

Green Party co-leader Jonathan Bartley's speech at Autumn Conference, Newport, 2019



Green Party

4 October 2019

I want to start by saying thank you.

You know, we don't hear it often enough.

Thank you to all the leaflet deliverers and the door knockers.

The activists and councillors.

The food preparers and the motion writers (well most of them).

The committee members and working groups.

The staff and volunteers.

You are the backbone of our party, and we couldn't do it without each and every one of you.

And I want to say a special thanks to Sian who is giving a speech on Sunday, focusing on getting London's first Green Mayor.

Sian your commitment, your passion, your determination is inspirational and it has been a pleasure to work with you this last year.

What a year it's been!

And what a year it's been!

I was in Brussels three weeks ago meeting with the leaders of other European Green Parties.

A Green Wave is sweeping the continent, and we are surfing it across England and Wales.

Truly, this has been one of the most extraordinary years in our Party's history.

At the beginning of May, we more than doubled our Councillors.

A few weeks later, we more than doubled our MEPs.

And we've increased our presence in Parliament with Natalie joining Jenny in the House of Lords

(The urge to bow in her presence will be even harder to resist!)

And we've just hit an incredible milestone.

Last week we gained our fifty thousandth member of the Green Party.

And in November, Carla Denyer passed the country's first climate emergency motion.

Now over half of the UK's principal local authorities have done the same. Making it one of the fastest growing environmental movements in history.

From our new Young Green chairs – Rosie and Thomas – to Caroline Lucas holding the Government to account every single day in Parliament, the message is clear.

The oceans are rising but so are we.

The spark of dissent against climate breakdown was lit many years ago.

By activists struggling against oil extraction in the global south

By campaigners here in Britain camping outside power stations.

By Green politicians saying the unsayable – that an economy built on fossil fuels has catastrophic implications.

And that spark has become a wildfire of revolt.

With extinction rebellion taking the streets, youth strikers walking out of school – and yes more Green Politicians being elected than ever before.

Just look at the numbers of people taking climate action and forcing governments to sit up and take notice.

Six Million on the global climate strike.

100,000 on the streets of London.

Over 200 different strikes across the UK.

And the vast, vast majority of people saying our Government isn't doing enough.

We are here to be the megaphone of that movement

To give those people a political voice

And turn those demands into action.

And by making the climate crisis a political imperative, we're defining the issue of our times.

Showing the way ahead for Governments all over the world.

But what of this Government?

While the planet burns, it fans the flames of hatred.

Bile, bitterness and division.

I am ashamed of what our country is becoming.

But this isn't just about Brexit.

This is the death rattle of an old order.

We are seeing the break up of the political system.

The breaking apart of the economic system.

The breakdown of our life support system.

We've been saying it was coming for years. And now it's here.

And the question for us is how we will respond.

The answer to me seems clear.

Now is the time for complete transformation of everything.

You know when I was born – 40 something years ago – we were given a dream.

A vision of the future, where we would create unprecedented wealth.

Technology and automation would mean we could spend more time with our family and friends.

Where we would discover that endless supply of energy that was the stuff of science fiction.

Well fast forward 40 years and we have created untold riches.

Technology has revolutionised everything.

And we have discovered how to harness the wind, the sun and the tides.

But instead of that vision we were promised, we work longer hours, the wealth is held by the super-rich while 14 million live in poverty and climate

breakdown threatens our very existence.

No wonder people are angry and want change.

Because it is the same failing system that has shut people out from power that has brought us to the brink of environmental catastrophe.

The same system that has gutted our NHS and polluted our air.

Given us foodbanks while choking our oceans with plastic.

Closed borders while creating climate refugees.

Left people feeling helpless in a world that is out of control.

Everything needs to change.

And only the Green Party acknowledges the scale of the challenge and the magnitude of the action that must be taken.

The imperative to fight not only the threat of Brexit but the conditions that have brought us Brexit.

With a general election looming, a vote for the Green Party is the most powerful vote you can cast.

We will fight to Remain in Europe, yes, but we will also fight to transform Britain

Democracy

But the Prime Minister is still careering us towards a crash out Brexit, and he's willing to tear down democracy to do it.

And when caught manipulating the constitution, what does he do?

He laughs at justice and pretends he is on the side of the people.

Was Cambridge Analytica on the side of the people? (no)

Are Dominic Cummings and Jacob Rees Mogg on the side of the people? (no)

Are politicians who lie about money for the NHS and then pursue a destructive Brexit that would destroy lives on the side of the people? (no)

If they were, they wouldn't try to play people like pawns in a game.

If they were on the side of the people they would trust the people and give them a people's vote.

