



OPINION



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**The End of the Beginning: Climate Protest Has Gone Global**

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Environment

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Friday the 20<sup>th</sup> September 2019 is a day to remember. And by the time you read this, it may well be the Friday past or the one before that. But, which Friday it was, doesn't really matter, it's the date that's truly important, that will be truly be worth remembering as the day of the world's first 'Global Climate Strike'. It's been a long time coming.

After years of languishing, being ignored, being all but forgotten; as we all got on with our busy, busy, busy lives; concern with the global 'Climate Crisis' has suddenly and explosively risen to the top of the political agenda as well as the personal agendas of a vast number of increasingly concerned people all around the world.

Friday's "Global Climate Strike" will have seen protests erupting around the globe: in Australia, New Zealand, Japan, India, and South Africa, in most European countries, most especially Germany, France, Sweden, Denmark, Ireland, the United Kingdom, then in the United States and Canada.

The demonstrations a hugely important signal to 'powers that be' all around the globe, occurring but days before the scheduled United Nations' Climate Action Summit in New York. Where a majority of the world's leaders are scheduled to present their long-term plans for curbing greenhouse gas emissions. Anything and everything that might help mitigate the effects of global climate change and ecological emergency very much on the table.

Given the scale of the impending crisis, it's all too sobering to remember that people started banging on about imminent 'Climate Change' thirty plus years ago. It's equally sobering to realise that there have been many such potentially pivotal 'climate moments' before, when it appeared the world's leaders really would engage with the issue. But as the growing tide of 'Climate Strike' demonstrations now attest, all too little ever came to pass.

For most people, here in the US, the birth of the modern 'Environmental Movement' dates back to 1988, when NASA scientist Jim Hansen first made "the climate problem" public in a searing testimony he gave to Congress. 'Time' magazine so moved by the public groundswell of concern that erupted; it named "Endangered Earth" its 'Planet of the Year'. (The fact that thirty years later, 'Time' has once again devoted an entire issue to the 'Climate Crisis' and 'The Economist' has, this very week, done much the same in response to growing public sentiment; and that ahead of the UN Climate Summit, more than 250 newsrooms all around the world are boosting their climate coverage in a major initiative, called 'Covering Climate Now', all point to this being just such a pivotal moment.)

Hopefully, it will prove to be more pivotal than the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992. Redubbed the 'Earth Summit Conference' to highlight its importance, people had high-hopes about everything, then, too, as it sought to reconcile worldwide economic development with protection of the environment. People clapped. Some cheered. But not too much ever came of it. More's the pity.

As ever, the world turned. More and more people tuned in and turned on to the true magnitude of the ever-increasing 'Climate Crisis'. Which in turn led to The Kyoto Protocol, the first agreement between nations to mandate country-by-country reductions in greenhouse-gas emissions. Signed in Kyoto, Japan, in December 1997, the agreed-to climate goals went into force in early 2005. People clapped and cheered, all over the world, all over again. As it really did seem that, at long last, good things were beginning to happen. Then, surprise, surprise, a veritable army of 'Climate Change' deniers suddenly emerged from out of the blue; far too many for it not to have been orchestrated by special interest groups; to spread confusion and pour scorn on the findings of climate scientists.

As if in direct response, 2006 saw Al Gore release his earth-shattering documentary 'An Inconvenient Truth' which caught the world's attention, big time, and brought the looming global climate crisis, once again, front and centre. And it was for an all too short time, a bona-fide cultural event. It undoubtedly helped raise public awareness of global warming and reenergized the 'Environmental Movement'. People watched the film. Bought the book of the film. Some people even read the book. And everyone who saw the film said how very important it was.

Yet, it wasn't too long before most everyone turned around and got on with their lives and did little or nothing to get to grips with the issues. And I was one of them. I was moved, but not nearly far enough. I began to recycle my garbage, religiously; but I didn't go so far as to recycle my mind.

The whole issue of 'Climate Change' didn't exactly go away. It was always there, bubbling, under the surface or high overhead. But for anyone who'd taken its matter to heart, awareness and concern, and a willingness to engage with the issue wasn't growing nearly fast enough. Not if all the things that needed to be done, were to get done in time. Not if anything was ever going to have any sort of positive effect on the future climate of the planet.

