

Jonathan Bartley and Caroline Lucas speech to Spring Conference



Green Party

3 March 2018

2018 – a year that will change everything

Introduction

CL: Conference welcome to Bournemouth. To what was billed as ‘spring conference’ but feels more like a mid winter one.

Thanks you all for getting here – through snow drifts, freezing rain, train delays and road closures. And can i say a special thanks to the Green Party Staff who slept on cold trains and in a van overnight to get here early to set up. I think they deserve a round of applause.

It’s good to be here again.

In a region that elected its first ever Green MEP in 2014.

In a town that elected its first Green councillor in 2015.

And where in the 2017 general election, every voter in South East Dorset had the chance to vote for a Green candidate.

A place where the Green Party is at the forefront of speaking truth to power.

Greens here are campaigning against plans to drill in Poole Bay for oil and gas.

Challenging a Tory council whose solution to the homelessness crisis is to install metal bars on benches to prevent people from sleeping on them.

Thank you to the local Greens, proud to stand with homeless people and defend their human rights.

And thank you for such a warm welcome to Bournemouth.

Conference, since we last met, there have been countless examples of brave Green voices speaking up for what matters, and making a real difference in their communities.

Voices like Pat Cleary's. As the only Green elected to Wirral Council, he recently won a 3 year battle to divest £400 million worth of pensions from fossil fuels and into clean energy instead.

Voices like those of David Gibson and Tom Druitt. Homeless people in Brighton and Hove now have a secure overnight shelter thanks to their courage and determination. Green councillors actively demonstrating our commitment to social justice.

And voices like Alison Teal's. She has come under relentless attack from Labour in Sheffield for taking non violent direct action.

Conference, Labour councillors demanded a custodial sentence to punish Alison for defending 6000 trees from being felled.

Trees earmarked for destruction, not because they were sick, but simply for profit.

Because the logic of a PFI contract dictates that cutting down mature trees is more cost effective than maintaining them.

One of my proudest moments as your co-Leader was being in Sheffield after Alison was acquitted and seeing her continue to do what Green councillors do best:

Standing up for our environment

Standing up for our democracy

Standing up for our values.

JB: It has been 100 years since some women first got the vote. An amazing landmark.

But how galling to see politicians pay lip service to the direct action of the suffragettes in one breath, and then in the next, distance themselves from the bravery of those making a stand today.

Like Sisters Uncut, who stormed the Baftas over Government cuts to domestic violence support services.

Like the 120 women in Yarl's Wood, hunger striking this week against the injustice of our barbaric detention centres.

And the the 15 people who stopped a deportation flight from leaving Stansted Airport last year.

Conference, these brave campaigners are facing up to a lifetime in prison under anti-terrorism legislation. Today we call on the Crown Prosecution Service to drop these trumped up charges. And on the Government to scrap laws that make criminals of human rights activists.

Conference, these are the new suffragettes. These are the new history-makers.

These last few months I have been privileged to stand alongside campaigners taking peaceful direct action against HS2, against the arms trade, against Fracking.

I have experienced what it's like to be dragged away by the police myself.

I've even had to buy a new pair of shoes as a result.

Standing with people like Sophia Lysaczenko, protesting against arms sales in London's docklands, and acquitted at Stratford magistrates court.

And i'll be with them this week protesting the state visit of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman – and demanding that the cosy relationship between Britain and Saudi Arabia comes to an end.

We applaud their bravery.

And we say their grit, their determination and their achievements are at the heart of how we will be remembered in the future.

Councillors and Council elections

Inside and outside the council chamber, Greens are making history.

Since we last met, new Green councillors have been elected in both Herefordshire and Lewes – a big well done to Ellie Chowns and Chelsea Renton.

Cllr Simon Grover has got St Albans council to offer sanctuary to refugees.

Greens have put forward a radical alternative to the council's budget in

Newcastle.

Freed Southampton's residential streets from industrial traffic.

And stood with child abuse survivors in Lambeth..

We pay tribute to these pioneers and prospectors. The ones making change happen.

As we approach this year's local elections, it's that conviction, that record and that bravery that we will be asking voters to back.

So conference, on May 3rd, let's elect more Green councillors right across the county. Let's get out there, break records and make these our best ever local elections yet.

Brexit

CL: Conference, we win when we stand up for what we believe in – from the smallest issues in a local ward, to the biggest issue of the day – Brexit

Let's not forget that the EU was originally a peace project, forged in the wake of the destruction and devastation of the Second World War.

