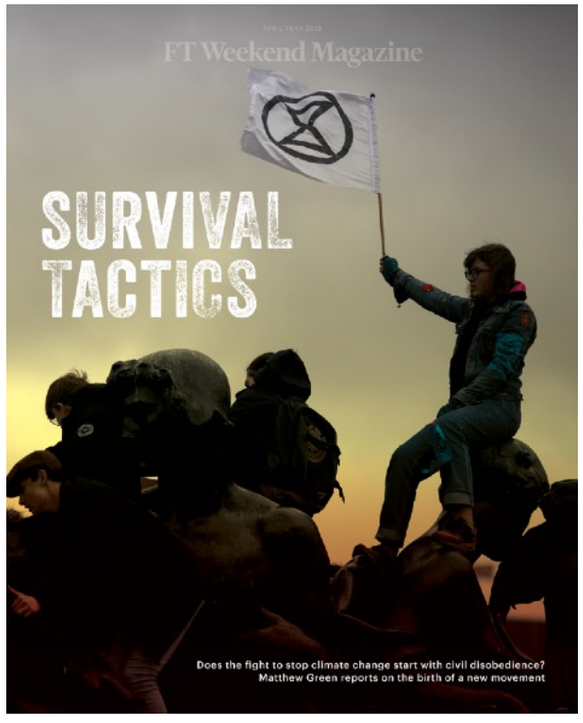
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Matthew Green reports on the birth of a new movement


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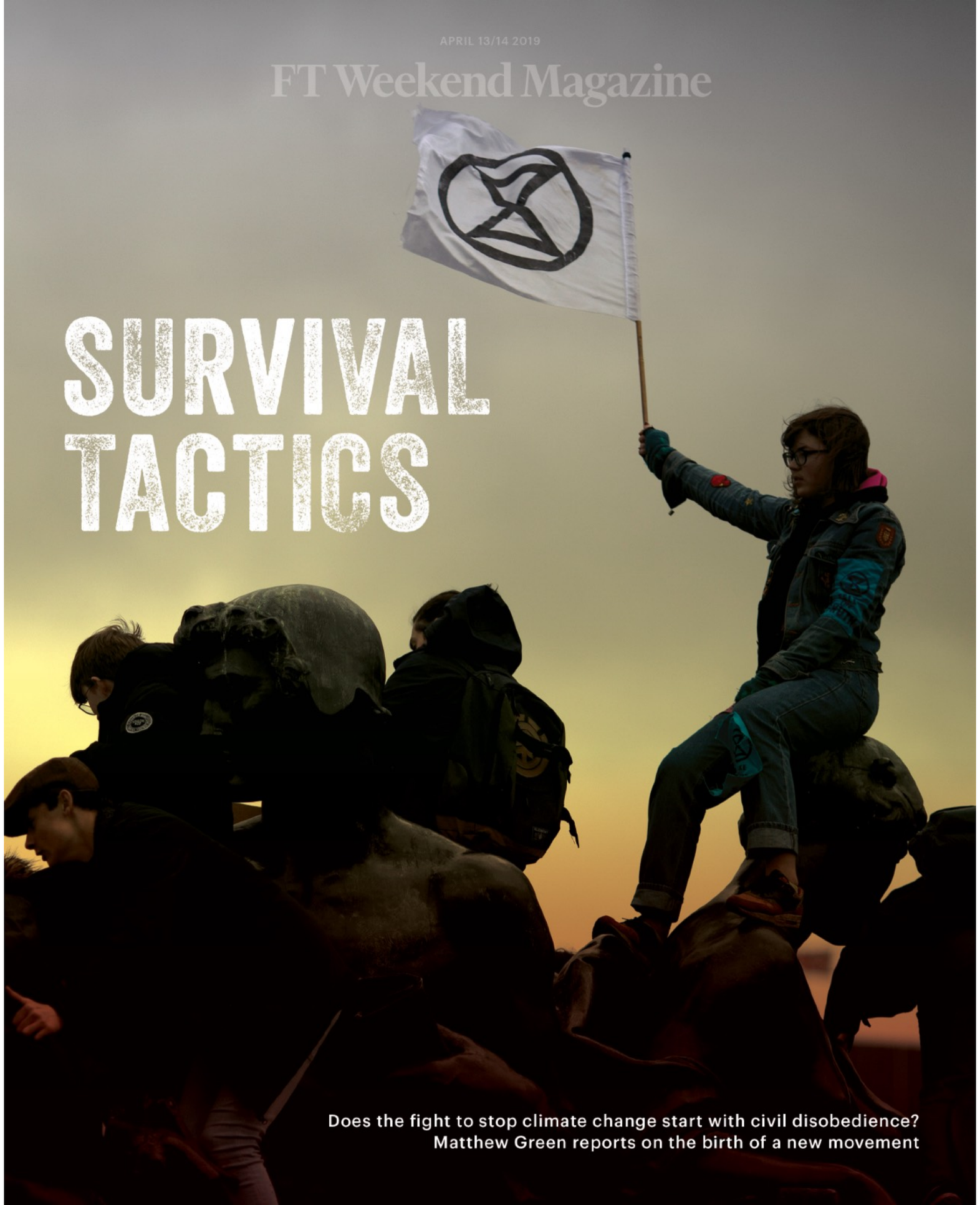
SURVIVAL TACTICS



Does the fight to stop climate change start with civil disobedience? Matthew Green reports on the birth of a new movement

REBELS WITH A CAUSE

What would you do to save your children's futures? For the members of Extinction Rebellion, climate change is a global emergency that threatens human survival. They plan a programme of mass civil disobedience to force governments to act — and they want you to join them. *Matthew Green* reports. Photographs by *Charlie Bibby*

One Saturday morning in November, Farhana Yamin took her place in a line of people gathered on Westminster Bridge and – when a signal was given – stepped off the pavement and into the road. As the crowd swelled, cars, black cabs and double-decker buses began to back up in nearby streets. Similar scenes were unfolding on four other bridges over the Thames in a two-and-a-half-mile arc spanning the capital's best-loved landmarks: Big Ben, the London Eye and St Paul's Cathedral. In a festival atmosphere, protesters danced and passed around cupcakes. Among the thousands of first-time activists: families with kids; a banker; a teacher; a civil servant; grandparents; a vicar. Banners bore the name of the new movement: Extinction Rebellion.

Starting at 11am this Monday, Extinction Rebellion plans to gridlock central London. Volunteers are due to peacefully occupy Parliament Square, Oxford Circus, Marble Arch and Waterloo Bridge. Participants have been asked to bring food and tents. Offshoots in cities across Europe and the US will stage parallel protests. After two previous attempts to get herself arrested, Yamin, an international environmental lawyer and one of the movement's leading voices, hopes she will soon see the inside of a police cell.

"Every now and again I think, 'What have I done?'" says Yamin, who helped midwife the 2015 Paris Agreement to curb greenhouse gas emissions, before growing disillusioned with the results of the 27 years she spent building coalitions to drive formal climate diplomacy. "I just got fed up with the environmental movement selling so much false hope when we're still trashing the planet."

For decades, scientists have warned that burning too much coal, oil and gas will trigger runaway climate change. Last year, as megafires raged in California and the northern hemisphere languished in a record-breaking heatwave, global carbon emissions did not fall or even stay steady — they climbed to an all-time high. If the curve does not start to bend soon, scientists fear that accelerating feedback loops could interact in catastrophic ways: collapsing ice sheets; faster-than-expected sea level rise; forest dieback; ocean acidification and thawing permafrost. Some have warned of the risk of a sudden shift to a new "hothouse" version of the earth. In this alien home, it is unclear how organised human life would survive.

