



Coal protest has hazy impact

Svea blockade by Greenpeace a unique event, but some call it more hot air than hot news

They kept a shipment of coal from leaving Svea for a day, but did they accomplish anything?

Greenpeace staged what may have been Svalbard's first such political protest Friday by blockading an 81,000-ton shipment of coal destined for Portugal as several members from a sea expedition climbed onto cranes at the mine. They were removed peacefully by police Saturday and their ship departed the area for Tromsø on Monday with no criminal charges or fines being levied.

Members of the organization said afterward they accomplished their goal of calling attention to the environmental dangers posed by continuing coal mining in the pristine Arctic.

"We managed to stop the plant," said Truls Gulowsen, chairman of Greenpeace Norway, in an interview from Oslo. "We had a good tone with local authorities and the operation

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A banner objecting to coal mining at Svea is displayed from a loading facility occupied by protesters from the environmental group Friday. Members from a three-month sea voyage seeking to raise awareness about climate change blocked a shipment of coal from being loaded onto the *M/V Pascha* for more than 24 hours before complying with orders by police to leave or face criminal charges. Photo provided by Greenpeace.

Ivar Undheim discusses goals for the future of Longyearbyen from his office as the new administrator of the city. He spent 20 years applying for the job, beginning the six-year term Sept. 1.



New chief humbly seeks power

Long-term electricity plan tops agenda for city's administrator

Ivar Undheim spent 20 years applying for Longyearbyen's top job, but isn't planning any similarly drastic moves now that he's here.

"To keep the society running is some kind of goal," he said. "I'm not looking for a big stage."

Undheim, 54, became the new administration of the Longyearbyen Council on Sept. 1 after being chosen from 45 applicants – this time. The career government official has been the administrator of Klepp since 1987 and said his duties here appear similar, only more so since the city is responsible for facilities

such as the coal plant, harbor and airport.

"This is more of a center of what happens," he said. "It's a bigger responsibility because we're left alone out here."

But Undheim's emphasis on making things run smoothly instead of making an impact doesn't mean he isn't seeking power. A long-term electricity plan is the most important issue he expects to address during his extendable six-year term.

"The power plant is always going to be there," he said. "There has to be some kind of decision about what's going to happen in the

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CARE bills Greenpeace, looks ahead

Poverty campaign says it lost 20,000 kroner to protesters; flea market, theater this weekend

Fundraisers say they lost 20,000 kroner to help impoverished women when Svalbard's governor was forced to cancel a day washing cars so he could deal with the Greenpeace protest at Svea.

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Submitting material

Letters, columns, photos and other material are welcome, but we can't offer pay for published items since nobody here is getting paid at the moment. Submissions in electronic form (text, Word documents, JPEGs, etc.) are highly preferred, although typing and/or scanning of items will be considered on a per-case basis. We reserve the right to edit submissions for length, clarity, accuracy, libel and other reasons, but we will also make every reasonable effort to contact the author about any changes prior to publication.

Restoring history



A 90-year-old residential barrack in the abandoned mining community of Hiorthhamn is among several buildings receiving major restoration by workers appointed by the Svalbard governor's office. Many of the buildings are now used as residential cabins, but are experiencing substantial rot and foundation decay. Work on the buildings included new foundations, drainage ditches and beds, plus repairs to roofs, doors, walls and floors. Restoration work was also done on buildings at Østkysten and Edgeøya. Reports detailing the projects are available at www.sysselmannen.no. Photo provided by the Svalbard governor's office.

Electricity, mining, schools top agenda

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next 20 years."

Determining if coal is replaced by cleaner alternative sources such as diesel or gas is a decision that will be made by politicians on the mainland, largely because funding is a significant part of the debate, Undheim said. Both short- and long-term investments need to be decided.

"If it's not coal, why invest in making facility cleaner?" he said.

Undheim said he is not pushing for a specific option.