Time just continued to slip on by. The Amazon rain forest continued to be destroyed. Arctic sea ice continued to melt and the glaciers shrink. Sea levels continued to rise. The Great Barrier Reef continued to erode. The amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the air continued to grow, exponentially. And calamitous, once-in-a-hundred-year weather events; floods, fires, droughts; began to occur, almost yearly, in far too many places all around the world. All of it happening under people's very noses, but still nothing much was being done to confront the worsening crisis. Nothing had, yet, really caught hold of the world's attention, let alone its imagination.

Then in November 2016 the United Nations, thankfully, got into the act again with the Framework Convention on Climate Change that resulted in The Paris Climate Accords. An agreement that set out agreed to targets for greenhouse-gas-emissions mitigation, adaptation, and finance. There was more clapping and cheering by all the delegates who attended; the sound of it again heard all around the world. Not by all, it's true, but most. Some 'Climate Change' doubters still wanted to wall themselves off; didn't want to hear anything about any 'Climate Crisis'; even going so far as to dismiss it as a non-occurrence; dispute its very existence.

Yet so overwhelming is the evidence of Climate Change, that the deniers have since been pushed to the very edges of rationality; especially as 97% of the world's scientists have loudly declared the issue to not only be all too real, but also the true existential crisis of our times.

Last year's report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) all but pounding the last nail in any self-respecting doubter's coffin, when it warned that limiting global warming to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels would be a colossal undertaking, requiring greenhouse-gas emissions to be cut in half by 2030. That fundamental transformation, globally, was necessary if there was ever to be any chance of meeting the targets set in the Paris Climate Accords.

A truly, daunting task that called for radical, truly transformational thinking or even a world shattering event if the problem was to ever have a chance of being solved. All that was missing was the spark.

That spark was **'skolstrejk för klimatet'**.

In August 2018 a really rather remarkable fifteen-year old Swedish schoolgirl called Greta Thunberg decided not to go school one day and started a 'school strike for climate' outside the Swedish Parliament building, in Copenhagen. Where, armed with only a hand-painted banner that said **'skolstrejk för klimatet'** and whatever the weather, she called on her country's politicians and world leaders to step up their efforts against global warming. Her lone endeavours sparked a global movement for action against the 'Climate Crisis' that has since inspired millions of students and school children to go on strike for "our" planet. So much so that pupil-based **'#FridaysForFuture'** strikes now occur, weekly, in more than 71 countries: the once, lone climate activist, now, anything but alone.

One might call it truly miraculous; even more so, when you consider the speed in which it all happened; but the bright spark that is Greta Thunberg has set more than schoolchildren alight; she seems to have caught the imagination of the world and become a global beacon of climate activism.

In October 2018, in England, a small group of young activists, seeking social change, all utterly fed up by the fact that little or nothing was being done to or deal with or even forestall the 'Climate Crisis', banded together to form Extinction Rebellion (XR), a climate activist group intent on rebelling against government inaction. Tellingly, just as with 'SchoolStrikeForClimate' and #FridaysForFuture, hundreds of XR groups then quickly took shape and hundreds of thousands of people have since taken part in mass peaceful demonstrations in towns and cities and countries all around the world.

A 'Tipping Point' reached; the dam of inaction finally breached.

Nothing like 'Global Climate Strike' has been seen before, but the likes of it will most assuredly be seen again and again and again, until the world's politicians wake up and realize something momentous is occurring. That something has radically changed in the world. And come hell or high water there are far too many people, now, who won't ever

be deterred from demanding that their politicians get up from their seats of power and go deal with it. The climate genie is out of the bottle and its wishes known.

This 'climate' moment is rooted in broad-based, grassroots movements that are occurring all around the globe. It's not based on the opinions of the chattering classes or the élites. It's not led by political groups and/or multinational news organisations; not funded by 'dark' money from global corporations or institutions. And because of all that, it feels very, very different. The world of yesterday and yesteryear has turned, and turned, again, only this time it has brought with it a rising sea of people who want action and demand change.

"The seas are rising and so are we."

As Greta Thunberg told the audience at George Washington University, in Washington DC, on 17 September: "Even though it is slow, the pace is picking up and the debate is shifting. See you on the street! On Friday!"

And every Friday, thereafter, until we have all done all we can to save our world; save our planet; this, now, the long-awaited beginning to the ending of the global crisis.

As, again, there is no Planet B.