

Greta Thunberg backs climate general strike to force leaders to act

Swedish activist says world faces ‘existential crisis’ and must achieve goals of Paris deal

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Greta Thunberg during a talk at Friends House co-organised by Guardian Events. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Greta Thunberg, the 16-year-old Swedish environmental activist, has given her support for a general strike for the climate, saying the student **movement she inspired** needs more support from older generations to ensure politicians keep their promises under the Paris agreement.

Speaking at a public event in London as **Extinction Rebellion** protests continued in the capital, the initiator of the school strike for climate movement was typically frank about the scale of the problem the world faces and the impact her campaign has made. “People are slowly becoming more aware, but emissions continue to rise. We can’t focus on small things. Basically, nothing has changed,” she said.

At several points, she stressed the need for the protests to spread. “This is not

just young people being sick of politicians. It's an existential crisis," Thunberg said. "It is something that will affect the future of our civilisation. It's not just a movement. It's a crisis and we must take action accordingly."

In a question and answer session, Franny Armstrong, the director of the climate documentary *The Age of Stupid*, asked whether it was time for a general strike. "Yes," replied Thunberg in unison with the other members of the panel.

Traditional unions have so far been wary of joining the strikes. Although workers' federations in Italy made Thunberg an honorary member, most others have given either tepid support or none due to concerns about the possible impact on jobs. But there is growing support in the UK, the US and other countries for a **Green New Deal** that would increase spending on renewable energy.

'We will never



stop fighting': Greta Thunberg addresses London climate protests – video

The talk took place on Earth Day, after a week of protests by **Extinction Rebellion activists** pushed the climate crisis on to news broadcasts and newspaper front pages.

Police have arrested more than 1,000 demonstrators at Parliament Square, Oxford Circus and Waterloo Bridge, but hundreds remain camped in Marble Arch, where Thunberg spoke on Sunday.

"I support Extinction Rebellion. What they are doing is good. Civil disobedience is important to show this is an emergency. We need to do everything we can to

put pressure on the people in power,” she told the audience on Monday, prompting cheers and applause.

“Why study for a future that is being taken from us? Why study for facts when facts don’t matter in this society? It’s empowering to know I am doing something, I am taking a stand, I am disrupting.”

The interest in the event was so intense that a long line of supporters stretched along Euston Road waiting for the doors to open at Friends House. Most guests appeared to be fellow school strikers. A handful wore shirts or headbands printed with the Extinction Rebellion symbol.



An Extinction Rebellion activist sits in front of tents at Marble Arch in London. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

But the audience included all age groups, and just about every major environment organisation associated itself with the talk, which was hosted by the Quakers and co-organised by Guardian Events. When Thunberg appeared on stage, she was greeted with thunderous applause.

Armstrong said: “I’ve been to dozens of talks here over the years, but I’ve never seen anything like this. It’s the first time I have seen a standing ovation even before the event starts. She’s a rock star.”

In the past week, Thunberg has **met Pope Francis** in the Vatican and addressed members of the European parliament. On Tuesday, she will visit the Houses of Parliament, meet the House of Commons Speaker, John Bercow, and take part

in an event with the leaders of all the main parties except Theresa May.

She told the audience she had been taken by surprise at the swift spread of a movement that began less than a year ago, when she **went on strike** alone outside the Swedish parliament. “It is hard to understand what is happening during the last months. It has all happened so fast. I don’t have time to think it through,” she said.

Veteran observers of the British parliament said she has helped push the climate issue higher up the UK political agenda than at any time since the 2008 Climate Change Act.

Green party officials said they hoped the meeting on Tuesday could spur a new phase of cross-party collaboration on climate change, including monthly meetings, wider public consultations and an agreement that party manifestos should be vetted by an independent body such as the Committee on Climate Change to assess whether they are in line with the Paris agreement.



People queue outside Friends House in London to hear Thunberg speak. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Caroline Lucas, the Green party MP, said the current wave of climate action on the streets and the school strikes gave her hope. “There is more political leadership there and here than I have seen in Westminster. It feels like a turning point in the history of how we defend our planet,” she said.