"The big thing for me is there needs to be a decision," he said, adding he hopes one is reached within two years.

Regardless of whether coal continues to generate Longyearbyen's electricity, continuing mining as an economic hub is vital, Undheim said.

"There's only two things we have enough of here – coal and water," he said.

Norwegian officials have declared mining should be allowed to continue, with new activity done in compliance with strict environmental regulations, although debates on specifics are ongoing. Store Norske, however, is scaling back operations and eliminating one-fourth of its 400 jobs due to a severe drop in prices and demand due to the global recession. The latter also poses a dilemma for those facing layoffs.

"When people lose jobs they move to the mainland, but working there is not as good as it used to be," Undheim said.

Not all of the layoffs affect Longyearbyen residents since some workers "come up, work one night and go back to the mainland," he said. "But it does affect planes. We need them to fill planes in the winter."

Eliminating mining entirely would reduce Svalbard's population 40 percent, according to a report by the Norwegian government issued

earlier this year, but Undheim said he doesn't envision anything so dire happening. He said Longyearbyen's population increased slightly during the first half of 2009 and, while the rapid growth of the past 10 years is unlikely, a smaller rate of increase appears likely.

A record 241 primary-grade students are attending Longyearbyen School this fall, a key factor in city planning since funding is based on enrollment. Undheim said his top infrastructure priority is expanding education options for secondary-level students, since they currently have far fewer than their mainland peers.

"I think it's always been a kind of breaking-up point for some families when they reach secondary school," he said, noting youths often want to finish their education on the mainland. But he said there's "no easy solution" and not just because of funding – there simply aren't enough students to fill a wide variety of classes.

"You can't run a secondary program with only one student in the class," he said.

Offering more housing remains an issue, although Undheim said much of the demand these days seems to be people wanting more space instead of existing tiny units that ensure residents merely have a roof over their heads. Improving harbor facilities to allow large cruise ships to dock there, rather than ferry passengers in tenders, and obtain fresh water easier is among the other goals he cited.

Also - admittedly on the pie-in-the-sky wish list - an ice hockey hall would be nice, Undheim said.

Undheim first applied for the administrator job in 1989 because "it looked interesting." He never actually visited Svalbard until a holiday here in 2000.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.



Longyearbyen firefighters let local youths use fire hoses, ride in fire trucks and tour the station during an open house Sept. 26 to raise money for the CARE campaign.

Greenpeace says it won't pay CARE bill

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But at least Longyearbyen residents will have more money to spend at a flea market supporting the same cause this weekend – and maybe have a few laughs afterward.

The governor usually spends a day each year helping local youths wash and put snow tires on cars as part of a series of fundraisers for CARE, an international humanitarian organization focusing on global poverty. Other events include the flea market from noon to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday at The University Centre In Svalbard, and the youth performance "Should We Act?" at 7 p.m. Saturday at Huset. The fundraising culminates with a nationwide telethon Oct. 18 on NRK1.

Anne Lise Klungseth Sandvik, chairwoman for the local CARE campaign, sent an e-mail to Greenpeace asking for the 20,000 kroner – or a donation to the telethon's auction worth that amount – after the environmental group blocked a shipment of coal from being loaded at the mine for more than a day starting Friday. The group ended the protest Saturday after police and other officials with the governor's office flew to the scene, with no criminal charges or fines pursued because orders to depart peacefully were obeyed.

"This is a service people in the city have looked forward to and waited on," Sandvik

told *Svalbardposten*. "It is a welcome service from the governor, who has brought in a lot of money for the telethon. This year we were also extra clever with marketing and really mobilized, including the kids who put notes on people's cars."

Truls Gulowsen, chairman of Greenpeace Norway, told the newspaper he's sympathetic for the lost fundraising and will provide the number of the telethon to those involved in the protest, "but to force someone to pay is to go too far." He said the governor, if committed to the event, can reschedule it for another day.

