

Green Party Deputy Leader Amelia Womack's speech to Autumn Conference 2020



Green Party

3 October 2020

Welcome to the Green Party's Extraordinary Autumn Conference.

And this is an extraordinary conference because these extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures.

But when have we ever been anything other than extraordinary?

This is our first ever online conference, and while it is a huge shame that we can't be together enjoying one another's company, I am still very glad that we can come together online and feel the solidarity and mutual support that conference brings.

One of the extraordinary things about the Green Party is that we continue to form our policies through our conference rather than from the top down.

So I am thrilled that so many of you are joining-in to shape the future of our party.

Because everyone who takes part, takes on the responsibility of creating our future – as a party, as a country, and as a planet.

For some of you our conference will be a completely new experience and for others you will have fond memories of travels to Scarborough, Liverpool, Brighton and beyond.

Can you believe it was just a year ago that you were with me in Newport for Autumn conference 2019. You came to explore my fantastic home city.

But what a lot has changed since then.

We had a snap General Election – which itself seems such a long time ago

Brexit – which I still like to pretend didn't really happen

Australian wildfires and Arctic ice breaking up reminding us that we must do more to stop the irreversible decline of the health of the planet

Uprisings against police brutality including the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor among so many others

And, of course, the Coronavirus pandemic.

Who would have thought a year ago that all this was in our future?

Newport is now in its second lock down, and I am sure many of you are also in your second lock down, or wondering when it may come to where you live.

Proper lockdown measures are vital to reduce the loss of lives and the risk to workers, especially in the NHS – it's a blunt tool but one of the only ones we have as a society to protect people.

And during our lockdowns we have seen people struggle.

But we have also seen people embrace big ideas.

People reflecting on what a better version of our society might look like

And most of all, people's instincts for unity and compassion shine.

Meanwhile we have seen a UK government flip flop on big issues and give vague and confused messages about what people are meant to do.

Just a few weeks ago we were given the impression that if people didn't return to their offices the country would collapse.

Then when a second wave came, the furlough scheme was brought to an abrupt end.

In England, tenants are at risk after the eviction ban was terminated.

And the government was exposed as having no real plan to 'build back better', or support people's lives.

Well... we the extraordinary Greens have that real plan and we have had it for a long time. It begins with a Universal Basic Income.

As Greens we have been fighting for this transformative policy that could protect workers in all industries while keeping our economy alive.

This is why I put together a letter which was co-signed by many in the music and arts sector which we sent to the Chancellor insisting that he consider the benefits a UBI could have for the arts and culture.

to save jobs...

to save venues

to save a sector that is the lifeblood of our culture and communities

to ensure that, for both workers and audiences, the arts remain for everybody, not just the privileged.

So that they can flourish now when they are needed the most, to keep people entertained and to keep spirits up.

We understand the importance of the arts and culture, because we know a person's value is not measured by how much profit they can generate.

But this government has seemed to throw more effort at helping bland and overpriced sandwiches, and landlords of bland and overpriced student properties.

But Universal Basic Income is just the start.

As Greens we pride ourselves on our radical yet rational politics that work to tackle the climate and ecological emergency while addressing the vast inequalities across our society.

And it's easy to forget that before the pandemic, around the time of the general election, our media was taking our climate and ecology more seriously than ever before.

Some of that momentum has been lost over the last few months... but this is the time we need to bring it back to the top of the agenda, because we know that the solutions to all of these crises are one and the same.

I am proud that in Wales we have a pioneering policy that reflects our Green values called the Future Generations Act.

This law puts the rights and wellbeing of future generations, not just short-term interests, at the heart of all Welsh government decision making.

If we implement a Future Generations Act across the UK it could mean less focus on short term gains for landlords and sandwich chains and strengthen the movement for a better future for our economy, climate and society.

This is a policy we as Greens campaigned for in the 2019 General election, and fundamentally shifts a short-termist way of thinking that has deeply damaged our society.

From austerity and poverty to supporting fossil fuels and plastics, disregarding children and generations yet to be born has caused irreversible destruction to our communities, atmosphere and habitats.

As Greens, we value not just what we can deliver in an election cycle. We don't just promise something for tomorrow, the next five years, or even the next decade. Our vision is for a future of fairness, and our manifestoes are stepping stones towards it.

A Future Generations Act can be powerful. In Wales it helped us block the M4 Bypass Motorway from being created.

Let's face it – no government who cares about future generations would continue to build motorways and expand airports in the way we have seen the establishment parties attempt to do.

But also, as Johnson brings the M4 back on to the agenda, we see a Prime Minister who is willing to override not just common sense but also devolution itself.

Next year we will have a bumper year for elections. London Mayoral and Assembly elections, elections for Mayors and councils across England, many delayed by by-elections and in Wales we will have elections to the Senedd.

I am our lead candidate in our target region of South Wales East for the Welsh Parliament elections.

And this is already shaping up to be a very exciting election.

