* **Who's afraid of Greta?**

November 7, 2019 [Svenja Blanke](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/svenja-blanke)

Some are fascinated with her: they see her as a hero, as a Joan of Arc of modern times or as a Mafalda, with a political agenda to preserve planet Earth and as such, represents the younger generations as more intelligent than that of their parents. Others are angry: they see her as a naïve puppet of opaque adult interests and they make fun of her.

Young ecologist, Greta Thunberg became a new global figure and depending on the political point of view of observers, she is either defended or hated. On September 20, 2019 the #FridaysforFuture movement, inspired and encouraged by the Swedish teenager, celebrated its largest mass mobilisation. In almost every country in the world, young people and adults took to the streets. It is estimated that about 4 million people mobilised around the world.

Greta Thunberg, a 16-year-old student, has been known in Europe for around a year, but in the United States she has risen to fame over the past month. Many Americans first saw her when she appeared on the Trevor Noah Daily Show. There, she explained with her well known seriousness that the world has very little time left, precisely eight and a half years, because as of January 1, 2018, only 420 gigatons of carbon dioxide remained. Now there are only 360 gigatons left, and in eight and a half years this will run out if the current levels of emissions are maintained.

Despite her youth, Great Thunberg has become popular because of her knowledge of climate and environmental problems, for the firmness of her convictions and for the actions that she carries out. Commentators are sure that that is why she has become an icon.

The climate activist does not relate well to the irony of American television programs. When asked for her impression of New York when she arrived on the Malizia yacht, she replied that it smelled bad. Her lack of understanding of irony and her seriousness are probably related to her Asperger’s syndrome (a condition she speaks openly about) and dose of Nordic frankness. All of these qualities have influenced the new environmental movement. It is a group that speaks very seriously and uses scientific research to support their arguments. It is, in fact, the antithesis of the ironic language used by generation X or millennials.

Greta Thunberg is the global face of this movement and her presence is extremely influential. In August 2019, when embarking on a trip from Europe to New York on a ship that doesn’t produce carbon dioxide, she caused rage in the media and in the political world. Furthermore, her interventions at the World Climate Conference in Katowice (Poland) in December 2018 and at the World Economic Forum in Davos put the world’s powerful in a very awkward position. This young girl, with her hair in braids threw slogans at them (“act” or “panic”) and was able to attract the world’s attention. Especially the European media. But her presence at the New York and Washington demonstrations, the meeting with Barack Obama, the appearance on the Daily Show and the speech before the General Assembly of the United Nations on September 23rd also made her a popular figure in the US.

The mass movement led by Great Thunberg dates back to the “school strike” that began on 20th August 2018. That day, instead of attending school, she sat in front of the Swedish Parliament in an attempt to draw attention to the dangers climate change represents for future generations. Her intervention produced an avalanche effect. In a few months a mass movement known as #FridaysforFuture emerged, reaching its first peak in March 2019 when 1.5 million teenagers and youngsters took to the streets to protest and demand a change in attitude to climate change. The movement is global, but its centre is in the Global North. And although in many countries the movement is led by teenage women, in no other country in the world is the symbiosis between the movement and a person is as clear as in the case of Greta Thunberg.

The activist triggered not only a political movement, but also fury from powerful media outlets. The media and commentators have become obsessed with her. According to some observers, the adoration towards Greta Thunberg is similar to a religious awakening. But this is not her problem. It is, on the contrary, a problem of the people and the media that react to her actions and her words.

Within the political spectrum, environmentalism is found mostly on the left and in the academic world. The right and many liberals deny Greta Thunberg and her colleagues the right to formulate their own political ideas and goals, instead treating them as immature and spoilt. The Argentine journalist Sandra Russo calls this the first case of “global bullying”, an idea which she discussed long before September 23rd when Donald Trump, the president of the United States, sent out a tweet which made fun of the 16 year old.

The criticism that Greta Thunberg’s ideas about the climate would be potentially “undemocratic” since they do not allow for political compromise are based on the idea that politics works “only step by step, always through compromise”. However, this can be seen as a form of soft paternalism. Greta Thunberg’s sharp accusations do not take place in a vacuum, they are stark, political interventions aimed at polarizing public opinion. Her statement that “the poverty of the many pays for the luxury of the few”, is according to some commentators on the extreme right, is “the product of socialisation in the Swedish education system” and is a stupid left wing criticism of capitalism.

Other critics argue that fanatical ecologists (or green capitalists) are hiding behind the young Swedish girl. More specifically, We Don’t Have Time AB, a Swedish company that works on environmental projects founded in 2017, by public relations specialist Ingmar Rentzhog, who gave wide coverage to the school strikes led by Great Thunberg in 2018. Earlier this year, she alongside her family said that they are no longer are in contact with the firm. Others point to the ever-present George Soros, the ghost of the global alternative right.

Everything seems to suggest that the more popular and disruptive the climate movement become, the more virulent the rejection from those who consider climate change as a conspiracy and the protection of the climate as pure nonsense becomes.

Excerpted from: 'Who’s Afraid of Greta Thunberg?'.

Courtesy: Commondreams.org