Local CARE volunteers are now preparing for the coming weekend's events. Donations of items for the flea market are being accepted at UNIS from 5 to 8 p.m. Thursday and Friday, with free pick-up of large items available. Arrangements to consign items worth more than 300 kroner are also possible.

The stage performance features local youths offering a humorous, yet critical look at consumer society and helping the needy. Admission is 100 kroner for adults and 50 kroner for children.

More information about local CARE events is available by contacting Sandvik at an-lissa@online.no. Information about the CARE organization can be found at www.care.no and www.care.org.

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Over-the-counter cash to be mostly phased out at bank

Withdrawing over-the-counter cash from Longyearbyen's only bank is being phased out, although it will still be available from the ATM and stores. Daniel Nyhagen, manager of the local Sparebank 1 Nord-Norge branch, said managing cash is expensive and "what we're doing now is something all competitors have done long ago." Most customers, he added, use internet and telephone banking. The bank plans to complete the process at all branches by 2012 - and is planning to close one-fourth of them. Nyhagen said the cash phase-out at the Longyearbyen branch may happen sooner, but it is not targeted for closure. Officials are working on solutions for those needing cash to conduct transactions.

Trapper doesn't have sole rights to down collection site

Trapper Harald A. Soleim doesn't have exclusive rights to gather down on Gåsøyane, the Svalbard governor's Directorate for Nature Management has ruled. The dispute began earlier this year when two men asked Soleim for permission to collect down in the nature preserve, where he has held a permit for several years, and were refused. The directorate ruled the Svalbard Environmental Protection Act allows all residents to collect down and eggs, and permit applications can be submitted before April 1 next year. Soleim said he may appeal to the Ombudsman, saying competition will lead to "anarchy."

Man to retry balloon journey

Frenchman Jean-Louis Étienne will try again to fly in a balloon from Svalbard to Alaska next spring, an expedition cut short last year when the balloon was destroyed in a storm while anchored in France. Étienne, whose extensive polar exploits include a solo ski trip to the North Pole, said he will study how climate change is affecting indigenous people of the north.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Cloudy, occasional snow. N winds at 24 km/h. High -2C (-11C wind chill), low -7C (-17C wind chill).	Some early snow. NNE winds at 22 km/h. High -6C (-12C wind chill), low -8C (-13C wind chill).	Sun and some clouds. NNE winds at 9 km/h. High -4C (-11C wind chill), low -7C (-13C wind chill).	A little snow. N winds at 19 km/h. High -4C (-11C wind chill), low -8C (-17C wind chill).
Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, -6C (-14C), -11C (-15C); Monday, low clouds, -8C (-13C), -11C (-13C); Tuesday, cloudy and winds diminishing, -7C (-7C), -8C (-8C); Wednesday, cloudy with snow late and overnight, -4C (-7C), -10C (-18C).			

Data provided by AccuWeather.com



Police, above, prepare to escort Greenpeace protesters off a loading crane at the Svea mine Saturday after members of the environmental group agree to end a blockade peacefully. Store Norske officials said are not seeking charges or fines against the demonstrators. The protest was among a series of events highlighting climate change, including 700 people who stripped naked in a vineyard in France, at right, and others who did the same on a glacier in Switzerland. Photos provided by Greenpeace.



Greenpeace's PR plan questioned

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took place quietly."

But observers locally and elsewhere questioned a publicity strategy of implying world leaders such as Barack Obama led the protest, the logic in targeting a mine with relatively "clean" coal, and the pollution generated by their voyage and police officials responding to the scene.

The protest also got little news attention outside of Norway as a similar demonstration in Canada on the same day reaped more headlines – to say nothing of coverage a couple of days later when 700 people stripped naked in a French vineyard and hundreds more bared all on a Swiss glacier.