The New Authoritarianism

But the mask is slipping as these politicians desperately cling onto power.

They know they that the system has had its day.

But their swan song is a nasty tune.

An authoritarian anthem – whose sheet music is the divide and rule script.

And we must resist it with every fibre in our being.

The political classes won't say it. So we will.

Learn the lessons of history.

When you see the scapegoating of disabled people. Of migrants. Of those on benefits.

Injunctions against protesters.

Surveillance deployed against everyone.

Indefinite detention.

The accusation that judges are enemies of the people.

The denial of science.

Racism and sexism not just being normalised, but espoused by leaders.

We cannot stay silent.

We cannot compromise and we must say with one voice, "no more".

And it must also involve action.

The way to take on the new authoritarianism. The path to unite our country. The route to transformation of our economy, must be a radical shift of power.

And we would rebuild a democracy fit for the 21st Century.

Just imagine what 160 local authorities who have passed climate emergency motions could do with real power.

We'd give it to them.

Increasing corporation tax to fair levels to reversing cuts to local authority budgets so they can and become the engines of a Green New Deal.

Real power to ban fracking, issue green investment bonds, renew infrastructure with low carbon alternatives, create renewable energy, build new council housing and insulate old homes, support green local businesses and run local transport.

Participatory democracy, allowing residents to form panels and citizens

assemblies to directly input into decision making.

That's what taking back control looks like.

And we'd bring transformation at the national level too.

A fossil-free politics, liberated from vested interests.

A constitutional convention.

A bill of rights and a written constitution

Proportional representation.

An elected second chamber.

And we'd abolish the Home Office.

Because transformation of our country demands a system that is truly representative and fair to everyone.

And that's why we aren't taking a revoke Article 50 position.

We may disagree with those on the other side of the debate over Europe.

We may disagree with the corruption of the referendum.

But that is not a reason to ignore and sideline those who voted to leave.

We have always said that the referendum must be the start, not the end, of a democratic process.

If we want to stay in Europe we must win the argument on Europe.

And we say to Labour this. Yes we are glad that you have, finally, signed up to a People's Vote. We wish you had done it sooner.

But it's not enough.

Don't agree to end free movement. Don't acquiesce to pulling up the drawbridge. Don't accept that we should all be left poorer.

We need a cast iron guarantee that you'd fight for Britain to remain.

Future generations (present generations)

We'll have a better future if we remain in Europe.

Our young people know it.

They know it is only by working together we can address the climate emergency.

While politicians have buried their heads in the sand and denied the truth, they have taken to the streets to call for climate justice.

Young people. The ones truly shut out of politics. The ones having their future stolen from them, are showing what leadership looks like.

Isn't it troubling when a 10-year-old has to take time out of their day to remind us of our responsibilities?

Young people are informed. Young people are organised. Young people must be heard.

So today I am setting out how the Greens would give young people real power.

Not just votes at 16 for Parliament but the right to stand for Parliament.

A Future Generations Act which would require the needs of young people to be taken into account before every Government decision.

A minister for future generations to represent young people at the heart of Government.

A young person's select committee, made up of representatives from the Youth Parliament, with the power to scrutinise and hold the Government to account.

And until we get reform of our electoral system and the House of Lords, we'd appoint young people to the Second Chamber of Parliament too so they can vote and initiate legislation.

Our future leaders should be given the power to lead right now.

The climate emergency

When a country faces an existential threat it moves onto a war footing.

And that is what we must do.

Hanging above everything else is the climate emergency, threatening our very survival.

The survival of our species.

The greatest challenge in modern history.

Extreme weather events are breaking records. People are dying in floods and heatwaves. Crops are failing, sea levels are rising, the Sixth Extinction is gripping the globe.

And the impacts are not evenly felt. The poorest are hit hardest. Those who contributed least to the climate crisis are suffering already for the gas

guzzling governments and corporations who contributed the most.

That's just where we are now. At a point eight degree rise above pre-industrial levels.

Imagine what 3 degrees looks like, or six.

Or runaway climate breakdown.

It is time to stop denying the truth and let the truth have its day.

Business as usual is not an option.

We have just ten years to complete what needs to be done.

And we cannot continue on with the same path and with the same thinking that has brought us to the brink of disaster.

The Green New Deal

We need a ten-year mobilisation to get to net zero by 2030.

So today we are setting out a green vision for wholesale, urgent transformation – of agriculture, of transport, of industry of energy, the very way we live and work.

For too long, Governments have pursued GDP in the mistaken belief that a rising tide floats all boats.

But those without boats have been drowning. Sucked down by a whirlpool of poverty, worsening air quality, chronic mental health and ecological destruction.

