

Text of a BBC Wales Website Article - 27th September 2008

Gas Protest Aims To Ignite Debate

Protest organisers are calling for a windfall tax on British Gas and energy suppliers' profits.

Around 30 protesters gathered outside British Gas' Cardiff headquarters to demonstrate against energy price rises and the economic crisis on Saturday.

The People Before Profit Alliance are unhappy at the company's recent price rises but want its event to launch a public debate on the failing economy.

British Gas raised its electricity and gas prices by 9% and 35% in July.

It said it had since launched measures to help its most vulnerable customers cope with the bill rises.

The rally began at 1400 BST outside the company's offices in Churchill Way in the city centre.

The protest was supported by local trade union leaders, pensioners groups, and the Plaid Cymru AM Leanne Wood made a speech.

The Alliance believes the British Gas rises were unnecessary as its parent company, Centrica, announced more than £1bn in profits a day later.

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As part of the protest it is demanding the government renationalise British Gas and the UK's other energy companies and subject them to a windfall tax on their profits.

The Alliance's Jonny Jones said: "We want the protest to act as lightning rod for people who are disenchanted about not only the British Gas price rises but also the greater economic downturn.

"It is quite clear that we haven't seen anything like the current economic crisis since the Wall Street Crash of 1927.

"As it starts to take a grip you can be sure the government and companies are going to make workers pay for the crisis by holding down wages and calling for us to keep an eye on our debts."

Describing the protest as a "lively" gathering, Mr Jones said the alliance was next planning to organise a public meeting where the best way forward could be discussed.

British Gas said it was widely recognised as the leading energy supplier in terms of helping its vulnerable and fuel poor customers.

A spokesperson said: "We have already committed £900m of energy efficiency measures for our customers' homes over the next three years and a further £160m to help our most vulnerable customers.

"In addition, the government's recently announced fuel poverty package will increase our commitment by around a quarter."