

Green Party calls for return to customs union



5 February 2021

- **Jonathan Bartley: “The decision to leave the customs union was an ideological mistake by the Conservatives”**

The Green Party has called on the government to seek to negotiate readmission to the EU customs union to reduce pressure on business and ease tensions in Northern Ireland.

Green Party co-leader Jonathan Bartley said:

“Although being outside the single market will still mean health checks, rejoining the customs union would greatly reduce the paperwork required by exporters. It could also enable us to join the EU VAT area, thus removing the charges now facing consumers buying goods from EU suppliers.

“The decision to leave the customs union was an ideological mistake by the Conservatives, who always downplayed the impacts it would have on business. Now we see the chaotic reality unfolding. It is not too late to say we made a mistake and to explore options for rejoining the customs union without rejoining the EU’s political institutions.

“The country was divided down the middle during the referendum, and most people thought we would stay in the single market and customs union. A decision to leave the political institutions was not a mandate to choose the hardest possible Brexit.

“The Green Party maintains that Brexit was a mistake of historic proportions and that the government must do what it can to mitigate against the impacts that are already becoming clear. We also maintain our belief that our best long term future lies at the heart of Europe.”

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European Greens call for vaccine solidarity not vaccine nationalism



5 February 2021

As Greens in the UK and in the European Parliament we are clear that we need to be struggling together against Covid, not battling each other for vaccine supplies.

We welcome the fact that the UK has invested heavily in the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine and that its rollout programme is proceeding so well, protecting millions of citizens a week. We also welcome the EU investments in vaccine development and the bloc's commitment to solidarity across EU member states so that none will be left behind.

We need politicians to work together so that they are not subject to profiteering by pharmaceutical companies. To do this we need full transparency of negotiations and contracts for vaccine supplies. European citizens have invested in these vaccines and they have a right to know how their money has been used and the scale of profits made by drug companies. We must avoid a situation where those paying higher prices receive better treatment: the market can have no place in healthcare.

We would also argue for all Covid vaccines to be sold on the basis of open patents so that production can be rolled out at speed across the world. This

is the sort of solidarity that a global pandemic demands and we call on the Commission and the UK government to cooperatively negotiate with pharmaceutical companies and the WHO to ensure IP restrictions do not limit availability of vaccines. Therefore we again call on the Commission to support the TRIPS waiver.

European healthcare is based on a European market for pharmaceutical products: we depend on each other for supplies of life-saving drugs. We deplore recent aggressive behaviour since a trade war over vaccines can only lead to some of the most vulnerable in our communities suffering.

Political leaders have been proud to say that until everybody is safe, nobody is safe, but they need to turn those words into practical action now by allocating European vaccine supplies based on need.

Signatories:

Amelia Womack, EWGP, Deputy Leader

Molly Scott Cato, EWGP, Brexit speaker

Larry Sanders, EWGP, Health speaker

Jutta Paulus, Greens/EFA, Member of Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

Tilly Metz, Greens/EFA, Member of Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

Rasmus Andresen, Greens/EFA, Spokesperson for Budgetary Affairs

Notes

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Shell's losses are clear sign that transition away from fossil fuels is

underway, say Greens



4 February 2021

- **Jonathan Bartley:** “This is a clear signal that the transition to net zero is underway and that big oil companies will not play a role in our economy in the future”

Green Party co-leader Jonathan Bartley has said the news that Shell has seen an 87% fall in earnings [1] is an indication that the transition away from fossil fuels is now fully underway.

Bartley has now urged the government to step in to help those workers who are being made redundant at Shell and other fossil fuel companies by providing training for the Green jobs of the future.

Green Party co-leader Jonathan Bartley:

“While some of these record losses are the result of Covid, it is clear that policies to transition beyond fossil fuels are impacting the balance sheets of big oil companies as they downgrade some of their reserves as stranded assets. [2]

“This is a clear signal that the transition to net zero is underway and that big oil companies will not play a role in our economy in the future.”

The results come a week after credit ratings agency S&P Global Ratings said it is [considering](#) [3] downgrading a number of major oil and gas producers, including Shell, “to reflect a growing risk to their businesses from the energy transition, price volatility, and future profitability.”

The Green Party will be watching closely as Shell prepares to launch its strategy for a net zero emissions future next week.