Rising from the rubble left by bombs and armies.

The principle that nations who share resources will value peace above war.

And the cause of peace is at stake again today.

The way this Government is playing politics with peace in Northern Ireland is reckless and indefensible.

So our message to Theresa May is very clear: Sacrificing the Good Friday

Agreement on the altar of an extreme Brexit is nothing short of criminal, and it must not be allowed to happen.

And we have another message – one we have always proudly and uniquely championed.

That free movement is good for our country – and it runs in two directions.

The right to study and work and live and love in 27 other countries is a precious gift that we will do all we can to protect – and we will stand up to those who stoke racism and prejudice.

How else to defend the NHS, for example, than by also defending free movement?

Since the referendum, the number of nurses coming to work in the NHS from the EU has dropped by nearly 90%.

The BMA estimates that one fifth of EU doctors working in the NHS plan to leave as a direct result of the prospect of Brexit.

Friends, Brexit isn't just a political crisis unfolding in the corridors of Westminster.

It's happening in our hospital wards, in our university lecture theatres, in the fields where our food is grown and in all of our workplaces.

For young people in particular, who overwhelmingly supported Remain, Tory Brexit is an unforgivable act of intergenerational theft by a Conservative Government that has lost its moral compass – and we will oppose it every step of the way.

Brexit ratification referendum

JB: Yesterday Theresa May had a chance to change course – to begin the process of healing this country.

But she refused. She acknowledged the pain that her brexit plans would cause – then said she's carry them out anyway. She promised no hard border for Northern Ireland – but didn't say how she'd achieve that.

At this most crucial of times the leaders of this country – a cabinet of extreme ideology and downright incompetence – has utterly failed. We deserve better than this, we deserve better than a half-baked speeches and permanent confusion.

That's why the Green Party is proud to be campaigning for a People's Poll on the final deal.

A vote that explicitly includes an option to remain part of the European Union.

Because as we march towards the national calamity of Brexit, we know there is an alternative.

But, far from acting like an official opposition, Labour risks being complicit in an unfolding disaster.

Both Jeremy Corbyn and Theresa May are committed to a Brexit that will hit poorest communities hardest.

Both are in a fantasy world where you can not only have your cake and eat it, but – like the Queen in Through the Looking Glass – you can think 6 impossible things before breakfast.

And today I want to make a direct plea to the Labour frontbench:

Show some leadership

Put the national interest above your party interest

Stand up for free movement

Stand up for young people

And stand with all of us campaigning for a People's Poll on the final deal.

JB: Conference, let's be clear: the struggles of those who voted Leave are very real.

The lack of opportunity, the absence of secure and rewarding work, the division of communities and hollowed out town centres, the worry over decent housing and health care, the stress over our children's education, the huge gap between the north and south. They all played their part in creating the howl of rage that was the referendum result.

And we are letting those same people down again if we fail to offer practical ways to address those concerns. Fail to offer hope for a future that is better than the past.

That's why today we are pledging to introduce a Programme for Community Renewal.

One that builds from the bottom up.

Planning laws that protect local economies from out of town development.

Public housing, built by local contractors training local people, and owned by community land trusts.

Residents given control over council budgets.

Public services where outsourcing is replaced by guerilla localism.

Not outrageously overpriced top down mega projects like Hinkley, HS2 and Heathrow expansion. Not the ones favoured by vain politicians who'd rather cut a ribbon than cut social exclusion.

But a programme that makes bold choices. Ones that are common sense. For the environment. For our wellbeing. For people.

And some of it might not appear too glamorous. Let's talk about buses.

Conference, Margaret Thatcher apparently once said: "A man who, beyond the age of 26, finds himself on a bus can count himself as a failure."

Well I'm a little over the age of 26 and I still take the bus every day. And I think we need a bus revolution.

Britain's bus network has shrunk to levels last seen 30 years ago – while bus fares have skyrocketed. Leaving people reliant on cars, abandoned with no other way of getting around.

Some communities have taken things into their own hands, including in Huddersfield where Greens have run a volunteer bus service on Boxing Day and New Years Day for 25 years.

It shouldn't have to be like this.

Our Programme for Renewal would aim for every community to have access to a decent, affordable bus service.

We need to cut bus fares and look to guarantee young people across Britain the same free bus travel currently enjoyed only by those in London.