Even as climatologists reveal the reality of the crisis in ever more granular detail, the environmental movement has tended to shy away from confronting people with graphic depictions of the dystopian future of harvest failure, starvation and anarchy that abrupt breakdown implies. Too much gloom, the thinking goes, only switches people off. But the viral success of Extinction Rebellion since its launch in October last year suggests that attitudes might be changing. The word "extinction" in the movement's title isn't just referring to plants, insects and animals. It means us.

Gail Bradbrook is one of Extinction Rebellion's founders and the closest person to a leader in a movement conceived as a self-organising, non-hierarchical "holacracy". After growing up in a Yorkshire coal-mining family, Bradbrook went on to earn a PhD in molecular biophysics, and has been involved in environmental and social justice activism since her teens. Juggling her responsibilities as a mother of two sons aged 10 and 13, she had been trying since the 2008 financial crash to catalyse high-impact social justice campaigns, but could never quite take them to scale. A few years ago, Bradbrook began to realise she had to tackle some sort of internal block.

A reluctant flier, she nevertheless travelled to Costa Rica to take a high dose of iboga – a psychedelic compound derived from a west African tree bark renowned for inducing visions. As the ceremony began, she offered up a prayer to be shown the "codes" for social change. Transformed by the experience, Bradbrook ended her marriage, and began to work with a core group of activists including Roger Hallam, a Gandalf-like organic farmer who is studying a PhD at King's College London in radical campaign design. A plan emerged: mass civil disobedience for bold climate action.

"The precedent is that civilisations collapse, and everything's stacked up for this one to go, and it's a mess when it happens," Bradbrook tells me over coffee in between planning sessions. "So you might be good at banking, but you're probably no good with a gun. The question for all of us is: 'Where are we best placed to serve at the minute?'"

Inspired by the suffragettes, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Bradbrook and her team

'IF YOUR GOVERNMENT ISN'T PROTECTING YOU AND THE FUTURE OF YOUR KIDS, YOU HAVE A DUTY TO REBEL, AND A RIGHT TO REBEL'

Gail Bradbrook, Extinction Rebellion co-founder (far right)

Main picture: last month's Extinction Rebellion 'spring uprising' rally in Bristol. Top, from left: Farhana Yamin, an international environmental lawyer and a leading figure in the movement; Gail Bradbrook, a leader of the group. Preceding pages: the school strike for climate action in London, March 15

aim to create enough disruption to force the UK to declare a climate emergency, commit to a carbon-neutral economy by 2025 and establish "citizens' assemblies" – chosen by lot like a jury – to democratically oversee such a monumental transition.

One of their slogans – "Tell the truth, and act like it's real" – is resonating. Last month, hundreds of volunteers gathered in a converted warehouse on a Bristol canal for a weekend "spring uprising" festival – half party, half dress rehearsal for the planned London shut-down. Ranging in age from teenagers to retirees, groups took turns to roleplay protesters locking arms and police trying to haul them away. A woman wearing a hi-vis vest supervised as the opposing teams grappled and yelled.

When the exercise was over, Bradbrook strode on to a stage to address the packed hall, giant banners saying "Rebel for life" slung from a gallery. Combining her academic bona fides with a plain-English rendition of the latest climate science, Bradbrook has developed a knack for persuading people who have never previously considered breaking the law that being arrested can be fun.

As she spoke, a photograph flashed up on a screen showing Bradbrook chatting amiably with a female officer leading her away from a protest outside the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, where she and other Extinction Rebellion volunteers had sprayed washable chalk graffiti to demand the government ban fracking. It had turned out that the officer was a vegan. Bradbrook joked that the only thing she didn't like about getting arrested was the paperwork.

"If your government isn't protecting you and the future of your kids, you have a duty to rebel, and a right to rebel," Bradbrook told the audience. "When you say 'no' and you get on the streets and you do an act of civil disobedience, it changes your psychology. Some of us need to turn the herd."

Last July, as train tracks in Britain buckled in the heat and sales of paddling pools soared, Jem Bendell, professor of sustainability leadership at the ▶

◂ University of Cumbria, published a paper entitled "Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy". In contrast to most scientific papers, read by only a handful of academics, "Deep Adaptation" has been downloaded more than 350,000 times. The paper also earned in-depth coverage from the digital magazine Vice, which ran its story under the headline: "The climate change paper so depressing, it's sending people to therapy."

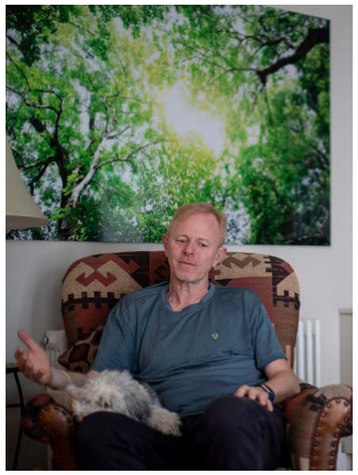
Over 36 meticulously referenced pages, Bendell set out the thinking behind his conclusion that non-linear climate impacts mean that the collapse of industrial society is now inevitable, probably due to massive harvest failures, perhaps within a decade or so. "When we contemplate this possibility, it may seem abstract... But when I say starvation, destruction, migration, disease and war, I mean in your own life," Bendell wrote. "With the power down, soon you wouldn't have water coming out of your tap. You will depend on your neighbours for food and some warmth. You will become malnourished. You won't know whether to stay or go. You will fear being violently killed before starving to death."

If the paper seemed bleak, Bendell argued that an impulse among many of his colleagues to try to "balance out" the raw implications of climate science with positive but ultimately futile examples of progress in the sustainability field was a bit like discussing the health and safety policies of the White Star Line with the captain of the Titanic. Rather than accept demands for substantial revisions made by the editors when he submitted the paper to a policy journal, he published "Deep Adaptation" as an occasional paper through his university. "As we are considering here a situation where the publishers of this journal would no longer exist, the electricity to read its outputs won't exist, I think it time we break some of the conventions of this format," Bendell wrote.

Though Bendell wrote his paper with touches of dark humour, he told me that he intended it as an invitation for "post-denial" students and colleagues to begin a pragmatic discussion on how best to support individuals and communities to prepare for collapse not just in a practical sense, but also by exploring the psychological and spiritual implications. Far from retreating into depression or apathy, Bendell noted that his mature students, when discussing his findings in a supportive environment, tended to experience "a shedding of concern for conforming to the status quo" and a new creativity about what to do next.

Among Bendell's readers was Andrew Medhurst, a 30-year veteran of the City who had taken a job in a government-backed workplace pension provider at the start of 2018. He had been reading up on climate change, found Britain's blistering summer unnerving and downloaded "Deep Adaptation". At 53, Medhurst could look back on a varied career in finance, postings in south-east Asia and the rewards of raising his two children, Lottie, 18, studying at drama school, and Henry, 23, a visual effects artist. He began to wonder how much time they might all have left.