“Young people are calling out against a system that is sadly broken ... We are going to change the definition of what is politically possible so that it is what is

scientifically necessary.”

The discussion ranged from veganism and avoiding flying to political change throughout society. Thunberg said everything was necessary, though she put the focus on challenging the companies and governments that are responsible for the bulk of emissions.

How to deal with with people in power was a frequent subject of questions to the panel. Thunberg said her autism helped her filter out much of the greenwashing.



The panel at the event also included the Green party MP, Caroline Lucas, right. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

“We are more likely to see through lies. We don’t follow the stream. You can’t be a little bit sustainable – either you are sustainable or you are not,” she said.

There were occasional moments of levity. At one point, Thunberg was asked how she dealt with climate deniers. “I don’t,” she replied.

Thunberg’s earlier point was reiterated by Anna Taylor from the UK Student Climate Network. “We are not going to be satisfied by politicians saying ‘we support you’ and then walking away,” she said.

“We won’t be satisfied until they meet our demands and act. That’s why simply taking a selfie or posting support on Twitter isn’t enough. That’s why we have to keep striking.”

For all the talk of politics and protest, however, some of the most poignant and pertinent questions came from the youngest children. One asked: “If pollution continues, how much time have we got left?” Another wanted to know: “Can we achieve our goal in the time we have?”

Thunberg, in response, was reassuring but measured: “Of course we can, it’s physically possible, the scientists say. It’s up to us. If we do this now then of course we will. But if we don’t, we might not do it. But yes, definitely we can.”

'You did not act in time': Greta Thunberg's full speech to MPs

Read the full text of the speech Greta Thunberg gave to MPs at the Houses of Parliament

Greta Thunberg

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Greta Thunberg tells MPs: 'Our future was sold' – video

My name is **Greta Thunberg**. I am 16 years old. I come from Sweden. And I speak on behalf of future generations.

I know many of you don't want to listen to us – you say we are just children. But we're only **repeating the message** of the united climate science.

Many of you appear concerned that we are wasting valuable lesson time, but I assure you we will go back to school the moment you start listening to science and give us a future. Is that really too much to ask?

In the year 2030 I will be 26 years old. My little sister Beata will be 23. Just like many of your own children or grandchildren. That is a great age, we have been told. When you have all of your life ahead of you. But I am not so sure it will be that great for us.

I was fortunate to be born in a time and place where everyone told us to dream big; I could become whatever I wanted to. I could live wherever I wanted to. People like me had everything we needed and more. Things our grandparents could not even dream of. We had everything we could ever wish for and yet now we may have nothing.

Now we probably don't even have a future any more.

Because that future was sold so that a small number of people could make unimaginable amounts of money. It was stolen from us every time you said that the sky was the limit, and that you only live once.

You lied to us. You gave us false hope. You told us that the future was something to look forward to. And the saddest thing is that most children are not even aware of the fate that awaits us. We will not understand it until it's too late. And yet we are the lucky ones. Those who will be affected the hardest are already suffering the consequences. But their voices are not heard.

Is my microphone on? Can you hear me?

Around the year 2030, 10 years 252 days and 10 hours away from now, we will be in a position where we set off an irreversible chain reaction beyond human control, that will most likely lead to the end of our civilisation as we know it. That is unless in that time, permanent and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society have taken place, including a

reduction of CO₂ emissions by at least 50%.

And please note that these calculations are depending on inventions that have not yet been invented at scale, inventions that are supposed to clear the atmosphere of astronomical amounts of carbon dioxide.

Furthermore, these calculations do not include unforeseen tipping points and feedback loops like the extremely powerful methane gas escaping from rapidly thawing arctic permafrost.

Nor do these scientific calculations include already locked-in warming hidden by toxic air pollution. Nor the aspect of equity – or climate justice – clearly stated throughout the Paris agreement, which is absolutely necessary to make it work on a global scale.