"I'm guessing that living in a tree for months on end or chaining themselves to heavy machinery wasn't getting the message across," wrote Katie Machol, green community editor for the alternative newspaper *Creative Loafing* in Tampa, Fla., in a blog response to the nudity protests.

Greenpeace members willingly agree world leaders are responding poorly to the organization's concerns as the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen this December approaches. Greenpeace is studying and raising awareness about global warming during its three-month voyage aboard the *Arctic Sunrise*, a former seal-hunting vessel until the group chartered it in 1995. The organization has since used it for activities such as disrupting the installation of oil facilities at sea and chasing whaling ships from waters in the southern hemisphere.

Their arrival at Svea on Thursday evening came near the end of their climate awareness journey and, while there were suspicions about their intent, the pitch at least was aboveboard.

"They asked to come to visit to get information about mining operations and plans for new mining in Lunckefjell," an article in Store Norske's most recent newsletter notes. Company officials gave the visitors a tour of the facility, "but Friday they had completely different plans."

"Early in the morning, six or seven activists illegally entered into the coal pier at Kapp Amsterdam, climbed up on the loading facility, pressed the emergency stop and barricaded themselves on the control bridge," the newsletter notes. "Thus, they stopped the loading of the *M/V Pascha*."

Store Norske officials didn't try to remove the protesters, "consciously choosing to calm down the situation," but when that proved futile contacted the Svalbard governor's office for help. Police and other officials arrived Thursday evening, telling Greenpeace representatives they needed to leave the mine by 8 a.m. Saturday, according to Deputy Gov. Lars Faus.

"It was also informed that they risked punishment if they are not complied with this order," he wrote in an e-mail.

Greenpeace members, who've been arrested in large numbers at other protests, initially indicated they didn't intend to go quietly.

"We will hold on as long as possible here," said Jan Martin Norman, a member of the group, told NRK at the 8 a.m. deadline. "We are willing to be arrested and imposed fines."

But about an hour later, after police reiterated the leave-or-be-arrested ultimatum, the group backed down. A video posted at Greenpeace's Web site shows police climbing onto the crane and escorting the protesters down.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

What's up

Oct. 7

7 p.m.: Culture Forum open meeting. Event and cultural exchange planning for remainder of 2009 and 2010. Næringsbygget 1, "Tundra" room.

Oct. 7-9

6 p.m.: Golf club orientation/instruction for new members. Sessions include use of golf simulator. Fee of 1,800 kroner includes membership in Longyearbyen Golf Club for 2010.

Oct. 8-9

5-8 p.m.: Submission of items for flea market to benefit CARE. UNIS. Pickup of large items available. Contact Daniel Vogedes at 900 42 453 or daniel.vogedes@gmx.de.

Oct. 10

7 p.m.: Performance "Should We Act?" by local youths to benefit CARE. Offers a humorous yet critical look about consumer society and those in need. Admission 100 kroner adults, 50 kroner for children. Huset.

Oct. 10-11

Noon-4 p.m.: Flea market to benefit CARE. UNIS.

Oct. 11

2 p.m.: Liturgy, recorded by NRK. Service will include walk to the cemetery. Svalbard Church.

8 p.m.: Movie: "G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra." U.S. action, ages 15 and up. Huset.

Oct. 12

10:15 a.m.: Meeting of the environment and industrial committee. Næringsbygget 1, "Tundra" room.

Noon-3 p.m. Open day at Svalbardhallen for students and parents during a planning day at Longyearbyen School. Participants are invited to bring their beverages and lunch.

7:30 p.m.: Book launch and slideshow, "Hiking In Spain," by Anita and Birger Løvland. Longyearbyen library.

What's online

Icepeople.net provides daily updates of news about Svalbard and the world's polar regions, plus extras for articles from the print edition. Among the latest news:

- *Study: Ocean acid will dissolve shellfish*
- *Svalbard's permafrost seen from space*
- *Climate link to deadly Philippines flood?*
- *Polar bears on piggyback, kitchen raids*