A few weeks later, Medhurst's foreboding deepened when the InterGovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a UN-sponsored panel of scientists, reported that the world would have to slash carbon emissions by about 45 per cent by 2030 to keep warming close to the 1.5C target agreed in Paris. The risks of letting temperatures rise by 2C – previously considered a fairly safe limit – were laid out: the loss of 99 per cent of the world's coral reefs; a thaw in permafrost equivalent to the area of Mexico; hundreds of millions of people plunged into poverty; and a heightened risk of the climate system hitting tipping points. Medhurst, a former senior compliance and risk manager in Lloyds' corporate banking division, did not see halving emissions as likely. In November, he joined the Extinction Rebellion bridge-blocking protest at Waterloo, accompanied by his wife Kate, who had spent much of her career at Bank of America Merrill Lynch, and their dog, a Löwchen named Mia.



'WE'RE ENCOURAGING OUR CHILDREN TO INVEST IN A FINANCIAL PRODUCT THEY MAY NEED WHEN THEY ARE 50. WHAT THEY MAY NEED IS FOOD AND SHELTER – NOT A SHARE PORTFOLIO'

Andrew Medhurst, a former risk manager, now helps manage Extinction Rebellion's budget

Main picture: Extinction Rebellion volunteers roleplay protesters locking arms and police trying to haul them away. Top: Andrew Medhurst left his job in finance to devote himself to the movement; a banner at the Bristol event

As Medhurst learnt more about how some climate impacts were materialising much faster than scientists had anticipated, he concluded that he could no longer continue selling pensions with a clear conscience. "We're not only destroying the planet for our children and grandchildren, but we're actively encouraging them to invest into a long-term financial product that they may need when they are 50," says Medhurst, a tall, self-possessed man whose voice can nevertheless start to crack when he contemplates the grimmer scenarios. "What they may need is food and shelter – not a share portfolio."

In February, Medhurst resigned from his job to devote himself to Extinction Rebellion, where he helps manage the budget – provided by a mix of philanthropic foundations, individuals, crowd-funding and corporate donations. Every few weeks he gives versions of the "talk" – a mix of climate science and social change theory – designed to recruit more volunteers for the civil disobedience campaign.

On a recent Thursday evening, Medhurst drove from his smart home in south-west London to address about 30 well-heeled listeners at the Quadrangle, a restored Victorian model farm in Shoreham, Kent, where he had once played cricket as a graduate at Midland Bank. "Lots of people have heard about climate change, lots of people understand it's real – but they don't see the emergency," Medhurst said during the drive. "They think what I thought a couple of years ago: that sea levels are going to rise by a couple of millimetres by the end of the century. No – this is really, really scary."

By the end of the talk, about half the audience had filled out contact forms. Two of them had ticked a box saying they would be willing to be arrested.

Cory Doctorow, a science fiction writer and activist, uses the term "peak indifference" to refer to the way societies seem incapable of acting in the face of overwhelming problems until they become impossible to ignore. From the Amazon rainforest to remote parts of Africa, community leaders have long been fighting – and often dying – to defend their ecosystems from an onslaught of agribusiness, mining and oil companies. Volunteers in the north London office serving as Extinction Rebellion's headquarters aren't running the same risks. Nevertheless, the scenes of young people poring over laptops and complex wall charts could be read as evidence that "peak indifference" may finally have passed in the rich world too.

Since the summer, demands for climate action have exploded. In the US, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the Democratic congresswoman, and her supporters in the youth-led Sunrise Movement have provided a rallying point with a proposed Green New Deal, which ties a low-carbon future to concerns over jobs, wages and economic justice. A lone protest by Greta Thunberg, a 16-year-old Swedish climate activist, inspired a global school strike that mobilised an estimated 1.5 million children and students on a single day last month – including Medhurst's daughter Lottie, who skipped rehearsals to join a march to the gates of Buckingham Palace. Thunberg's clear-eyed message to business leaders in Davos: "I don't want you to be hopeful, I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day – and then I want you to act."

Bill McKibben, a US climate writer and activist, who was arrested at the White House in 2011 while

protesting against a new pipeline, says it would be a mistake to judge such movements solely on whether their immediate demands are met. "The prize that activists are playing for is to change the zeitgeist, to change people's idea of what's natural and normal and obvious," says McKibben, who co-founded 350.org, a campaign that has persuaded investors to divest billions of dollars from fossil fuel companies. "And if we can change the zeitgeist, then legislation and so on will follow fairly easily."

Nevertheless, civil disobedience is a delicate art – especially in the toxic political climate unleashed by Brexit. The violence that erupted in France during anti-establishment *gilets jaunes* protests has left some in Britain especially wary of any signs of a slide into "ecofascist"-style mob rule. Mark Stevenson, a futurist and author, says he feels inspired by Extinction Rebellion's ambition, but warns that disruptive protest could easily backfire. "My fear for them is that if they get it wrong they could end up making an enemy of the very people they need to bring along," he says. Though Extinction Rebellion volunteers do their best to explain their cause to blocked motorists, sometimes with offers of cake, not everyone is sympathetic. At a recent London protest, where traffic was slowed to a crawl, a man in the cab of a white van yelled in frustration: "They should get a job!" Nigel Farage, the Brexit campaigner and LBC radio host, has called the campaign "economic terrorism".

Corinne Le Quéré, professor of climate change science at the University of East Anglia, who undertook groundbreaking work on a global carbon budget, says the wave of concern over climate change would be better channelled into an aggressive but methodical long-term response. "Many people say 'Oh, we need a tipping point, and everything will go pretty quickly,'" she says. "Maybe – but I think a social tipping point is pretty unstable."

The British state's tolerance for dissent has hard edges. In March 2017, 15 protesters cut the fence at Stansted Airport and chained themselves to the wheels, nose and wing of an airliner to stop asylum ▸

◂ seekers being deported. Although they escaped jail, the "Stansted 15" were convicted under laws drawn up to prosecute terrorists. They could have been sentenced to life.

Alison Green, a cognitive psychologist and former pro-vice chancellor of Arden University, prides herself on being the hyper-rational opposite of a "touchy-feely" social scientist. But she is the first to admit that her years of research into human problem-solving left her ill-equipped to understand her own experience of climate grief.

It began with the heatwave. Green noticed that the leaves of the plane trees on the Cambridge commons were parched and brown. The tarmac outside her house started to melt and the earth at her allotment was baked so hard she couldn't get a fork in to turn it. The water pumps ran dry. Seeds she planted refused to germinate, and seedlings she coaxed out of soil in cardboard boxes on her dining table died within a few days of planting out. The fields seemed empty of crops. "It was scary," Green says. "And no one was talking about it."

Green began to read about climate change. "For a month, I went around in shock. I just saw the world completely differently," she says. "I suddenly felt so incredibly vulnerable – I realised just how fragile life on the planet really is."

Concerned that her colleagues were unaware of the gravity of the situation, Green started handing out climate science papers at work. Nobody denied there was a problem, but people tended to grow uncomfortable if the discussion went on too long and meetings would quickly move to the next agenda item: budgets, staffing, curricula.

"I had this really rude awakening where I realised that my career was completely pointless – it was irrelevant, it was meaningless," Green says. "Either I'm going to continue doing what I do and not sleeping well at night because of the crisis that we're in, or I'm going to jump ship. How can we knowingly educate students for a future that doesn't exist?"

A friend of hers coined a phrase – "ecophany" – to describe Green's metamorphosis. She has since resigned from her job to support Extinction Rebellion, persuading hundreds of academics and scientists to endorse its principles. Green has also started volunteering as UK director of Scientists Warning, a public engagement group. Her biggest frustration is with those who tell her privately that they support Extinction Rebellion's aims but do not want to say so publicly for fear of harming their careers. "There's still this view – and it does prevail in academia – that you work within the system," Green says. "What they don't yet get is that the system is the cause of the problem. Either we dismantle this edifice that we've built, or it's going to crumble."