We must also bear in mind that these are just calculations. Estimations. That means that these “points of no return” may occur a bit sooner or later than 2030. No one can know for sure. We can, however, be certain that they will occur approximately in these timeframes, because these calculations are not opinions or wild guesses.

These projections are backed up by scientific facts, concluded by all nations through the IPCC. Nearly every single major national scientific body around the world unreservedly supports the work and findings of the IPCC.

Did you hear what I just said? Is my English OK? Is the microphone on? Because I'm beginning to wonder.

During the last six months I have travelled around Europe for hundreds of hours in trains, electric cars and buses, repeating these life-changing words over and over again. But no one seems to be talking about it, and nothing has changed. In fact, the emissions are still rising.

When I have been travelling around to speak in different countries, I am always offered help to write about the specific climate policies in specific countries. But that is not really necessary. Because the basic problem is the same everywhere. And the basic problem is that basically nothing is being done to halt – or even slow – climate and ecological breakdown, despite all the beautiful words and promises.

The UK is, however, very special. Not only for its mind-blowing historical carbon debt, but also for its current, very creative, carbon accounting.

Since 1990 the UK has achieved a 37% reduction of its territorial CO₂ emissions, according to the Global Carbon Project. And that does sound very impressive. But these numbers do not include emissions from aviation, shipping and those associated with imports and exports. If these numbers are included the reduction is around 10% since 1990 – or an average of 0.4% a year, according to Tyndall Manchester.

And the main reason for this reduction is not a consequence of climate policies, but rather a 2001 EU directive on air quality that essentially forced the UK to close down its very old and extremely dirty coal power plants and replace them with less dirty gas power stations. And switching from one disastrous energy source to a slightly less disastrous one will of course result in a lowering of emissions.

But perhaps the most dangerous misconception about the climate crisis is that we have to “lower” our emissions. Because that is far from enough. Our emissions have to stop if we are to stay below 1.5-2C of warming. The “lowering of emissions” is of course necessary but it is only the beginning of a fast process that must lead to a stop within a couple of decades, or less. And by “stop” I mean net zero – and then quickly on to negative figures. That rules out most of today's politics.

The fact that we are speaking of “lowering” instead of “stopping” emissions is perhaps the greatest force behind the continuing business as usual. The UK's active current support of new exploitation of fossil fuels – for example, the UK shale gas fracking industry, the expansion of its North Sea oil and gas fields, the expansion of airports as well as the planning permission for a brand new coal mine – is beyond absurd.

This ongoing irresponsible behaviour will no doubt be remembered in history as one of the greatest failures of humankind.

People always tell me and the other millions of school strikers that we should be proud of ourselves for what we have accomplished. But the only thing that we need to look at is the emission curve. And I'm sorry, but it's still rising. That curve is the only thing we should look at.

Every time we make a decision we should ask ourselves; how will this decision affect that curve? We should no longer measure our wealth and success in the graph that shows economic growth, but in the curve that shows the emissions of

greenhouse gases. We should no longer only ask: “Have we got enough money to go through with this?” but also: “Have we got enough of the carbon budget to spare to go through with this?” That should and must become the centre of our new currency.

Many people say that we don’t have any solutions to the climate crisis. And they are right. Because how could we? How do you “solve” the greatest crisis that humanity has ever faced? How do you “solve” a war? How do you “solve” going to the moon for the first time? How do you “solve” inventing new inventions?

The climate crisis is both the easiest and the hardest issue we have ever faced. The easiest because we know what we must do. We must stop the emissions of greenhouse gases. The hardest because our current economics are still totally dependent on burning fossil fuels, and thereby destroying ecosystems in order to create everlasting economic growth.

“So, exactly how do we solve that?” you ask us – the schoolchildren striking for the climate.

And we say: “No one knows for sure. But we have to stop burning fossil fuels and restore nature and many other things that we may not have quite figured out yet.”

Then you say: “That’s not an answer!”

So we say: “We have to start treating the crisis like a crisis – and act even if we don’t have all the solutions.”