It will test how people feel about the incumbent Labour party who have effectively had control of Wales since devolution in 1999.

It will be a battle between those who want more devolution leading towards independence, and those who want to reduce or remove devolution completely.

The Tories in Westminster are attempting a power grab against devolution, prompted partly by the end of the transition arrangements with the EU.

We need to work with our colleagues in Scotland and Northern Ireland to ensure that our nations' democratic rights aren't trampled on by this delinquent government.

Because the truth is, Wales doesn't just need a brighter future.

It needs change, right here, right now.

We need real change today for the millions of people who have been let down by a political establishment happy to watch entire communities trapped in dead-end poverty.

We need real change today for people vulnerable to the lies of fascism because they haven't been offered any sort of future by the collapsing centre of neoliberal politics.

We need real change today for some of the most incredible habitats and landscapes anywhere in the world, from the coast of Pembrokeshire, to the rolling peaks of the Brecon Beacons, and the neverending views of Snowdonia.

We can get all that change by pouring our national efforts into the most important work of the century ahead – the mission to go net zero carbon by 2030.

We need a Green New Deal for Wales.

What does that mean?

It means renewables, everywhere.

It means a national effort to restore our natural world, to make Wales the most ecologically diverse and beautiful nation in the world.

It means insulating every single home so nobody ever has to decide between feeding their kids and paying for heating, ever again.

And it means doing all this by paying people a decent living wage for the world's most important work.

Our Green New Deal for Wales will create a wave of good Green jobs, stimulating the economy in every corner of the country, and offering real opportunities for young people through decent apprenticeships, skills training and education.

Wales was once the powerhouse of Britain, and it can be again.

Obviously, we can never go back to coal.

But we can lead the world on renewables.

We can lead the world on wind energy.

We can lead the world on pioneering technology like the tidal lagoon.

Wales led the first industrial revolution and we can lead the second. And where we lead, the rest of Britain, the rest of Europe, and the rest of the world will follow.

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Before I was stopped in my tracks by the pandemic, I spent half my life on trains, criss-crossing the country meeting Green activists in cities, towns and villages where they are working hard, knocking on doors, to get Greens into power.

So I know that the recent story of Wales is not unique to my nation, that story of economic decline, atomisation, destitution and hopelessness.

I see coastal towns abandoned, with tourism in freefall.

I see town after town with hollowed out high streets, nothing but boarded up doors, bookies and vape shops.

I see people living in worse and worse housing, on higher and higher rents, trying to make ends meet on lower and lower wages.

For too long, establishment politics has ripped the heart out of our communities, wrenching opportunities from the young, and putting public space in the hands of private profit.

So a Green New Deal for Wales could be a beacon for what we can do in every single community in the UK, unlocking a brighter, Greener future for everyone

Greens are standing up for local democracy. We are standing up for Wales. And I am standing to lead us into the Senedd for the very first time, to stand up for all our futures.

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A key part of our work as Greens is scrutiny. Our sister party in Scotland consistently prove that, and show the great things that can be achieved when Greens are elected to a devolved parliament.

This summer, it was Green MSP Ross Greer who saw the coming disaster of the exam results algorithm, held the Scottish Government to account, exposed the injustice to the media and public and forced them to change course.

In budget talks with the minority SNP administration, the Greens have proven themselves tough and smart negotiators.

The Greens have secured an annual grant to young carers, free public transport for all young people from next year, and hundreds of millions of pounds in extra funding for local authorities facing cuts.

And it's because of the Greens that Scotland has the most progressive Income Tax system in the country, with low earners paying less and the better off paying more to fund public services.

And it remains the case that the only Green Party law in the UK is Patrick Harvie's 2009 Aggravation by Prejudice Act, which ensured homophobic and disability-related offences would be treated as hate crimes, and was the first trans-inclusive hate crime legislation in Europe.

We know the power of elected Greens, we see Caroline Lucas, Jenny Jones and Natalie Bennett hold the government and opposition to account every day.

We see our councillors making change that makes lives better for our friends, family and neighbours.

Every day I am thankful for the hard work of our elected officials, and the activists out there knocking on doors, delivering leaflets, running campaigns and ensuring that we get more Greens elected to deliver real change for our communities, towns, cities, and country.

It's been tough to pause campaigning, especially when we have such an opportunity to win big and build on incredible results in 2019.

But we will still be ready to win big when we finally get the chance next May.

If the last year has proved anything, it's that rapid change is possible in the face of a crisis, that people do not want to go back to normal because what the hell was normal about before?

What the hell was normal about children living in poverty, governments ignoring the climate and ecological emergency, refugees dying while seeking

safety.

As Greens, we will never settle for normal, we will only accept extraordinary.

So keep campaigning for Greens to be elected, keep campaigning to create something better.

We know we can make better possible and we know we can do it together.

Thank you to all of you for everything you do to make it happen, and I look forward to being there with you every step of the way.

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