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What are the school climate strikes?

Tens of thousands of children worldwide plan to walk out of school on March 15th



The Economist explains
Mar 14th 2019 | by F.H.

GRETA THUNBERG is an unlikely figurehead. In August the then 15-year-old high-school student walked out of her classroom and took up position outside Sweden's parliament with a hand-painted sign that read "skolstrejk för klimatet" (school strike for climate change). Sitting alone on the cobblestones, she provoked puzzled looks from passers-by. Seven months later Ms Thunberg finds herself at the helm of a global movement. On March 15th tens of thousands of school children around the world are expected to join Ms Thunberg ' leaving their classrooms in order to protest against climate

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Tomorrow's school strike is the first globally co-ordinated walk-out. The demands of the strikers differ from country to country. In Australia students are calling for Adani, an Indian energy company, to stop digging a huge new coal mine in Queensland and for a full transition to renewable energy by 2030. The demands of British students include lowering the voting age to 16, whereas American school children are striking in support, among others things, of the Green New Deal, an environmental programme espoused most vociferously by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a new member of Congress. Broadly, though, the goals of the strikes are the same: to persuade politicians to stop dragging their feet over climate change and to make efforts to prevent irreversible temperature rises.

The strikes signal a shift in green activism, with those who will be particularly affected by climate change taking the lead. The protests take place amid a lawsuit that has been filed by a group of American children against the federal government, arguing that it was violating their constitutional right to life, liberty and property by allowing activities that contribute to climate change. Although some politicians have criticised the school strikes as disruptive, others, including Angela Merkel, Germany's chancellor, back them. This could be because children's fears for the future carry a certain moral weight; last month Dianne Feinstein, a Democratic senator, was roundly criticised after a video of her lecturing a group of young climate activists went viral. For many, Greta Thunberg has become a beacon of hope. But as she told the Davos crowd in January, that was never her plan. "I don't want you to be hopeful," she said. "I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act."

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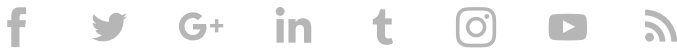
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