

Deputy Leader Amelia Womack speech to Swansea autumn conference 2019



5 October 2019

On the 8th of October 2018, the UN gave us a clear warning that we have just 12 years to tackle the climate emergency.

Here we are a year almost to the day since that report was published. So conference, in this speech I am going to cut the nice introductions – because there is no more time to waste.

We don't have time for a joke Prime Minister who wastes his conference speech talking about CDs by Jason Donovan, or to watch Jacob Rees-Mogg lying down on the job while the future of the country is at stake.

Unlike Mogg we will be standing up for our future and our democracy.

Because like me, I know that every one of you shares the sense of urgency for a fundamental overhaul of a broken social and economic system

One that has inflated inequality

One that has abandoned people to political failure

And one that has failed our planet.

When I was a young girl, growing up in this city, I heard about the damage that humanity was having.

I never believed it would come to this. Glaciers now not just vanishing – but gone; The Great Barrier Reef not just bleaching – but 50% dead; the Amazon, that I so often thought about in wonder – burnt for agriculture and meat.

So although through the eyes of a child it was plain to see the urgent need to end this destruction, successive government either failed to see it or simply didn't care.

We can't keep allowing government after government to fail us and our futures.

Now is the time for vision and ambition.

We have come so far over the last few years and now we need to be serious in our ambitions to deliver action both locally and nationally...

It is time for us to build a Green Government.

This clearly won't happen overnight, but our actions now are putting the foundations in place.

And we will build a Green Government on those foundations – because our country and planet demands nothing less right now.

A green government would have science and evidence – not money – at the heart of its policies.

- Using the internationally tested Housing First policy to reduce homelessness, along with introducing rent caps and longer tenancies.

Because we all deserve a roof over our heads.

- Using science to lead our understanding of how we can reduce the impact of the climate emergency.

- Using evidence-based approaches to drugs policies.

Rather than criminalising drug users we need to start treating addiction as a health issue.

Because know as Greens that we have the best policies.

For the last 35 years the Greens have been leading on a vision of a system that is fit for the demands of the 21st century.

We need a Green government.

Because not only have the Tories, Lib Dems and Labour failed in government to deal with the escalating environmental emergency, they've let us all down in so many other areas too.

- Labour's PFI contracts led to the backdoor privatisation of the NHS.

- The Lib Dems stood on a promise that they wouldn't increase tuition – and then swiftly introduced sky high fees.

- And the Conservatives. Those in Government today. Not only have they rolled out an austerity programme that has hit the poorest hardest.

Not only have they forced record numbers of families to use foodbanks.

They have taken away the safety nets which has resulted in a huge increase in homelessness and people are dying while sleeping rough on our streets.

And every single one of those deaths, every single one, must be seen as a tragedy that could have been prevented.

And now they are planning tax cuts for the rich and big corporations.

The party of Government right now isn't just a Rees-Mogg or Johnson joke – they are the cruelest, most vindictive ministers that have sat around the cabinet table in modern British History.

This is why we now need local and national Green Governments that will overhaul this broken economy.

From council elections, Mayoral elections, Welsh Assembly election, these are important and powerful campaigns and building blocks to that ultimate ambition.

We know how to win elections.

We know how to rewrite the rules and win in places that others simply didn't expect.

This is only possible because of you.

Because of each and every one of you – out leafleting, on doorsteps canvassing and getting the message out there.

Because we know the power of each Green vote, we know the power of voting for what you truly believe in.

We know the power of Greens when they are elected. Just one Green can change the game – but collectively we can achieve anything.

If you haven't already, you need to get selecting so that we have the best group of candidates ever.

And as I travel the country now I'm already meeting so many talented and inspiring candidates.

As a party with equality at our heart, then please remember to support and encourage diverse candidates to stand, because we need more women and more people of diverse genders, fewer people from private school, more working class people, a better cross section of ages, people with different abilities and more diversity of colour in our politics and in our parliament.

But also, don't forget to prepare for a People's Vote.