“That’s still not an answer,” you say.

Then we start talking about circular economy and rewilding nature and the need for a just transition. Then you don’t understand what we are talking about.

We say that all those solutions needed are not known to anyone and therefore we must unite behind the science and find them together along the way. But you do not listen to that. Because those answers are for solving a crisis that most of you don’t even fully understand. Or don’t want to understand.

You don’t listen to the science because you are only interested in solutions that will enable you to carry on like before. Like now. And those answers don’t exist any more. Because you did not act in time.

Avoiding climate breakdown will require cathedral thinking. We must lay the foundation while we may not know exactly how to build the ceiling.

Sometimes we just simply have to find a way. The moment we decide to fulfil something, we can do anything. And I’m sure that the moment we start behaving as if we were in an emergency, we can avoid climate and ecological catastrophe. Humans are very adaptable: we can still fix this. But the opportunity to do so will not last for long. We must start today. We have no more excuses.

We children are not sacrificing our education and our childhood for you to tell us what you consider is politically possible in the society that you have created. We have not taken to the streets for you to take selfies with us, and tell us that you really admire what we do.

We children are doing this to wake the adults up. We children are doing this for you to put your differences aside and start acting as you would in a crisis. We children are doing this because we want our hopes and dreams back.

I hope my microphone was on. I hope you could all hear me.

Greta Thunberg condemns UK's climate stance in speech to MPs

Teenager who sparked global youth movement hits out at airport expansion and support for fossil fuels

‘You did not act in time’ – Thunberg’s full speech

Damian Carrington and Peter Walker

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A name plate marks a place for the absent prime minister as Caroline Lucas and Jeremy Corbyn meet Greta Thunberg. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

The UK government's active support for fossil fuels and airport expansion is "beyond absurd", **Greta Thunberg** has told MPs.

The 16-year-old Swedish student, who sparked a global youth-based movement when she began a "climate strike" outside Sweden's parliament last year, gave a typically blunt speech. She told MPs: "This ongoing irresponsible behaviour will no doubt be remembered in history as one of the greatest failures of humankind."

Thunberg, who had earlier met the heads of several of the UK's political parties, also said today's generation of leaders around the world had not acted fast enough to halt climate change. "You lied to us. You gave us false hope. You told us that the future was something to look forward to," she said. "You don't listen to the science because you are only interested in solutions that will enable you to carry on like before."

Some consider the UK to be a leader in the fight against global warming, but Thunberg was fierce in her criticism: "The UK's active current support of new exploitation of fossil fuels, like for example the UK shale gas fracking industry, the expansion of its North Sea oil and gas fields, the expansion of airports, as well as the planning permission for a **brand new coalmine**, is beyond absurd."

She said the UK had a "mind-blowing historical carbon debt", referring to the nation's cumulative emissions since the industrial revolution. The UK government also uses "very creative carbon accounting", she said, by not including the emissions from imported goods in headline figures. The former UN chief Ban Ki-Moon also recently criticised the **UK government's funding of fossil fuel projects** in other countries.

Thunberg said there was still just about time to stop climate change: "I'm sure that the moment we start behaving as if we were in an emergency, we can avoid climate and ecological catastrophe. Humans are very adaptable. But the opportunity to do so will not last for long."

She said the deciding factor for every new economic development must be the level of carbon emissions it will produce. "Every time we make a decision we should ask ourselves; how will this decision affect that [emissions] curve?"

About 1.6 million students are estimated to have skipped school to protest against climate inaction, prompting some criticism over lost education. Thunberg said: "I assure you we will go back to school the moment you start listening to science and give us a future. Is that really too much to ask?"