Conference we're talking about real solutions. Small scale yes, but with big

impact. From a compulsory bottle deposit return scheme to credit unions. Practical solutions that can happen now.

That's what community renewal is all about. The politics of good – not of grandstanding.

Climate and environment

CL: And, of course, the natural world is at the heart of our programme.

Because the destruction being wrought on our environment is the greatest betrayal of young people and their futures.

Scientists tell us that a sixth mass extinction is already under way.

And that the UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world.

That's why our agenda is so urgent.

And that's why the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan – finally published a few months ago – is so desperately disappointing.

A Plan to deliver little more than a wait of a quarter of a century to phase out avoidable plastics.

By which time, the politicians who wrote it will all be retired – or expired.

And then there's Michael Gove.

The man who thinks he has the right to anoint himself as the leader of a new green party, just because he's bought himself a keep cup.

The fact that he looks even vaguely passable as an Environment Secretary is testimony to just how desperate things have become.

This is the same Michael Gove who tried to get climate change taken off the school curriculum

Who was a leading light in a Government that committed to delivering a zero waste economy – and then went on to scrap local authority recycling targets

Not only that, but also – staggeringly – just weeks after the 25 Year Plan was released, Gove also blocked more ambitious EU recycling targets.

Conference you've got to hand it to him – this is turning hypocrisy into a new art form.

The same Michael Gove who claims Britain will go green after Brexit, when it's his own government that's been undermining EU environment policy for years.

The same Tories who went from hugging huskies to killing badgers in the blink of an eye.

Let's have an environment plan, yes. But let's be serious about what that must mean.

Protecting marine life from plastic isn't enough without also taking urgent action to address accelerating climate change which is warming our seas and destroying our coral reefs.

Our Programme for Community Renewal would take practical steps like rolling out an ambitious timetable of street by street home insulation.

It would set tough new targets, not just for recycling, but for re-use and

reduction – real progress towards a circular economy.

But it would also take the bigger steps we need for a bigger future.

A ban on fracking.

An end to the fuel duty freeze.

No Hinkley. No Wylfa. No nuclear, fully stop.

All new car and van sales from 2030 will be electric or plug-in hybrid only

Breathable streets and green space for all.

Every home a power station.

The best public transport system in the world.

Wind and solar the backbone of British energy.

That's what an Environment Plan looks like.

Wealth and the Green economy

JB: Conference, a plan requires action too.

And it requires us to be brave and visionary enough to stop further climate breakdown.

The leaders who gather for the next round of climate talks at COP 24 in December will do so knowing that they literally hold the future in their hands.

Now, I know we like to complain about the weather in this country. But for once, it's fair enough.

This week, the temperatures here have been lower than those in the Arctic.

This is more than a temperature anomaly. It is an off-the-scale event.

The Arctic. 20 degrees warmer than usual. That should be front page news, but it gets barely a mention.

Conference, if our job is to speak truth to power, we must break the silence over climate change because complacency is a greater enemy than denial.

We must break the silence over the links between climate change, the economy and wealth too.

And then break the links themselves.

Conference, the obscene truth is that the wealthiest 10% of the country owns 44% of the nation's wealth. There are 5 billionaire families in the UK that hold the same wealth as the bottom 20% of the population.

Yet no other Party is truly confronting the issue of wealth, who controls it, and who owns it.

We support a Basic Income not just because it provides security and opportunity but because we believe that there is enough wealth. The problem is that it is in the wrong hands. And the longer that growth is seen as part of the solution rather than the problem, we won't deal with climate change and we won't address inequality.

Creating a sovereign wealth fund could help meet the costs of a universal basic income, transforming quality of life as we know it.

Dismantling privilege and replacing it with an economy that radically redistributes wealth to promote equality and social solidarity.

Tax is not a dirty word. It's how we fund the commons. It's how we demonstrate our collective responsibility for one another and the world we inhabit.

We need a wealth tax and a rise in income tax for the wealthiest. Which must mean more than just the top 5% if we're serious about recovering our public services.

And we badly need land value taxation too.

Last year the most expensive house in the country sold for just shy of a massive £16 million. The cheapest went for £18,500. Yet the difference between what those two new home owners pay in council tax is just £250.

Council tax is regressive and it's the past. Together with business rates and stamp duty, it needs scrapping, in favour of a developers' duty that captures the value of land not property.

Conference, it's time to turn everything on its head. To create an economy that serves us and not the other way round.

A chance to determine whether the economy liberates or enslaves us.