Bartley continued:

“As big oil companies go through essential restructuring in the face of the climate emergency, we need the government to step in and retrain their

workers for the new opportunities in the green economy. Such restructuring needs to be at the heart of investment for the post-Covid recovery.

“For decades we have been told that we must support fossil fuel companies because they pay pensions but now we see it is pension funds themselves that are driving the move away from big oil.

“Setting a net zero target means that all those who will be receiving pensions beyond that date must have fossil assets excluded from their funds. Insurance companies, who are bearing the brunt of climate-related loss and damage, are also turning their backs on fossil fuels.”

ENDS

Notes

1

<https://news.sky.com/story/shell-tumbles-to-19-9bn-loss-as-pandemic-hits-energy-demand-12208176>

2

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/aug/14/seven-top-oil-firms-downgrade-assets-by-87bn-in-nine-months>

3

<https://www.spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/latest-news/oil/012621-oil-majors-credit-ratings-under-threat-from-growing-climate-risks-sampg-global>

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[Greens call for justice for students and an end to a working life of debt](#)



2 February 2021

The Green Party has said all student debt should be wiped off following the call from vice chancellors to suspend interest payments on student loans for 15 months. [1].

Green Party finance speaker Molly Scott Cato responded to the call from vice chancellors in withering terms:

“The idea that students should be charged a slightly lower rate of interest on their loans is wildly inadequate at a time when they are bearing the brunt of the Covid lockdowns. Most people will be astonished to learn that the current interest rate is as high as 5.6% when market interest rates are close to zero.

“We are condemning many young people to a working life of debt bondage, since they will never be able to repay their loans but rather act as cash cows for wealthier and older people who hold investment portfolios. [2]

“Education is and always has been a public good and should be funded by public investment. The desperately misguided policy to privatise universities, begun under a Labour government, needs to be reversed and the government must step in to ensure students can receive a world-class education without the burden of debt. [3]

“The Green Party is committed to abolishing student fees and adding the debts accrued to the national debt to be paid back over the long term.”

Co-chair of the Young Greens, Rosie Rawle, added:

“The suggestion from vice chancellors to suspend interest accruing on student loans for just 15 months is well-meaning but frankly insulting. Many other countries in Europe offer free higher education, as does Scotland, and students in England and Wales should not be unfairly penalised by carrying a lifetime debt burden. The three parties that dominate at Westminster have all betrayed young people. Now is the time for them to make amends.”

Molly Scott Cato concluded:

“Our young people have stood by older generations through this pandemic, putting their lives on hold and sacrificing their educational opportunities. The least we can do in return is to remove this dreadful lifetime burden of debt from them.”

ENDS

Notes

1

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-55895334>

2

House of Commons Library estimates the value of outstanding loans at the end of March 2020 at £140 billion:

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn01079/>

3

Timeline of betrayal of young people:

<https://www.channel4.com/news/factcheck/factcheck-how-students-have-been-misled-and-lied-to-for-20-years>

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[Caroline Lucas responds to the Dasgupta Review on the Economics of Biodiversity](#)



2 February 2021

In response to Professor Dasgupta's review, published today [1], the Green Party MP Caroline Lucas said:

"Professor Dasgupta's report should send shockwaves through the Treasury. His conclusion is crystal clear: ministers need to replace GDP growth with environmental protection and human wellbeing as the country's overarching economic goals and apply this to all economic policy making – starting with next month's budget.

We cannot continue with our current approach to economic progress if we are to preserve the natural world we depend on and are part of – it can no longer be treated by peripheral to our lives. A focus on GDP growth above anything else is driving ecological as well as climate breakdown and no amount of Prime Ministerial rhetoric or 'investing in nature' will halt this catastrophe if we don't address the root cause.

We can enhance biodiversity and create a better society for everyone if we abandon an outdated, destructive way of thinking about the economy as separate from the environment and wellbeing and move to one focused on people's health, quality of life and the regeneration of nature. Two thirds of the public think that government should focus on health and wellbeing over GDP, and 2021 – the year of two critical UN summits – is the year to do it."

ENDS

Notes

1

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/nature-is-a-blind-spot-in-economics-that-we-ignore-at-our-peril-says-dasgupta-review>

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