Student climate strikes

# Introduction

Today is Friday the fifteenth of March and the student strikes, supposedly “for the climate” or “for ecology”, known as Fridays for Future, have arrived here in Prague. Although there were comments both praising and condemning (*Edit 5.4.19: Now a good many of them – I do realize this is not breaking news – but if the protesters cling to their élan and their demands, we might see a continuation.*), some of my classmates are participating right now, hence my belief that my opinion as a pro-eco and urban, yet critical of the strike student can be relevant and moderately interesting. In no way would I desire to question the right of anyone to proceed with a nonviolent form of protest; that right is sacred to anyone respecting the people and their liberties.

First things first – one may ask, what is the issue about? Let’s start from the beginning. In our corner of the world, the weather has taken the mainstream by surprise with some quite unusual mood swings and even extreme forms of the anticipated ones. Despite the droughts and heat waves in early spring, not all of them can be easily attributed to global warming, such as the new kind of winter *acclimatizing* itself in Europe – freezing, but dry, snowless. Yet still, the global climate change, be it manmade or not, is becoming more palpable daily. After all, it is not that startling that the generation most likely to be hit with the full-scale disturbance coming has taken to the streets. It all started in the much-adored West, where students from Belgium are some of the most dutiful in regular, ecology-concerned strikes. From there, it spread to most European capitals as well as certain American metropoleis, only to turn up in Prague today. Notwithstanding, the question persists – is this the “right way” to preserve our beloved planet?

# Strike?

Before I get criticized unjustly, I have to say that I am very much pro-ecology. Nonetheless, I still feel that I have to take issue with these strikes even despite being a student deeply interested in ecology. Let me explain why. The most *striking* problem I perceive is the manner. In fact, I believe the principle of student strikes is improper. To proceed, I think I need to clarify the point of strikes themselves. In a way, they have been around since time immemorial, but due to their nature, they compel us to be treated as a measure of last resort. When striking, one shows how important they are and why exactly their opinion has to be *well, not just heard, but also* listened to, by not contributing to the general well-being and delineating their demands instead. With students, the situation is completely different; they reject something that is provided to them (by the state, their parents or both). They are bound to fall short of their target due to multiple reasons. First, they do not show their importance to society in any way, therefore the desired leverage on the majority or the state is close to none at all. Second, they spurn the effort put into them by not going to school, which is catered to them, therefore wasting resources gathered by the society. Disrespecting the general public is no adequate path to win the favour of said public or politicians. Some people I discussed the issue with argued for the substantial weight added by taking the risk, that is, gambling their comfort and future to demonstrate how much they care about the planet. But unless they get the bad blood boiled in pretty much everyone, there is virtually nothing at risk for them and this move is more likely for them to be seen as privileged brats, because right now almost everyone except the ruling few recognizes the environmental threat. The solution is obvious – there is no need for strikes, because inspiring the silent majority to take up the arms, too, against the small group of individuals disregarding the common future of us all, can not be done by antagonizing the society. Therefore, what I propose is softening the protests from strikes to demonstrations after school and including more information sharing as a better form of activism. *Edit 5.4.19: Obstructing the public transport in the city centre didn’t prove that helpful too. Despite everything, the reactions here in Prague have remained largely positive.*

# But you destroyed our future!

Besides the strike character of the protests, there are several other problems as well. For me, the second most resented thing about the strikes is the rhetoric. “Our parents, or broadly the generation of our parents, are destroying our future.” Are they, though? Bar some lunatics, nobody elects (well, apparently except for the elections) their children’s prospect be impaired, much less crushed. I don’t feel that we should affront the previous generation about supposedly sabotaging our future, most of all because the majority of them didn’t do so, and even if they did, I am certain it was far from willingly. This is exceptionally true for post-communist countries such as the Czech Republic, where just the slightest bit of population actually participated on any decision making, and even out of that tiny bit, mere tens of people did partake on determining the extreme abuse of nature. Furthermore, I refuse to believe that the people opted for destruction with reason and informed choice rather than out of nescience. Yes, we can all agree that there are significant differences and misunderstanding between our generation and those before us, but instead of contrasting ourselves from them, which inevitably leads to conflict and general harm, we should strive to overcome the deepening trenches. When problems such as these arise, the task of our self-proclaimed environment-conscious generation would be to teach our parents and grandparents how to help slow down the climate change together. Of course that also includes putting joint leverage on irresponsible politicians, because the general approach towards the environment and eco-concerned habits have changed quite drastically already. From all perspectives that I can think of, picking up aggressive rhetoric benefits nothing.

# Fighting ignorance with ignorance

Addressing the last concern besides efficiency, I gather that the primary problem to be tackled is lack of awareness and outright ignorance, which is obviously no closer to being diminished, much less solved by this kind of protests. What I see daily is a good amount of people who correctly feel that something needs to be changed and who are willing to go protesting, yet fail to even attempt a deeper understanding of the topic in question. Moreover, I see the deprecated ignorance (the root of evil in my opinion) in some of the protesters. Which in turn leads me to two major points. Firstly, an overly active moron is worse than almost everything. When you lack basic knowledge in the field you want to influence, you can be fooled with extraordinary ease. In other words, the demands to rise from the protesters are far from guaranteed to be sane or to improve anything. Take the Czech Republic and the pensions reform. Everyone sees the problem, everyone is dissatisfied with the current situation, yet no solution is in sight because people do not bother enough to understand even the basics. Any actual experts in the field are then not being heard in the cacophony of misleading, but more appealing “solutions” (*Sounds good, doesn’t work* to quote a significant someone). One could possibly counter with the principle of democracy, that is delegating things you do not understand or things you are not fit to decide to people you trust to be competent in their respective fields. I would then say, well, this is of course right and I fully respect it, but I am talking about the mindset where people do not even bother checking who might be competent, of which there are some easily recognizable markers (such as schools or previous experience). Secondly, I am afraid I have to disagree with the “target audience” of students. Multiple factors such as lack of experience, lack of knowledge, proneness to activism, idealism and an inclination to rebel against the previous generations all the while seeking guidance from an authority of sorts make students more gullible as well as more likely to swallow some bait. It is a matter of general distrust in both the ability and the motivation of students to “make the right choice”. I do not even trust myself from two years ago to make a sensible decision, and that is not for a lack of diligence or responsibility, both of which are not your typical teenager attributes. With motivation, a teenager usually only feel duty towards himself, while adults mostly also bear the responsibility for their children’s future. Therefore, I believe parents have both more experience and a stronger motivation to make a properly informed choice than students.

# Summary

To conclude, I do not wish to discuss the efficiency of street protests or strikes altogether, because this varies greatly between individual countries (for example in France, it is basically a part of the culture and there is next to no room for any alternative, *thanks de Gaulle*). Instead, I want to instill a seed of doubt about the idea itself and the common characteristics of it. In my opinion, there are actually two roots of the problem: the strike character and ignorance. Striking is objectionable for students, because it disrespects the rest of society instead of promoting activity, the aggressive rhetoric likewise. Besides, it does nothing to suppress or combat ignorance, which might even spread thanks to easier manipulation of students and the panic aura surrounding the climate change (even though a degree of panic might be in place). And one last thing before I write my last period, please keep in mind that I am writing this as a privileged, environmentally aware urban student. Thank you for reading.

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