Main picture: representatives of theatres, art galleries and museums aligned with Extinction Rebellion stage a horse-led procession to declare a climate emergency, London, April 3. Top, from left: the global school strike on March 15; Alison Green, a cognitive psychologist, resigned from her job to support Extinction Rebellion

The ecologist Joanna Macy describes the "colossal anguish" people feel at the devastation of the natural world as "a great public secret". Extinction Rebellion commands such loyalty not because all of its volunteers necessarily believe they will succeed. More than a vehicle for protest, the movement offers a spiritual refuge from the grinding cognitive dissonance of living in a society where the gap between what science says needs to happen and what people are actually doing looms large.

"It is as though the world's astronomers were telling us that an asteroid is heading our way and will make a direct hit destined to wipe out all of life, to which the public responds by remaining fascinated with sporting events, social media, the latest political scandals and celebrity gossip," wrote Catherine Ingram, a retreat leader and author, in a February essay entitled "Facing Extinction". "No matter how clear and rational our understanding of the situation, many of my extinction-aware friends admit that the magnitude of the loss we are undergoing is unacceptable to the innermost psyche," she added. "It might be akin to a parent losing a young child... Only this time, it is all the little children. All the animals. All the plants. All the ice."

Zhiwa Woodbury, a public interest attorney and ecopsychologist affiliated with the California Institute of Integral Studies, believes the world's paralysis in the face of climate change can best be explained through the lens of what he terms "climate trauma" – the overwhelming realisation that the earth's life-support systems are starting to break down. The natural impulse to resort to denial or distraction as a coping mechanism won't work for long because the human psyche isn't ultimately separate from nature. Thus the knowledge of an ever-present, ever-growing threat to the biosphere is serving as a kind of universal catalyst to bring the unresolved trauma buried in every individual, culture and society to the surface. On this reading, the challenge to the liberal order posed by Brexit and Trump could be symptoms of a more profound unravelling.

"There's something fundamental about us that's intimately connected to the natural world. If that relationship breaks down – which it has – then every relationship will go," Woodbury tells me. "That's actually hopeful, because it basically says that if we focus on the way we relate to each other, to ourselves and to the world, we can come out of this."

Extinction Rebellion is one of a number of new groups to emerge, such as the Dark Mountain Project in the UK, where talking about how terrified, angry or numbed you feel about the climate crisis is not only acceptable but welcomed. Just as some terminal patients begin to perceive each moment of life as a miracle after receiving their diagnosis, a deep reckoning with the implications of climate change can sometimes trigger a similar awakening. A poster at Extinction Rebellion's London office says: "Give yourself time to feel – grief opens pathways of love, and melts the parts of you that are frozen." Twice a week, facilitators hold an online video conference for anyone who wants to explore their climate trauma called "The Skill of Brokenheartedness".

Extinction Rebellion's unflinching relationship with grief is visible in the movement's fondness for macabre imagery – mock coffins, buckets of fake blood and paper skulls – but the mischief-makers who dream up its actions also know the power of humour. On April Fool's Day, 13 volunteers were arrested for stripping almost naked in the public gallery of the House of Commons to draw attention to the climate crisis during a Brexit debate. A photo of the defiant display snapped by an MP made headlines around the world.

Gail Bradbrook says there is no better place to confront the heartbreak of climate change than a custody suite. In her experience, being arrested has a "spell-breaking" quality, transmuting society's ingrained pressures to conform into a newfound sense of personal power. Several other Extinction Rebellion volunteers have reported similar epiphanies: one underwent an emotional catharsis as – alone in her cell – she finally felt safe to weep her deepest tears; another sensed a powerful connection with a lineage of freedom fighters past.

The roll-call grows. Extinction Rebellion says more than 200 volunteers have been arrested since October. They include four who disrupted a council meeting in Norfolk over plans to build a new road; nine who glued themselves to glass at a Mayfair hotel hosting an oil conference; and another nine who staged a "die-in" at the Rockefeller Center skating rink in New York. Last month, Stephen

'I HAD THIS REALLY RUDE AWAKENING WHERE I REALISED THAT MY CAREER WAS POINTLESS – HOW CAN WE KNOWINGLY EDUCATE STUDENTS FOR A FUTURE THAT DOESN'T EXIST?'

Alison Green, former pro-vice chancellor, Arden University

McDonald, 62, a builder-decorator, and another man were convicted of criminal damage for attempting to dig a mock grave during a funeral-themed protest in Parliament Square. McDonald, who has three grandchildren, had never been in trouble with the law before. Bradbrook says people used to look at the floor when she called for arrestees at the end of the "talk". "I may as well have said, 'Can you just get undressed and crap in the corner?'" she says. Now, more and more say: "Bring it on."

Yamin, the international lawyer, who is also a trustee of Greenpeace UK and will soon take up an advisory role at the World Wildlife Fund, wants to build a bridge with existing organisations to forge a much bigger "movement of movements". "We need to tap into the new form of leadership that's being asked of us now," she says. "Why would I want to be earning a nice salary when so many others are dying to defend Mother Earth?"

Will all these sacrificial acts achieve anything? Climate models and social systems share a propensity to sudden, hard-to-predict shifts that can lead to a new status quo. In earth sciences, that's usually bad news. But contemplating non-linear change can also be a source of inspiration. Extinction Rebellion and its allies believe there may still be time to catalyse an evolutionary leap towards a saner model of planetary stewardship.

Clad in a crimson coat and matching hat as she dashes between fundraising discussions with a London hedge-fund owner and meetings to rally Extinction Rebellion volunteers, Bradbrook tells me she now knows that she would – if necessary – give her life for the cause. "It's to reimagine society in a way that makes sense to us all," she says. "I know that sounds like a hippy dream. But the point is, if we don't do it – we are f***ed." Her phone bears a sticker of Extinction Rebellion's insignia: a stylised design of an hourglass. FT

Matthew Green reported for the FT from Pakistan and Afghanistan and is the author of "Aftershock: Fighting War, Surviving Trauma and Finding Peace"

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INSIDE CHINA'S CRACKDOWN ON YOUNG MARXISTS

A report by Yuan Yang

INSIDE CHINA'S CRACKDOWN ON YOUNG MARXISTS

Since last August, more than 50 activists in China, many of them students, have been rounded up and detained for protesting against the exploitation of workers amid rising inequality. Why is the world's biggest communist power fighting its own young leftists? Report by *Yuan Yang*. Artwork by *Cristiana Couceiro*

Luke, an undergraduate student at one of China's elite universities, recalls the day he became a committed Marxist. It was not in the countless hours of compulsory Marxism lectures he endured as part of the undergraduate curriculum, but during his first-year winter break in Beijing. Along with 20 other young workers, he squeezed into a minivan with nine seats and was driven to a small workshop on the outskirts of the city. There, he put together cardboard packages for 12 hours in a below-freezing room with no heating.

What startled him most were the hands of the dozen young women living in the workshop, which were "swollen like radishes" from the cold. Unlike him, they had not had the opportunity to finish school. The boss of the workshop had brought them there from their hometown, and they did not know when they could go back.