And that tide is set to drown us all.

So we'd put the Climate Chancellor into Downing Street.

Make the Treasury a Ministry of Transformation.

Carbon budgets at the top of the agenda. The environment as the bottom line.

All spending and decision-making determined by the health of our natural world and the wellbeing of people.

Green New Deal for Work

And that chancellor would drive forward the Green New Deal.

The biggest release of investment to local communities and local businesses

that the country has ever seen.

A massive investment in green technology

Decarbonizing the economy and creating millions of green jobs.

But let me explain what I mean by 'Green Jobs'. Yes it means people in hard hats installing solar.

It means factories manufacturing green tech.

But green jobs also means an army of carers, teachers, artists, nurses, and youth workers. Jobs that are high value and low carbon.

And they must be the backbone of a British economy that prioritises human needs over corporate greed.

Powered by empathy and kindness as much as solar and wind.

So we'd close the Government's arms export agency and end all subsidies for the UK arms industry.

War, misery and suffering would no longer be among Britain's exports to the world.

We'd scrap plans for a new generation of nuclear weapons too and instead put an extra £6bn a year into the NHS.

It would mean the closure of all detention centres, halving our prison population, and the excluded jobs they can build a life on.

Transforming our education system, abolishing SATS and league tables. Young people no longer treated as economic units to compete in a global marketplace. Equipped instead with the confidence, skills and knowledge to meet the challenges of the rapidly changing world around them.

Unleashing a new wave of creativity and innovation by giving small businesses access to lending at affordable rates, through Community Banks.

Structuring work to meet the reality of an increasingly automated world. Reducing the working week.

And to give everyone safety and opportunity in the new green economy we'd scrap universal credit, ditch benefit sanctions and enrich everyone with a Universal Basic Income.

Green New Deal for Transport

And conference the Green New Deal means a green transport revolution too.

The slash and burn of HS2 must be halted in its tracks.

We cannot allow this assault and destruction of over 100 ancient woodlands, and the loss of invaluable biodiversity.

We'd spend that £70bn on new local transport infrastructure for every local community. Electrification of rail, new lines and buses.

And we'd scrap the Government's road building programme, and use Vehicle Excise Duty to deliver free bus travel for everyone right across the country.

The biggest travel upgrade this country has ever seen.

Giving people the incentive to get out of their cars and onto affordable, accessible, state of the art transport.

We'd end airport expansion and introduce a progressive frequent flyer levy to end the binge flying of the super-rich.

A Carbon Tax and an end to petrol and diesel cars by 2030.

That's the kind of action we need to transform our transport system for good.

Green New Deal for Agriculture

And our relationship with the land needs to change too.

We must move away from the extraction of resources that enriches a few to a future where everyone benefits from nurturing our environment and the species who rely on it.

So we will transform our land. Restore it to its pre-factory farming state. Reduce the carbon it emits and increase the carbon it absorbs.

When the land flourishes, we will flourish with it.

Rewilded landscapes, a revitalised natural world, planting 700 million trees, a quarter of the UK covered by forest by 2030.

And yes, someone's got to say it so we will.

That means making it cheaper to move away from meat-based, carbon intensive diets to embrace healthier low carbon alternatives.

Green New Deal for Energy

Communities like Newport could once again be at the heart of industry and prosperity.

This country could lead the world in clean technology. Just six tidal lagoons down the west coast could provide as much power as a dirty nuclear plant.

Built in a fraction of the time, safer, cleaner, and ready to provide energy on demand.

100,000 new low-carbon council homes a year, 30 million homes insulated to the highest standards, old gas boilers stripped out and every home a powerstation, fueled by decentralised renewable energy.

It's not fanciful thinking. It's practical. It's realistic.

We must do what science demands not what is deemed political possible.

Conclusion

It's easy to fear the future.

Our century is only 19 years old, but already we have seen 17 of the hottest years ever recorded.

Brexit hangs over our heads, fires rage from the Amazon to the Arctic, and democracy is under attack.

But the night is always darkest before the dawn.

Greens don't fear the future.

We welcome the future. Because we have the way and will.

Taking decisive action to address the climate emergency isn't just about averting disaster. It's about creating a brand new Britain.

Forget austerity. Forget worshiping GDP. Forget pointless and bloody foreign wars. Forget fracking, coal, and oil. Forget working longer hours for lower pay. Forget air so toxic it chokes you to death.

This can be a new start.

The best days of Britain can still be ahead of us.

We need a decisive break from business as usual, and we are ready to make the leap.

The Green Party has always been on the right side of history.

The time is now to shape our future.

Thank you.

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