Lifestyle and Work

CL: Conference, we should be very clear about what the current economy delivers.

Over half of the children in parts of our cities growing up in poverty.

Wages stagnating for years.

Long hours at work – and many more hours spent working from home for those whose offices now travel with them.

Rough sleeping up. Affordable housing down. A country divided.

This system is not suffering a design flaw – it's programmed to fail and people are living the consequences.

From the changing world of work to the social contract that is our welfare support system, we are at a crossroads.

And conference it is only the Green Party that has the vision to make the right choices.

Automation could deliver more insecurity, zero hours contracts, low pay and exploitation.

Or it could signal an end to jobs that are monotonous and repetitive. Rich with time and the opportunity to live larger lives.

An economy that lets us make mistakes, take risks or time out when we need it.

And, crucially, gives everyone access to these choices, not just the privileged,

The challenge is not to make the economy bigger, it's to make it work differently and better.

Our Programme for Community Renewal is about being innovators and pioneers.

The Green Party will continue to be bold, and offer more than just a radical alternative to the Government.

We want to reprogramme an economics and politics that's now hit the buffers.

With the political sands shifting we can demand what was previously seen as

impossible: a shorter working week, jobs that are secure and rewarding, and yes the opportunity to fulfill our ambitions and dreams.

This is no time for tinkering with a broken system – we have a new world to win.

Political Strategy & Holistic Review

JB: One of the many things that makes me so proud of our Party – this ability to face up to what’s difficult and daunting, not turn away.

When we met last, in Harrogate, conference voted almost unanimously to undertake a holistic review of how we operate as a Party. A warts and all look at our strengths and our weaknesses.

We are delighted to announce that process is underway, has two excellent chairs in James Humphries and Julia Chantaray, and has begun the vital work of reaching out, listening and asking difficult questions of us all.

CL: Like where did you get that haircut?

JB: More important even than that.

When Greens are elected, people like what they get. So one of our commitments is to continue finding new ways to reach out, listen and be heard.

So today, I am pleased to announce that I am hitting the road with a brand new commitment: “Leader in the Room”.

A pledge to visit and speak to any and every local party that can guarantee 40 people in a room together. Conversations to build a Green future.

Friends – we are a party of the Left. But the terms “Left” and “Right” are increasingly irrelevant when they refer to a system that is dying.

People want an alternative.

So we are pleased to announce today too, our political strategy, setting out the new space that we inhabit.

It reaffirms our full commitment to a life based on democracy and justice within the planet’s limits.

It uniquely identifies us as the only Party for whom the promotion of dignity, equality, social justice and human rights for all, go hand in hand with environmentalism, with the need for urgent collective action on climate change.

Challenging us to be ambitious, fearless, positive and principled.

That’s about policy yes.

Our overwhelming commitment to protecting the natural world.

About our honesty too, in speaking truth to power.

A party prepared to say what most people know is common sense – that we should change our drug laws so they are based on the evidence not on moralising, and radically reduce the prison population in the process. We should be very clear about this – our aim as a society should be to have fewer people locked up, not more.

A party that knows electoral reform is the key to unlocking the future of the many. That will give young people a meaningful voice.

And conference, a political strategy rooted in our values.

Courage, empathy, diversity, innovation and the common good.

I say to you today – we are the alternative.

Conclusion

CL: Conference, as your co-leaders, we pledged to deliver a Green voice in every community. The political strategy is how we realise that promise – to you and to the future.

It takes inspiration from what we've heard from you at meetings up and down the country, from our sister parties around the world, as well as from those closer to home, from the local parties winning, growing and standing up for what matters.

The work of renewal consists of many steps. Some we take together, some we take individually. But we are never alone.

We are part of a long and a proud tradition of levellers and diggers, dreamers and freedom fighters. We are making a new history. One that's positive, hopeful and secure, in which our children and our children's children can thrive.

We are part of a movement that spans the globe. Uniting trans activists with Zapatistas, #metoo survivors with Women in Black. We stand with subversives everywhere, prisoners of conscience, the resistance and the organisers. We stand with #blacklivesmatters, the Indignados and one million women rising.

We may not always know the impact of what we do, but we should always know this: real power comes from building bridges not walls.

We are strong from being united in our values, trustworthy in our principles.

Stronger still from speaking truth to power. From our willingness to stand up time and again for what we believe in.

Conference, we are the Green Party and together we can make 2018 the year that changes everything.

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