"They were like slaves. I thought, this capitalist mode of production can turn people into feudal serfs," says Luke (not his real name). As he applied acrid-smelling adhesives to the cardboard, he turned over the "tiny coincidences" that separated the lives of the young women from his own, as a student at one of China's most celebrated universities. The women were the children of workers, as he was, and were about the same age. "I had a really strong wish," he remembers. "I wanted to make things better."

Luke threw himself into leftist student organising on campus, speaking to and supporting the many cleaners, cooks, guards and rubbish collectors working there. Then, last July, he read online about the arrest of 29 workers and activists who had tried to register a union at a factory belonging to Jasic Technology, a manufacturer of welding equipment. It was the biggest mass arrest of workers for three years. In August, he travelled to the Jasic site in the southern manufacturing hub of Shenzhen, following a call for support that went out to leftist student groups across the country.

On August 24, not long after his arrival, Luke's dormitory of activists was raided by police, and about 50 students were taken into custody. The mass detention was one of the most contentious crackdowns on student protesters since the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989. After a series of kidnappings and arrests both on and off China's most prestigious campuses, a total of 42 people remain in detention, including 21 students and recent graduates, as well as activists, social workers, trade-union staff and Jasic workers. Many have lost contact completely with their families, while relatives have been pressured by police not to speak to the media or to contact lawyers.

The story of the Jasic workers, and the students who supported them and set the issue aflame, highlights a paradox at the heart of modern China. While the country is controlled by a Communist party government that trumpets Marxist rhetoric, its economy has flourished since the 1980s partly thanks to the development of "state capitalism" – a liberalisation that has allowed private markets and mass consumption to thrive within strict parameters set by the state.

Last May, President Xi Jinping gave a speech to mark the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx's birth, proclaiming him "the greatest thinker of modern times", and arguing that the 19th-century German philosopher "pointed out the direction, with scientific theory, toward an ideal society with no oppression or exploitation". Yet China's government has turned a blind eye to worker exploitation as the country has become a global economic powerhouse, with income inequality exceeding that of the US. "The objection of many on China's new left – not just students – is that China is a socialist country in name but capitalist in reality, and that inequality, pollution and corruption are a consequence of this anomaly," says Rana Mitter, professor of Chinese history at the University of Oxford.

The state's concerted oppression of young Marxists partly reflects the tension within the Chinese Communist party's own origin story: that it has not preserved the communist ideals behind its revolutionary success under Chairman Mao. In 1978 the party formally ditched the idea of class struggle, deeming it too divisive, and instead prioritised economic development. "The students' commitment to a purer form of Marxism only serves to highlight the CCP's own drift from its roots," says Jude Blanchette, author of a forthcoming book on China's neo-Maoists. "This, crucially, has been why the left in China has always presented more of a challenge to the party leadership than the right."

The suppression of leftist students has extended far beyond the initial Jasic protest. Universities have attempted to shut down student Marxist societies and stop workers congregating with students on campus. In December, police turned up to a commemoration of Chairman Mao's birthday in his hometown of Shaoshan and took away another student activist.

The Financial Times spoke to a total of 12 students and supporters over the past six months, of whom at least four have since been detained. Many of these students had been harassed by the police as a result of their activism. While China's constitution claims that all citizens have the right to freedom of expression, in practice the students involved in the Jasic protests were told by their universities and the police not to speak to the media. Many, however, believe that spreading the message is more important than avoiding the risk.

The Communist party has tried to stamp out as much information about the students' protests as possible. In one of the few uncensored articles on the protests available on the Chinese internet, the state media agency Xinhua alleges the students were swept into a conspiracy plotted by an "illegal organisation" and funded by a "western NGO" – generic accusations made against many grass-roots activists in China.

The student dispute has garnered international concern. In the US, Cornell University cut off two student exchanges with China's top Renmin University, citing limits on academic freedom and student safety. Famous Marxists and scholars from across the world, including Noam Chomsky, criticised the party's actions and called for a boycott of Marxism conferences in China. A dispute that started in classrooms has highlighted the major identity crisis of the Communist Party of China: who are the country's real Marxists?

By the Communist party's own account, modern China was created on the back of student protests. On May 4 1919, following the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, students from universities across Beijing gathered in front of Tiananmen Gate to demonstrate against the government's acceptance of a treaty that meant China would continue to be occupied by foreign powers. That protest sparked a series of strikes and further protests across China. The Communist party traces its birth to the radicalised political atmosphere that emerged after the "May Fourth movement".

At the time of the protest, Mao Zedong was a 25-year-old librarian, studying and working at Peking University, who was becoming interested in Marxism. Thirty years later, Mao's Communist party won the Chinese civil war and founded the People's Republic of China. He often credited the students of the May Fourth movement with being the "vanguards" of China's revolution.

In the years following Mao's death in 1976, his supporters were forced out and Deng Xiaoping rose to power. Deng embarked on market reforms and coined the phrase "socialism with Chinese characteristics". However, the party kept many of the structures of control that exist to this day – over the press, over political participation, and through restrictions on the movement of people that can trap rural citizens in poverty.

Frustration over growing inequality, corruption and rampant inflation brought Chinese students back to Tiananmen Square in 1989. The addition of workers to the students' protests was one of the factors that particularly alarmed authorities at the time, and galvanised Deng to bring in the army to suppress the movement.

The resulting massacre became an indelible stain on the Communist party's reputation abroad, and is still one of the most carefully erased parts of Chinese history at home. By gathering ▶

'I had a really strong wish. I wanted to make things better'

Student activist 'Luke'

'The objection of many on the new left is that China is socialist in name but capitalist in reality'

Rana Mitter, professor of Chinese history, University of Oxford

XINHUA/EYEVINE

Clockwise from top: student activists at a rally for Jasic workers in Shenzhen, August 2018; President Xi Jinping marking the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx's birth, May 4 2018; detained student activist Yue Xin; Qiu Zhanxuan, former president of the Marxist student society at Peking University, also now in detention

Zhang Shengye
Graduate of Peking University
Detained November 9 2018 on Peking University campus

Yang Zhengjun
Workers' supporter
Detained January 8 2019 in Guangzhou

Zhan Zhenzhen
Student expelled by Peking University
Detained January 2 2019 in Changsha while visiting Mao memorial

Cao Jian
Campus worker at Peking University
Detained December 27 2018 in Beijing
Released February 4 2019

Ma Zisheng
Campus worker at Peking University
Detained December 27 2018 in Beijing
Released February 4 2019

Yan Zihao
Student of Renmin University
Detained January 21 2019

Liang Xiaogang
Workers' supporter
Detained November 9 2018 in Shanghai

Yu Kailong
Workers' supporter
Detained December 30 2018 in Changsha while visiting Mao memorial; since released

Lan Zhiwei
Worker's supporter
Detained February 2 2019 in Changsha while visiting Mao memorial

Zheng Yongming
Graduate of Nanjing Agricultural University
Detained August 24 2018 in Huizhou dormitory raid

Yue Xin
Graduate of Peking University
Detained August 24 2018 in Huizhou dormitory raid

Xu Zhongliang
Graduate of University of Science and Technology, Beijing
Detained August 24 2018 in Huizhou dormitory raid

Mu Yingshan
Graduate of Nanjing Normal University
Detained January 3 2019
Released February 7 2019

'The students' commitment highlights the party's own drift from its roots'

Jude Blanchette, author of a forthcoming book on China's neo-Maoists

◂ with workers, the students were enacting a dictum reinforced by Mao over decades: that revolutionary action requires students to stand alongside workers. This year, in the lead-up to several politically sensitive anniversaries – 100 years since 1919, and 30 years since Tiananmen – "there is a real concern that student demonstrations will show up the party as not being the sole legitimate source of authority in China," says Rana Mitter.