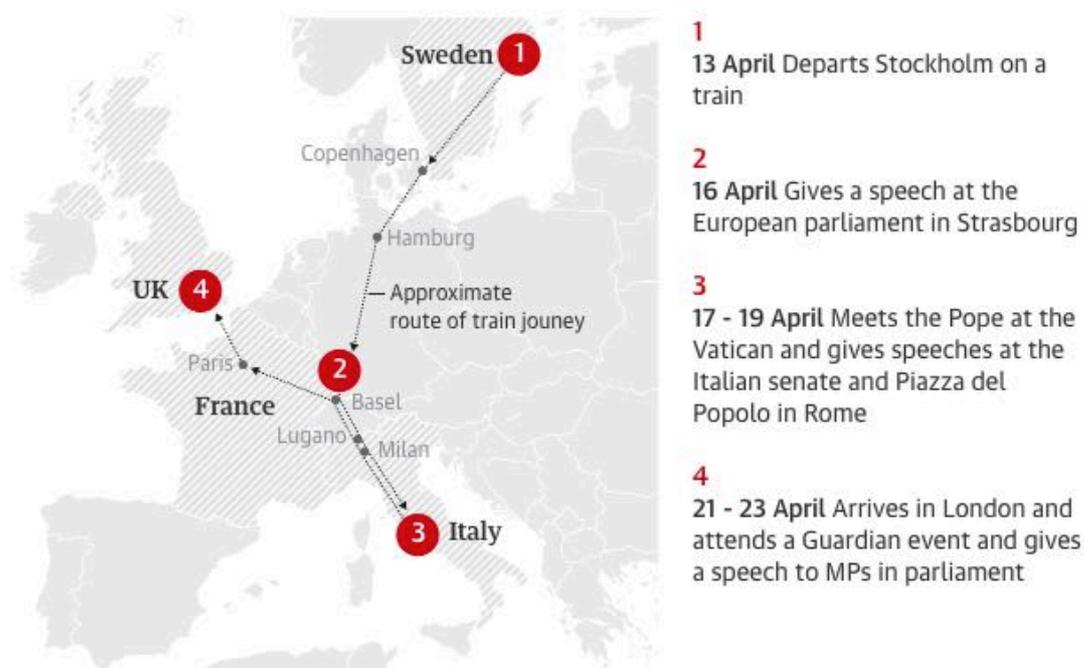
Earlier on Tuesday, **Jeremy Corbyn** and several other Westminster party leaders met Thunberg at parliament, with a symbolic place left at the table for the absent Theresa May.

Thunberg, who came to London to speak at the Extinction Rebellion environmental protests, and was due to address activists at Parliament Square later on Tuesday, met Corbyn, the Liberal Democrat leader, Vince Cable, the Green MP

Caroline Lucas and the Westminster leaders of the SNP and Plaid Cymru, Ian Blackford and Liz Saville Roberts.

May was chairing cabinet on Tuesday morning. Her spokesman said he did not have information about whether the prime minister had been invited to see Thunberg.

Organisers of the event said May had been invited, but there had been no response. A place at the table was left empty, with the prime minister's name.



Guardian graphic

Thunberg told the MPs: "We just want people to listen to the science." Corbyn told her: "Well done for what you have done."

Lucas, the former Green leader who is the party's sole MP, told the activist: "I think all of us are really committed to trying to ensure that there's an ongoing way to really make sure that all of our policies and all of our work in parliament is properly scrutinised by young people with a perspective on climate in particular.

"We want young people's voices to be heard in parliament. This is such an important moment, when the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change say we have just 11 years left to get off the collision course we are on for climate catastrophe.

"That sense of urgency is here as never before, at a time when there have been protests on the streets not just of London but around the country and all the different nations of the UK. More than ever, politicians have our ears open to your message."

While in parliament Thunberg also met the Commons Speaker, John Bercow, as well as the former Labour leader Ed Miliband and the Lib Dem MP Layla Moran.

Outside on Parliament Square, more demonstrators supporting the Extinction Rebellion group were massing, **with police warning they risked arrest** if they did not remain in a certain area and the protest continued after midnight.

More than 1,000 people have been arrested amid sit-in protests in London over the past week, which blocked Parliament Square, Oxford Circus and Waterloo Bridge. Activists are still at Marble Arch. More than 10,000 police were deployed to contain and then break up the protests.