

Manifest



“If a few children can get headlines all over the world just by not going to school, then imagine what we could all do together if we really wanted to.”

GRETA THUNBERG

Switzerland. Germany. Italy. Canada. Sweden. The Netherlands. The United States of America. It is not solely in Belgium that the status quo is challenged by an entire generation that takes to the streets in order to reclaim the future. We find ourselves at the very beginnings of a paradigm shift, inspired by the words and deeds of a Swedish teenager, Greta Thunberg, who inspired us to face the old institutions and fight for a new and sustainable way of life.

We, as students, are part of the so-called Climate Generation.

The will for change, driven by passion and energy, has pushed our cause forward at incredible speed - and colleges and universities worldwide is the next step. Our manifesto lists the fundamental changes we demand of our collective governments. Action must be taken, sooner rather than later.

TREATING A CRISIS LIKE A CRISIS

The facts surrounding climate change have now been known for a while. The industrial revolution brought with it an unparalleled demand for fossil fuels, with the vast majority of it released into our atmosphere at exponential rates. These have the unfortunate consequence of polluting our world, and causing drastic changes in the delicate balance of our ecosystems. Tropical storms and floods, the acidification of our oceans, and the rising sea-levels are but a few of the facts we will have to face, merely a few decades from now - unless we act with both passion, and vigour.

Make no mistake, the road ahead will be a bumpy one, but it is through civil initiatives such as this one that hope shines through. We're seeing positive action on reducing plastic waste, cleaning up the oceans, ecological city gardens, and renewable energy. Numerous other initiatives exist, and bring out the best humankind has to offer.

And despite the clear willingness of the people to tackle the issue of climate change, we note a certain lack of.. ambition on the political side of affairs. Meanwhile, the threat of inaction is becoming increasingly apparent, more so than ever in the last few years.

While individual action is a clear requirement to a sustainable world, it is far from being the sole condition. Nearly 90% of worldwide greenhouse gas emissions originate from industries such as the transportation industry, the agricultural industry, and the energy industry. Our society's dependence on fossil fuels plays a major role in the wider picture, and we strongly believe it is our fundamental right to strive for a future that brings with it the promise of a safe and natural environment. This future depends on our ability to steer our society away from fossil fuels, and make a radical ecological turn in the way our economy functions.

The Climate question thus reaches far beyond individual behaviour: the issue is political in nature, one could argue the most important one we, as a species, have ever faced. And since politicians are not willing to act on their own behalf for a cause that is shared by all, we have decided to take it upon itself to show them that it does matter. Our federal government's reaction to the first day of skipping school was unsatisfactory: the idea of "climate coaches" and a website that does nothing but promote individual message is but an indication of the lack of ambition that exists on the political level.

The time for greenwashing and other symbolical measures that serve no purpose but to calm the people, is over. More audacity and creativity are needed.

The Climate Generation will not stand witness anymore, and will endure up until the creation of a real climate law, with an effective plan to transition to a carbon-neutral economy.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

The first time the United Nations brought all world leaders together to tackle the climate issues was in Rio De Janeiro in 1992. Most students were not even born then. That's the amount of time already wasted without serious action taking place. The ones who did take initiative were the member scientists of the International Panel on Climate Change, which was founded by the United Nations following the gathering. Governments can fall back on an enormous amount of scientific knowledge and guidelines in order to come up with an ambitious climate plan.

To achieve this, we however need a radical change in the stance of our political leaders. Whoever keeps on acting based on what is 'politically realistic', instead of what is needed to maintain our living environment, is part of the problem, not of the solution. Climate law needs to be prioritised above other laws. Furthermore, it needs to be ambitious. The last reports of the IPCC should be the starting point. The temperature change from climate change needs to be held at a maximum of 1,5 degrees celsius, and for this to happen, the world needs to be climate neutral by 2050 at the latest. This means that the next ten years are absolutely crucial in terms of reducing our emission. By 2030, our emission of greenhouse gases need to be halved, at the very least. This is non-negotiable, given the fact that literally millions of lives are at stake.

A commonly argument used to justify the inexistence of policy regarding climate, is the lack of technology to make the ecological transition. This argument does not hold. First of all, most essential techniques for sustainable energy creation and storage, green agriculture and industry, building isolation, and sustainable transportation have existed for a long time. Furthermore, the innovative fine tuning and perfected real-world application of these techniques will not happen until they're made priority. This represents the democratic assignment and duty the government has in regards to its people.

CLIMATE JUSTICE IS SOCIAL JUSTICE

It is clear that global warming is a political priority that has to be solved. What is equally clear is that the wake of our generation will grow up until real solutions are put into practice. Sure, we are well aware that the climate problem coexist with other conflicts, crisis and injustices in our society. Society as a whole is not yet actively involved in the climate movement. But if we want drastic change, we need everyone to participate. Ecological and social realities are intertwined with one another. Policies which increase social inequalities are acting like a break on climate transition. Climate justice and social justice are two sides of the same coin.

Although the climate concerns everyone, not everyone is equally responsible, and not everyone feels the consequences in the same ways. The 10% richest people on earth are responsible for more than half of world's emissions. The climatic excesses that go hand in hand with climate change affect the southern countries much more than industrialized countries, who have the largest historical responsibility. An ambitious climate policy has to consider the elimination of these inequalities with regards to its objectives. It not the many that have to pay for the greed of the few. The financial burden of ambitious climate policy cannot be put entirely on the middle class' shoulders.

The idea that a policy that guarantees a transition to a sustainable world has to be carried through by the application of antisocial tax measures is part of the past. Current taxation measures not only have the consequence of further critically endangering our world's fragile ecosystems, they also continue enabling the ones most responsible for the problem financially, creating the false perception that ambitious climate policy comes at a high cost. Instead of that, measures that improve the general social well-being, such as free public transportation and renewable energies have to be made affordable.

OUR DEMANDS

1. Urgent measures allowing for a CO₂-neutral Belgium by 2050. Our greenhouse gas emissions need to decrease by at least 10 percent in the short term. Take notice of the advice of the climate researchers who have been pleading for urgent action, and work together with them to work towards a sustainable future.
1. Belgium has four climate ministers, but no climate policy. CO₂ does not stop at the language border. We demand one climate minister who has the legal responsibility to tackle climate issues.
1. Transitioning to a CO₂-neutral Belgium needs to be socially fair. We demand of the government that it takes its responsibility seriously, and avoids having regular citizens carry all the burden towards transitioning to a sustainable society. We say yes to social measures such as affordable public transport and renewable energy, but we say no to unfair taxation pushed onto regular citizens.
1. Involve younger generations in climate policy. We demand that we have a say in what our future looks like.
1. We ask for solidarity towards countries affected by climate change. From the North to the West, and the East to the South: This problem is global, and requires global cooperation and support. Belgium needs not only to lead, but to stand as an example towards others as well.

THE REAL POWER IS TO THE PEOPLE

Our manifesto and demands are addressed to decision makers. They have the role to do what is expected of them: to serve the population. We will not share in false pretense and action anymore. The dynamics and energy needed to finally treat the climate issue seriously will not suddenly appear after decades of stagnation. Our student movement is one that belongs to the people, where pupils and other citizens can put political leaders under pressure to make changes.

We will make it clear that we are not to be ignored anymore.