Mary Gallagher, professor of Chinese politics at the University of Michigan, argues that the state's harsh response to the Marxist students is less about their political stance than their activism in general. "This is part of a broader crackdown on labour activists, lawyers and feminists who have all tried to build more sustained movements for social change," she says. "The party is more concerned with their ability to organise than with the substantive issues."

When asked why such a wave of student activism was possible now, all the students interviewed pointed to China's growing inequality. Since the implementation of market liberalisation in the 1980s, China's level of income inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient has increased rapidly, from about 0.30 in 1980 to 0.47 in 2017 by official estimates (compared with an OECD average of 0.31 and the US's level of 0.39). At the start of his second five-year term as general secretary of the Communist party in October 2017, Xi announced that the "principal contradiction" facing the country was the tension "between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life".

The gap in opportunity has also increased. A paper by Yuyu Chen at Peking University and his co-authors shows that social mobility fell in the post-Mao era of economic reforms to pre-1949 levels, as measured by the dependence of children's educational attainment on their fathers' attainment. "China is now sufficiently capitalist to make Marxist categories perfectly suited to social analysis," says Rebecca Karl, professor of Chinese history at New York University.

Xi extensively quotes Mao and Marx but has done little to implement their ideas, instead focusing on maintaining party control over businesses and civil society. His embrace of Mao is seen by some as an attempt to create a similar cult of personality: last year, "Xi Jinping Thought" became part of the Chinese constitution, making him the first leader to insert his own named ideology into the document since Mao.

Despite being a socialist country by name, China has no meaningful social safety net and its labour laws are poorly enforced for the worst-off workers. As a result, family health problems, a bad boss or an economic downturn can be the blow that knocks someone down to a position from which they can't climb up.

Mi Jiuping, a 36-year-old Jasic Technology worker from rural Hunan province, had experienced many of these knocks before he became an advocate for his fellow workers in Shenzhen. "There always has to be someone who goes first. If everyone is afraid, we workers will never get our day of freedom," Mi was quoted as saying in a short memoir of him, written by colleagues and supporters and published on social media.

In May, Mi drafted a petition asking Jasic to stop its alleged beating of workers and allow them to form a union. While organising a trade union is not illegal in China, all unions must have party approval and be overseen by the party's union, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions. But the ACFTU tends towards maintaining party control rather than listening to workers, and unions are in essence often run by a company's management.

Mi met with two months of delays from the local party body that oversees trade unions. Then, in early July, Jasic assigned Mi and his fellow organisers to new positions and escorted them out of the factory. On July 27, Mi tried to re-enter the factory with other workers and has been detained ever since. In an online statement posted on July 29, Jasic denied beating workers or blocking their union. The company said it had fired workers lawfully, in order to protect the company's normal running, and that it was supporting the building of a union.

The FT's numerous calls and emails to Jasic have gone unanswered. The grounds of the factory on the outskirts of ▸

OCTOBER 19/20 2019

FT Weekend Magazine

INSIDE THE BATTLE FOR HONG KONG

Sue-Lin Wong meets the protesters

INSIDE THE BATTLE FOR HONG KONG

As violent clashes between police and protesters continue in Hong Kong, the Financial Times spent months following pro-democracy advocates – from front-line radicals to moderate professionals – as they fight against the world's most powerful authoritarian state. By *Sue-Lin Wong*. Photographs by *Pierfrancesco Celada*

Photographer: Pierfrancesco Celada

When the United Kingdom handed over Hong Kong to China in 1997, Nick Wu was barely five years old. He grew up in a conservative, working-class family in the territory and, on graduating from university, found a job in marketing. This summer, when pro-democracy demonstrations erupted, he became a front-line protester.

For more than four months, Wu, a mild-mannered, bespectacled 28-year-old, has spent his weekends in a gas mask and helmet, fending off tear gas, pepper spray and prying police cameras, as he dodges rubber bullets, bean-bag rounds and beatings. It wasn't always like this. In 2014, while at university, he participated in 79 days of mostly peaceful protests when pro-democracy activists occupied parts of central Hong Kong in what became known as the Umbrella Movement.

"During Umbrella, we didn't escalate our protests so we failed. It was stupid – we sat, holding hands, waiting for the police to take us away one by one. It's kind of funny to look back on it now," he says. "We believed in the system then, we thought our votes could make a difference. But now we've learnt the system is stacked against us so we've become less peaceful. We've lost patience."

Wu is one of hundreds of thousands of people caught up in this moment of global significance. His ostensible adversaries are Hong Kong's police and government. But everyone knows that, in reality, the protesters' actual foe is China, a bristling superpower with the world's largest army and a furious leadership that has likened the demonstrations to terrorism. The protests, which began in June and have plunged the former British colony into its worst political crisis in decades, represent the biggest insurrection on Chinese soil since the pro-democracy movement in 1989, which eventually led to the Tiananmen Square massacre, when the Chinese Communist party ordered its troops to kill hundreds – perhaps thousands – of people in Beijing.

The stakes for China's future – and the way in which the world interacts with the superpower – could hardly be greater. If Wu and his fellow protesters prevail in wresting concessions for a more democratic future for Hong Kong, it would indicate that Beijing is ready to tolerate diversity. If it cracks down again, as it did in 1989, it will not only jeopardise the viability of Asia's financial hub but also create a new crisis in relations between China and the west.

One thing is certain: this youth-led movement of people fighting on the streets for democracy against the world's most powerful authoritarian state has changed Hong Kong for ever. To many, the protesters' position appears hopeless, as demonstrators, some not yet teenagers, battle tear gas and even gunfire, often with just umbrellas and hard hats. "If we burn, you burn with us" has been one of their rallying cries – an ominous quote from the dystopian teenage fiction series *The Hunger Games*, in which young people launch sometimes suicidal missions against an all-controlling government.

This is a movement that erupted from a place of frustration and anger, rather than because protesters believed they could win a fight against the Chinese Communist party. "I don't think the Hong Kong people stand a chance of winning against the government – they're experts, they have the resources, it's not a fair fight," says Wu, the first time I meet him in August. He allowed the FT to spend eight weeks following him, on condition of anonymity because he fears arrest.

As the situation on the ground evolves from street protests into a movement, it is shaping a distinct Hong Kong identity among its followers, who increasingly see themselves as separate from mainland China. Beijing risks losing the hearts and minds of several generations – not just the young – and faces growing, if nascent, calls for Hong Kong independence despite China's vehement opposition to any separatist movements on its soil.

For the Chinese Communist party, Hong Kong's value lies in it being an international financial centre and a gateway connecting China and the world. But the recent protests have hurt this reputation, with the economy facing its first recession since the global financial crisis, as business confidence, tourist numbers and retail sales plummet.

To date, more than 2,500 people have been arrested, the youngest only 12 years old, while a 14-year-old and an 18-year-old have both been shot. Although there have been no confirmed deaths, violent clashes between police and protesters have escalated recently. Last weekend, the first home-made bomb was allegedly detonated and a police officer was slashed in the neck.

Over recent months, the FT spoke to pro-democracy advocates ranging from front-line radicals to moderate professionals and high-school students about this turning point in the territory's history. What began as protests in June against a controversial bill that would have allowed criminal suspects in Hong Kong to be extradited to mainland China has now become a fight for genuine, universal suffrage and a battle over the future of the territory.

