

Present day

What is seen as radical in society at this time?

What started in the late twentieth century and continued into the twenty-first was the increased awareness surrounding the dire state of the Earth's climate. The early 2000s and the generation that came along with it had – across the globe – grown up around climate change activism. This was (and still is to a large degree) the age of the hipster, the beginning of widespread veganism and an increased acceptance of diversity, as all have been brought into the spotlight of modern politics in recent years.

These schools of thought were empowered with the invention of modern social media, advertising opinions and ideologies to the masses on websites such as Facebook, Myspace and then eventually Twitter and YouTube, as trends and phases of content preference (the move from blogging to short-form content) increased awareness of many social injustices in society. The main demographic of these social media platforms was young people with liberal mindsets who wished to free society from social injustices such as racism (namely through the promotion of equality of opportunity, with employment programmes such as BAME) and sexism, where social media allowed people of any background to express their grievances regarding issues that affected them specifically.

It isn't just social injustices that have come into the spotlight of society's issues as a result of the advent of the internet and mass media. The climate crisis, an issue with a scope much greater than that of any social issue, due to it threatening the continued existence of the human race, has enjoyed a lengthy amount of time at the forefront of modern politics and thus radicalism. The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have proven to be disastrous for the environment; pollution of the atmosphere, with greenhouse gases causing global warming, has affected numerous aspects of nature, such as the intensity of hurricanes and rising temperatures around the globe. Pollution of the ocean, especially through plastic, has led to many species of marine life becoming endangered or extinct, as well as microplastics being absorbed into almost every fish in the sea. As previously mentioned, the invention and subsequent popularisation of the internet has led to a new generation of people seeking to change society and build a better future for their children, and who are currently seen as radical, as they challenge those in power who seek to uphold the harmful status-quo.

As shall be discussed and explored below, one of the largest movements in the UK – and even worldwide – addressing social injustices and climate change (Extinction Rebellion) emerged from Stroud, and they have been seen to represent the frustrations of an entire generation.

What is radical in Stroud?

Stroud, as can be seen in the centuries prior, has always been a hotbed for activity surrounding radical ideas and new ways of thinking.

Established in May 2018, in the living room of Gail Bradbrook's home in Stroud, Extinction Rebellion is now a global environmental movement. The group aims to use non-violent protests and rallies to raise awareness, not only with the government but also with the people, of the situation of our climate. Citing inspiration from past political protests such as the suffragettes and the civil rights movements, Extinction Rebellion aims to instil a sense of urgency for preventing further 'climate breakdown'. A number of activists in the group accept arrest and imprisonment, similar to the groups from whom they are drawing inspiration. The group functions and acts around three main aims and ten principles. These aims are:

1. Government must tell the truth by declaring a climate and ecological emergency, working with other institutions to communicate the urgency for change.
2. Government must act now to halt biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero by 2025.
3. Government must create, and be led by the decisions of, a citizens' assembly on climate and ecological justice.

Stroud is ahead of the curve on climate action. It became the first local district in Europe to turn its own operations carbon-neutral in 2015, and the second in the UK to declare a climate emergency in 2018.

When Extinction Rebellion first took its ideas from a Stroud arts café into streets, airports and power plant sites in 2019, it was easy to dismiss the group's demands. Their call for the UK to aim for net-zero emissions by 2025 was mocked as unrealistic. However, sustained over ten days of marches and arrests, that call shifted expectations so quickly that by the time Britain became the first G7 country to set a net-zero goal for 2050 two months later, their messages and ideas seemed rather reasonable.

Started in Stroud a decade ago by the late earth lawyer Polly Higgins, with the creation of the group Stop Ecocide, the push to make ecocide an international crime was similarly deemed too radical for most campaigners and funders. In June 2020, French President Emmanuel Macron endorsed a call from France's citizens' assembly on climate to make ecocide a national crime.

With a strong resurgence of activism against slavery around the country, areas around Stroud have also been brought to light due to their links to slavery. The Blackboy clock has been one of the focus points of conversation surrounding Stroud's slavery links. Dan Guthrie, a 21-year-old local artist and writer, has been researching the history of the clock and taken it up with Stroud District Council. He now sits on a panel made up of local councillors, historians and community representatives, overseeing a council-run

consultation, which could see the 240-year-old statue removed and relocated to a local museum.

Despite the increased awareness surrounding Stroud's strong links to slavery and the physical reminders of the past dotted around the town, the local Conservative MP Siobhan Baillie has not seen eye to eye with the people campaigning for the removal of the statue. In a statement published in a local newspaper and on her website in 2021, Baillie said that she was 'concerned that a certain minority of people with loud voices have an unquenchable desire to be constantly finding things to be outraged at'. Her remarks, along with other comments, including 'I'm getting tired of Black lives this and Black lives that...', have led people to say that Baillie has 'poisoned the debate about the clock'. A call for the removal of the statue has brought to light the underlying racism that 'poisons' Stroud and has spawned radical groups such as Stroud Against Racism, an anti-racist organisation with 'the mission of removing systematic racism and replacing it with a system of equality and equity'.