

Green Party: Right to protest under threat in Lancashire



13 July 2017

Jonathan Bartley, co-leader of the Green Party, has written to the CEO of fracking company Cuadrilla to demand answers over allegations security staff punched an activist and pinned him down by the throat.

Bartley visited the Preston New Road fracking site today (Thursday 13 July) to meet anti-fracking campaigners and hand deliver the letter to Francis Egan, Cuadrilla chief executive. Joining Bartley on the visit was indigenous leader and Standing Rock activist from the US, William Hawk Birdshead.

Police in Lancashire are [investigating reports of assault](#) by a security guard at the site, with protestors also making complaints about heavy handed police. Pictures show activist Robbie Gillett being pinned to the floor by his throat by security guards.

The letter [full text below] asks Egan to confirm:

1. If he is aware of the allegations;
2. What actions he will be taking to investigate them;
3. What actions he will take against the security guard(s) and staff in question if these allegations are substantiated;
4. What existing processes he has in place to ensure that all staff contracted through external companies conduct themselves safely and appropriately;
5. What steps will be taken to ensure such violence does not take place in the future.

Jonathan Bartley, co-leader of the Green Party, said:

"The reports coming from Cuadrilla's fracking site in Lancashire are of grave concern. Protestors being driven into with a van, punched in the face, held by the throat – and all by workers employed on the site.

"Cuadrilla must respond to these serious allegations immediately. Protest is a pillar of our free society and democracy. Cuadrilla must make clear what it is doing to investigate and ensure violence is never used against anyone at its site."

Robbie Gillett, anti-fracking activist, said:

"Cuadrilla's staff were in no way justified in punching me in the face whilst already restraining me on the floor of a public highway, nor in strangling me as the photos show. That amounts to common assault. This was a violent, disproportionate and unlawful use of force which is a typical of an industry that has no social licence to operate."

Ellen Gibson, a spokesperson [from Reclaim the Power](#) who was present at the site and witnessed the action, said:

“Today’s brutality by Cuadrilla’s security team represents a totally disproportionate, violent and unnecessary response to the ongoing peaceful protests at Preston New Road. Particularly concerning were the actions of the Head of Security, who punched and throttled a man.

“While security guards may be allowed to use ‘reasonable force’ to eject someone from private property; punching demonstrators in the face whilst pinning them to the ground on a public road amounts to assault.

“This violent behaviour from Cuadrilla’s staff against community members and supporters cannot be left unchallenged – the Police must act to guarantee the safety and right to peaceful protest of all people present at Preston New Road. What little credibility Cuadrilla had in the local community and across the UK has been demolished after today’s actions by their staff.”

Notes:

1. Full text of the letter to Cuadrilla:

The Green Party
The Biscuit Factory
A Block (201)
100 Clements Rd
London
SE16 4DG

Francis Egan

Cuadrilla Resources Ltd

Cuadrilla House, Unit 6 Sceptre Court

Sceptre Way, Bamber Bridge

Preston

PR5 6AW

12/7/2017

Dear Mr. Egan

I’m writing to you about the ongoing protests taking place at your fracking site in Lancashire.

I’ve been extremely concerned by a number of eyewitness testimonies from

people at the protest, regarding the behaviour of your contracted security guards and staff. There have been reports of hostility and even violence.

Last week, I was troubled by an image (enclosed) of a protester being held down by the throat, and numerous eyewitnesses testimonies that the protester was punched in the face by the same security guard, shortly after the photograph was taken. The individual has suffered significant facial injuries consistent with the descriptions of violence we have received.

Further to this incident, I was shocked to see footage earlier this week of what appeared to be a member of Cuadrilla staff hitting a peaceful protester with a moving van at some speed, and continuing to drive away. Eyewitness allegations claim that this appeared to be deliberate.

If these testimonies are correct then these would appear to be cases of very serious assault.

Please could you tell me:

1. If you are aware of the allegations;
2. What actions you will be taking to investigate them;
3. What actions you will take against the security guard(s) and staff in question if these allegations are substantiated;
4. What existing processes you have in place to ensure that all staff contracted through external companies conduct themselves safely and appropriately;
5. What steps will be taken to ensure such violence does not take place in the future.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Jonathan Bartley

Co-leader of the Green Party of England and Wales

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