Under a framework known as "one country, two systems" – designed to allay fears that Hong Kong would be completely subsumed by China when it was handed over in 1997 – Beijing granted the city a high degree of autonomy for 50 years. This included freedom of speech, assembly and protest. But as Chinese president Xi Jinping has strengthened political control across the whole country over the past few years, many in Hong Kong have lost belief in the system. Since the Umbrella Movement ended, its leaders have been jailed, pro-democracy lawmakers have been disqualified from the legislature and businessmen abducted by the Chinese Communist party.

"We grew up influenced by the British government, which promotes freedom and fairness, social justice and the rule of law," says Wu. "But in China, the Chinese government promotes slogans like 'Without the Communist party, there would be no New China', ideas which are very difficult for us to get behind. It's very reasonable they can't understand us and what we're fighting for. We have different conceptions of freedom, fairness, justice and how a government gains legitimacy." He is dressed completely in black, the uniform of the protesters, as we sit in a Japanese bakery before demonstrations start. By 3pm that day, most of the nearby shops are already shuttered.

'WE'VE LEARNT THE SYSTEM IS STACKED AGAINST US SO WE'VE BECOME LESS PEACEFUL. WE'VE LOST PATIENCE'

Nick Wu, protester

On the first day that police used tear gas this summer, Wu and his friend were standing on one of the main arteries outside Hong Kong's Legislative Council. "We were just being peaceful protesters when, suddenly, we saw a guy carrying two boxes of helmets. We each took a helmet and followed him to the front line. I look back and realise – oh, how far I've already come," he says. His phone buzzes. He glances down, hesitates, then answers. It's his mum, asking where he is. The conversation is brief. "Every ▶

Previous pages: a young woman protects herself from tear gas in Hong Kong last month. Facing page (clockwise from top left): protesters are targeted with tear gas in Admiralty, central Hong Kong, on the day of a general strike on August 5; Nick Wu, photographed last month in the New Territories; blocking CCTV with umbrellas; Vickie Lui, spokeswoman for the Progressive Lawyers Group

Facing page (from top): a protester protects himself from a police water cannon last month; police gather in Tung Chung, Lantau Island

◂ time my mum calls, my immediate reaction is I feel annoyed. When I don't answer her calls, she bugs my dad to call me. And when I don't answer his calls, he tells my sisters to call."

The protests have created rifts between families; an older generation, who often fled poverty and upheaval in mainland China, found stability and freedom in Hong Kong but a younger generation sees these very freedoms being eroded as social inequality grows. Wu's parents and older siblings came of age during the boom years. "My father is extremely pro-government, he doesn't think the police are being brutal enough. He thinks we protesters are trying to destroy Hong Kong. My mother just wants me to stay safe and my older siblings are focused on making money. I've tried to explain to my parents, to the older generation, why we're so angry, why our fight for freedom is so important, but you only get one life and they can't experience ours," he says.

Vickie Lui, 39, the spokeswoman for the Progressive Lawyers Group, a group of lawyers committed to upholding democracy and the rule of law in Hong Kong, attended an elite international school and grew up in a family that staunchly supports the pro-Beijing establishment. Her parents were furious when they saw a YouTube clip of her energetically explaining the legal problems arising from the extradition bill. They worry about her safety and career prospects. As a barrister, she is careful not to attend illegal protests, which would violate her professional ethics code, although she has participated in several approved rallies.

Lui experienced her political awakening during the Umbrella Movement, catalysed by a decade-long struggle with a brain tumour that almost cost her life. "There are things in the world that are more important than just living your life, going to work, going home, receiving a salary, going on trips," she says. "That really was my epiphany, that was my turning point in life.

"For people who are moderate like me, we still believe in 'one country, two systems'," she adds. "But the Chinese government has to do something to show that our trust is worthwhile and that what we believe in – sticking up for 'one country, two systems' – is meaningful... If they continue to escalate the situation, it's going to drive more and more moderate people towards the radical bunch."

Genuine universal suffrage remains one of the key demands of the protesters and its gloomy prospects are fuelling an embryonic independence movement, particularly among younger generations. "The government isn't elected by the people. They are only responsive to rich people, large companies and the Chinese government. They aren't responsive to the general public and the younger generation," says Wu, who, like many protesters, argues universal suffrage is guaranteed under the Basic Law, the territory's mini-constitution. In 2014, Beijing rejected calls for fully democratic elections in Hong Kong, instead proposing voting reforms that would have allowed people to elect a chief executive from three candidates effectively vetted by the Chinese Communist party. The proposal, which sparked the Umbrella Movement, was defeated in Hong Kong's legislature and the chief executive continues to be elected by a 1,200-strong committee stacked with Beijing loyalists.

"Thank goodness we didn't give them democracy in 2014, it would be so much harder for us to get out of this mess now if we had," a Chinese government official tells me over the summer, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of losing his job. "Universal suffrage isn't going to happen for a very long time, if ever at all," he adds.

The face of Hong Kong's independence movement is Edward Leung, 28, an activist currently serving a six-year sentence for his involvement in clashes between police and protesters in 2016. This confrontation is now viewed by many as the start of the localism movement, which advocates for greater autonomy or even independence and captured about 20 per cent of votes in the Legislative Council elections in 2016.

For many front-line protesters today, Leung is the closest thing to a spiritual guide. He coined the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Times", which now rings out at all hours across the city. "Edward planted the seed that protests can be violent and we Hong Kong people have the ability and the duty to fight for our own city, to fight against China's influence," said Nora Lam, 24, director of *Lost in the Fumes*, an award-winning documentary about Leung that has been hugely influential among protesters. "A lot of the actions of the protesters now are quite similar to what Edward and his followers did in 2016."

'THANK GOODNESS WE DIDN'T GIVE THEM DEMOCRACY IN 2014, IT WOULD BE SO MUCH HARDER FOR US TO GET OUT OF THIS MESS NOW'

Chinese government official

Voices suggesting restraint were mostly silent this year after hundreds of protesters stormed Hong Kong's legislature on July 1, destroying symbols of China's central government and briefly occupying the chamber. (The demonstrators also put up signs cautioning against shattering treasured artefacts and paid for drinks they took from a canteen fridge.)

"It was you who taught us that peaceful protests don't work," read one piece of graffiti, a reference to a comment made by Hong Kong's chief executive Carrie Lam when she admitted she was suspending the extradition bill not because of the biggest peaceful protest in the city in three decades but because of the violent protests that followed. As the movement continues, increasingly violent actions have grown more acceptable to a broader cross section of participants, according to a survey from the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Polls also show the number of people identifying as Hong Kongers rather than Chinese has hit record highs. "This movement is about being faceless, about being anonymous, about not taking credit for what you have done – it's about being a part of a bigger community," Brian Leung, 25, told the FT. The only protester who took off his mask inside the legislature on July 1, he has since returned to the US to study authoritarianism, and is considering whether to seek political asylum overseas or return to face imprisonment. "The people around you at a protest are strangers but you trust them so much you will risk your life for them. Given this experience is repeated again and again... it is natural our [Hong Kong] identities are becoming stronger than before."

Summer has turned into autumn the next time I meet Wu. "We have a new anthem," he says. "Have you heard it?" How could I not have? Since the start of September, "Glory to Hong Kong" has rung out across the city, at football matches and in shopping malls. An orchestral rendition with musicians clad in gas masks and yellow hard hats has been viewed more than two million times on YouTube. "I never used to understand why people could get so emotional singing their national anthem," Wu says. "Now, for the first time, I get it."