It's vital that we continue to demand a final say on Brexit.

I know that as we speak dedicated people are using every power we have as a democracy to protect us from the potential Brexit damage. But also as we speak the Prime Minister is using every power HE has to subvert our democracy.

So let's be real for a moment. The next few weeks and months will be an almighty struggle. Staying in the EU is not guaranteed – and crashing out is a real possibility.

But we will fight, we will be united and we won't be silent until we have a final say.

And it feels so powerful to be here in Newport talking about democracy on the 180th anniversary of the Chartist uprising.

The Chartists fought for an overhaul of our democratic system.

They fought for their right to vote,

For a secret ballot,

To end property qualification for MPs,

For a salary for MPs so that everyone could afford to take the position,

For equal constituencies

And finally for a General Election to take place every year.

Five out of six of their demands were met. I confess that I am not keen on an annual general electionalthough it certainly feels like General elections are getting more and more regular these days.

But once again we need the chartist spirit, because our electoral system is broken and unfair.

We see a Tory government that can barely hide their contempt for democracy.

And as Greens we will always fight for fairness, just like the Chartists didn't give up their fight. And like the chartists we have our list of demands:

A proportional representation voting system

Votes for 16 and 17 year olds

A constitutional convention

Further devolution

An elected upper chamber

And a written constitution

When I think of the Chartists, it makes me wonder how history will remember us.

And as this decade comes to a close in just three months, I have been worried that it would be remembered as the decade that we ignored the 12 year warning by the IPCC.

Another decade where we failed ecology, climate and communities.

But maybe this was premature,

Because just as this decade is ending we are seeing something happening that none of us had dared to dream of.

School strikers have energised a truly youth-led international movement.

Extinction Rebellion's non-violent direct action has ensured that the climate emergency is being talked about in the media.

And hundreds of Greens elected and leading on policy to protect people and planet across the country.

As we step forward I hope we will see the next decade as the roaring 20s – not like the 1920s of glitz and decadence, but the 2020s in which people refuse to remain silent while the establishment fails to fix social and environmental inequalities on this planet.

So we are going to stop asking nicely and start demanding some big changes now.

While the climate emergency has gained publicity, we need to demand the government also address the ecological emergency.

We need to protect our habitats, rewild our countryside and reintroduce species which have been driven away through habitat loss and hunting.

The ecological crisis isn't just about planting trees, it's about enabling ecosystems that have evolved together to be revitalised.

Let's not forget that our right to the countryside was won by working people during the Kinder Scout mass trespass.

We must fight for future generations to continue to have that right to the countryside.

After the premature passing of Polly Higgins this year, I want to ensure that her message is amplified across this country.

We need a pause button on ecological destruction, and our environment needs to be protected.

Imagine if drilling for oil in the Arctic was seen internationally to be illegal as a crime for damaging our planet irreversibly.

Imagine if we didn't need to debate whether fracking should be allowed because our guiding legal principle would be that industrial practices should not be allowed to put profit before people and the environment.

In the memory of Polly, and all earth protectors I want to reaffirm our commitment to implementing a law of Ecocide.

Rather than spending £25 billion on new roads we demand that the government invest in a Green New Deal, put an end to our ridiculously high train fares and ensure that the greenest option is always the cheapest and easiest option.

We must bring an end to the relentless growth of flights.

Across the country, airports are lobbying hard to get through proposals to

expand – whether it's new runways or reducing restrictions against flight times, or huge dual carriageways to get more people to the airport.

But because we aren't in government quite yet we need to make our demands in other ways.

So today here at conference I will be launching a petition against airport expansion which I want you all to sign and share.

Let's call time on airport growth and demand an end to government subsidies for the aviation industry.

Conference..

where the Green's lead others follow.

We're on the right side of science and will be on the right side of history.

Your presence today shows your commitment to building a better future

A greener future

A future we can be proud of

Now is the time to say yes to Europe

No to Climate Chaos.

Thank you Conference

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