

As new pipelines expand the flow of dirty fossil fuels globally, environmental activists are joining with social justice and indigenous rights movements to cut off climate change-inducing oil and gas at the source.

When climate activists took over the office of long-time United States Democratic congresswoman (also former and likely future Speaker of the House) Nancy Pelosi on November 12, they were joined by the youngest member of the newly elected Congress. “I am proud of each and every single one of you for putting yourselves and your bodies and everything on the line to make sure we save our planet, our generation and our future,” said New York representative-elect Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Just two years earlier, Ocasio-Cortez was a 27-year-old bartender who joined the protest at the Standing Rock Sioux tribe camp to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline. She came away inspired to help bring change via election to the US Congress.

“My journey here started at Standing Rock, and it started with everyday people doing what you all are doing,” she told the protesters last week, before explaining the Democrats’ New Green Deal that would promote jobs while protecting the environment.

Ocasio-Cortez isn’t the only one to be politicized over a fossil fuel pipeline.

Galvanizing a movement

The #NoDAPL anti-pipeline movement at Standing Rock focused global resistance to change-inducing fossil fuels on the oil industry’s attempts to expand their flow.

From gas pipelines between Asia and Europe, to the web of infrastructure transporting high-carbon Alberta tar sands oil across North America, to pipes crisscrossing the Niger Delta and traversing the southern highlands of Mexico, local communities, environmentalists, social justice activists and indigenous rights movements — and sometimes armed militants — have been fiercely resisting pipelines.

“There’s no question that the Dakota Access Pipeline has galvanized this movement,” Charlie Kronick, a UK Greenpeace campaigner and oil industry analyst, told DW.

“The combination of the trampling of the human rights of indigenous and local communities, the underplaying and ignoring of the local environmental impacts, combined with the fact that [for example] the tar sands are not compatible with a future that deals with climate change in any meaningful way,” has created a “perfect storm,” Kronick said.

Though US President Donald Trump thwarted the Standing Rock protesters’ attempt to stop the fracking gas pipeline, pipeline protesters have also seen a number of victories.

Construction of the controversial Keystone XL and Trans Mountain pipelines, which ship crude bitumen across the US and the planet, have both been halted by federal court cases since August.

In the former case, decided on November 8, the judge said there had been a failure to take a “hard look” at the impact of the Keystone XL on global climate change, after Trump overturned his predecessor’s decision to stop construction.

‘Not here, not anywhere’

Europeans are also resisting gas pipelines to funnel Russian and Central Asian fossil fuels to the continent. The Nord Stream gas pipeline planned to run through the Baltic Sea has come under fire over its implications for local communities, the climate and marine life. And in Italy, the so-called #NoTAP movement has emerged to stop planned construction of the Trans Adriatic Pipeline, the last stage of the Southern Gas Corridor reaching from Azerbaijan to Italy and part of the European Union’s strategy to reduce reliance on Russian gas.

NoTAP’s slogan is simple: “Not here, not anywhere.” Local activists in Puglia, through which the pipeline will arrive after crossing the Adriatic, fear their fish stocks and idyllic coastline will be vulnerable to spills. The pipeline also threatens 1,600 ancient olive trees which stand in its path.

Allegations of mafia involvement, money laundering and corruption leading back to the Azerbaijani regime are also feeding the resistance — NoTAP signs abound in Puglia.

In March 2017, riot police clashed with protesters attempting to block the cutting of centuries-old olive trees for the pipeline. Some locals later received fines of up to €10,000 (\$11,500) for protesting; others were banned from the area for three years.

As at Standing Rock, where protesters had been pepper-sprayed and reportedly attacked by police dogs, the view that state police are acting as the security arm of private corporations has further fired up protesters.

“You have a lot of human rights violations, and practices of criminalizing dissent,” Anna Di Ronco of the Department of Sociology at the University of Essex, co-author of a 2018 article on the #NoTAP protests and their use of social media, told DW.

The NoTAP protests, involving many olive oil producers who are among the poorest people in the country and perceive no economic benefit from the pipeline, began as more of a social justice than environment movement, Di Ronco said.

But in the wake of #NoDAPL, the anti-TAP movement also began to cite environmental arguments about climate change, tapping into a broader movement.

Growing civil disobedience

When pipelines do go in, protesters are increasingly resorting to sabotage.

In October, 2016 nine climate activists, the so-called “valve turners,” stalled the flow of tar sands oil from Canada to the US by accessing emergency valves in four states — and

stopping 2.8 million barrels of oil from flowing, roughly 15 percent of daily US consumption. They were quickly arrested. "I'm just more afraid of climate change than I am of prison," one activist said.

In a stunning victory, the charges against them were dismissed in October.

Source: dw