Allusions to a budding independence movement are now pervasive – in slogans chanted, songs sung and even the type of demonstrations staged. Nora Lam is stunned at how *Lost in the Fumes* is resonating with protesters. "What I was trying to portray in the film was [that] Edward was just another young person in Hong Kong who has the same problems as us growing up – chasing your dreams and having them crushed, not knowing what to do after graduation, suffering from depression," she explains.

Despite playing to packed houses in arts centres, museums and schools, no commercial cinema was willing to screen the documentary when it was released in late 2017. "Executives don't want to get into trouble. Maybe they aren't against you or the whole movement in general but they are too scared to do what should be allowed in a normal society," she says. "I think I'd be less upset if the film had been banned outright by the government. Fear among ourselves plays a far more important role than actual control from the regime."

A poster for the film hangs on the door of the student union at Hong Kong Baptist University, alongside A4 printouts calling for independence. ▸

SEPTEMBER 14/15 2019

FT Weekend Magazine

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT INSIDE
THE LIMITS OF HUMANITY

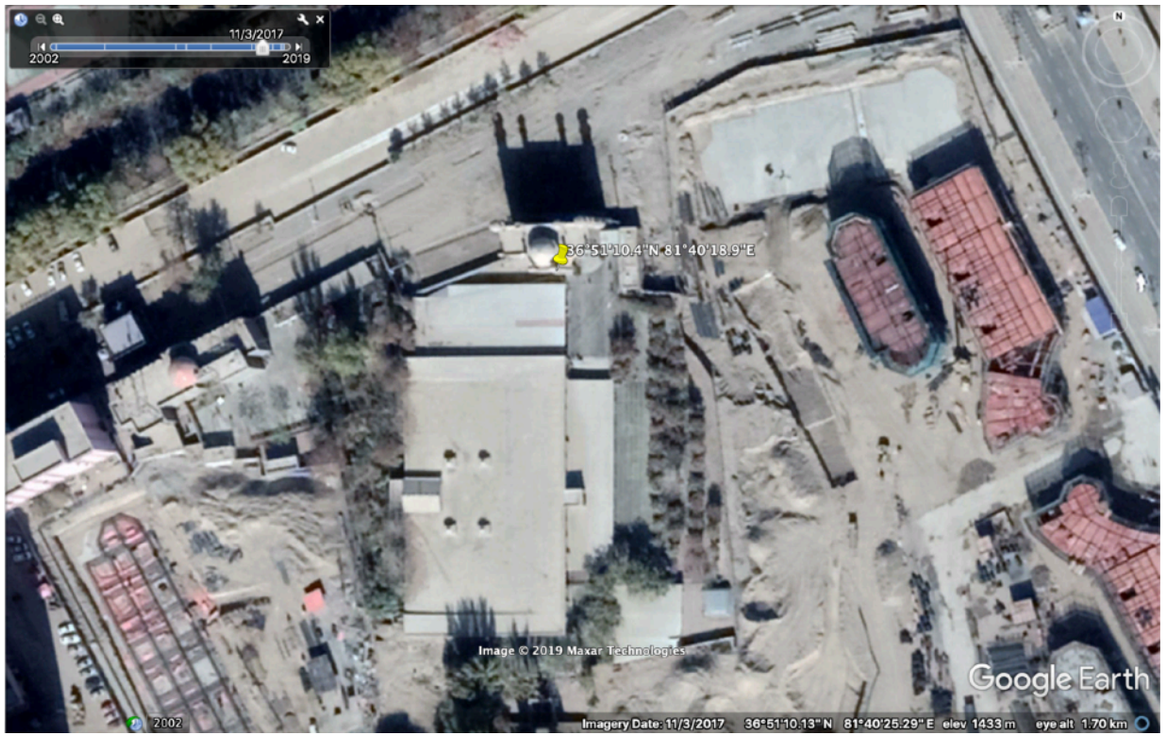
THE SILENCING OF A CULTURE

China's ideological battle against the Uighurs. By Christian Shepherd

FEAR AND OPPRESSION IN XINJIANG

In China's far west, the government has embarked on a systematic campaign to outlaw traditional Uighur culture, in the name of creating a single 'state-race'. More than a million people have been detained in high-security camps, children have been separated from their parents and Uighur intellectuals have been jailed en masse. *Christian Shepherd* reports from a region in lockdown. Illustration by *Joan Wong*

Xinjiang Mosque Demolitions



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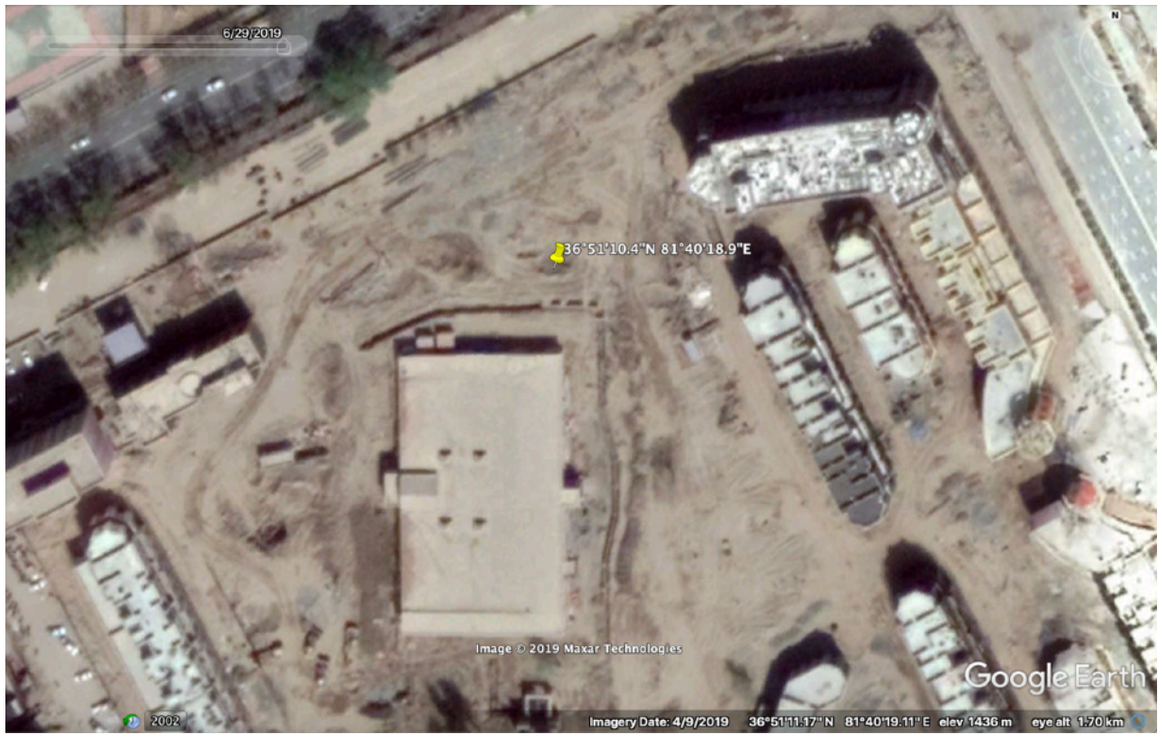

2019

Reeducation Camps Xinjiang

7th April 2017

24th May 2017