

# Dzaier Neil Greens of Colour speech

## Autumn Conference 2021



22 October 2021

I'm really pleased to have the opportunity to speak to you today.

For many of us it wasn't an easy decision to come here in person but to see so many of my Green Party colleagues here in Birmingham is a real pleasure.

I was asked to deliver this speech in my capacity as a member of Greens of Colour – a group where I hold the position of Disability Officer.

But that isn't my only role in the Green Party.

I am also convenor of the disability group and I was elected earlier in the year to the role of Equalities and Diversity coordinator on our executive. A role I share with my friend and colleague Rashid Nix.

And I'm giving you that list of roles because it represents a lot of what I want to talk to you about today.

Seeing us all as the beautifully complex multifaceted people that we are is what this party needs to help us engage, appeal, maintain and get a truly diverse group of people elected and running this country.

And I believe that we CAN do this.

So let me introduce myself properly for those that may not have heard my sometimes loud – and sometimes contentious voice – before.

I'm Dzaier Neil. A woman of African heritage – Algeria to be specific – a person of colour, disabled, paralympian, activist, passionate about bringing about social justice and climate action.

For me, none of those things can be – or should be – addressed as stand alone.

Intersectionality is a word that gets thrown around a lot and it can seem niche or abstract. But what it means is incredibly important.

That we are more than the sum of our parts.

That we are more complicated and more important than any label.

That the way we experience life is different depending on all of the elements of who we are.

I am a person of colour and a woman and I have a disability. So my experience of the world and of discrimination in the world is different to many other

people even if they are of colour or women or disabled.

The reality as human beings is that we shouldn't be reduced to tick boxes.

I believe that the Green Party can and should be a champion for those who suffer discrimination for whatever reason.

That we have a responsibility to live up to our ideals of doing politics differently.

I sometimes ruffle feathers in my roles – because I don't hold back.

But it's because I know that we can be to all those people out there who feel disenfranchised, who feel they are overlooked, who are put into boxes to be ticked – a place of belonging and understanding but also a place of practical action that show them – not just tell them – that they are valued.

I hold this party to a high standard because I know we can reach it.

I believe we are at a crucial moment for our future.

We are pushing at an open door, not only because the realisation that the climate emergency is now at our door is widespread – but also because so many people have found themselves without a political home in our unjust society.

But just as we can't treat the attributes of individuals as if they are not connected – we must help people move away from the idea that social and climate justice are not connected.

To transform our society into the one we want to live in, the one that thrives and provides for people in a way that is fair and decent – we have to tackle these crises hand in hand.

Because the situation in our society is a crisis.

Take social care.

We have a government unwilling to address the fact that the system is thoroughly broken.

That millions of people in this country are being left without the basic support they need – and that scenario is only going to get worse.

We are told there is no money to address this but we know in reality there just isn't the will.

The pandemic has shown us that when the situation is one of life and death the funding can be found. And that is where we find ourselves with social care – in a situation of life and death.

I am one of the co-sponsors of a motion to this conference that clarifies and extends our party policy on social care to offer a service that is fully funded, free at the point of use and includes a universal legal right to independent living for all disabled people.

That is the kind of bold policy, which makes a real difference in people's lives.

That is the kind of social justice that the Green Party is all about.

Party diversity and practical solutions

But we can't be on the sidelines criticising others without also looking internally at the things we, as a party, need to do better.

When it comes to the diversity of our party – our membership, the communities we appeal to and operate in most frequently – we have a good deal more to do.

We are a party that champions groups who face injustice and as such we have to make sure we are representative.

We have to make clear to communities from the Global South, and to those don't feel heard by the current political system – they have a home with us.

We cannot focus our attention on rhetoric and grandstanding around equality and diversity and then do nothing behind the scenes.

Our actions must be visible, practical and tangible.

So what does that look like?

One. It looks like proactive action to attract more people of colour as constituency candidates and Councillor candidates. To develop and motivate a diverse group to put themselves forward for elected positions within our party structures.

We must use the Deyika fund – specifically set up for this function – to make sure people of colour feel supported and comfortable in their roles. That they have an equal shot to run and to win.

Two. It looks like doing more to push our social justice policies which would play a crucial role in supporting diverse and lower income communities.

We must make ourselves more relatable – and proactively reach out to and into those communities and demonstrate what we have to offer.

Three. It looks like making resources available to members on lower incomes at a local and regional level so that they can meaningfully contribute to Green Party events and activities.

To champion digital inclusion so that how much money you have doesn't dictate whether you can have your voice heard or not.

These are the things we could and should do as a party to demonstrate – practically – our commitment to equality and diversity.

And our need to diversify – to make clear our commitment to supporting those

who need us most – in their day to day lives and in their Green Party journey – is not restricted to people of colour.

15 percent of people in the world have a disability. 15 percent.

A legacy of the Tokyo Paralympics is the 'we are the 15 campaign' designed to end discrimination worldwide against disabled people by 2030.

It brings together the biggest coalition ever of international organisations from the world of sport, human rights, policy, communications, business, arts and entertainment.

It is a global movement that is publicly campaigning for disability visibility, inclusion and accessibility.

Campaigning groups like these are our allies and we must be the political face of this kind of ambition.

In 1984 the Green Party was arguably still in it's relative infancy. It certainly did not have the scope and opportunity we now see in front of us.

At the same time some of you may know that I was a member of Team GB at Stoke Mandeville – the original home of the Paralympic Games.

The first games in 1948 were organised as a sports competition for British World War two veterans by Sir Ludwig Guttman. It happened in the grounds of Stoke Mandeville hospital where he set up the first spinal injury unit.

When I was a Paralympian Papa Guttman was my consultant – I'm giving my age away now, just to clarify I wasn't there in 1948 – and he used to say 'you have to pick up your life where you left it'.

He believed in the power of sport to change lives.

Almost 40 years later I was taking part alongside more than 200 other athletes from 50 countries and I went on to compete again in 2008 and qualify at top world ranking level in 2016.

I am telling you this not because I want to show off about my medal haul – in 1984 it was 2 golds, 2 silvers and 2 bronzes by the way – but because Guttman was in the business of changing lives and I really believe that we are too.

The experience of being at the games for me was so inspirational, so significant – that I was able to achieve so much, gives me hope that working together – as a team – we can too.

I also take hope from others.

You might have seen Ade Adepitan – Nigerian born Paralympic basketball player turned TV presenter – in his series which looks to different communities around the world for their solutions to climate change.

He is bringing questions – and hopefully some answers – into people's living

rooms from his unique perspective. I admire him for that.

Conference, we still have far to go.

Our party needs to be more representative.

More inclusive.

More ambitious about representation and inclusion.

At national, regional and local level we need to look at what can practically be done to promote equality and diversity – not just talk about it.

We aren't there yet on this journey but we can get there.

So let's leave this city heading out on a positive pathway and come back in 6 months, a year, 10 years – and celebrate our successes and how far we've come.

Please do these four things for me conference:

Support our motion to further improve our offering on social care including a universal legal right to independent living for all disabled people.

Google 'We are the 15' and support their campaign.

Watch Ade on the frontline – Ade Adepitan's TV programme on climate change.

And – go back to your regions and local parties and take practical steps to bring in more people of colour, more people from working class backgrounds, more disabled people.

We MUST demonstrate that the Green Party is the place that welcomes people regardless of their background.

Then we'll be making progress.

Conference, please enjoy your time here in Birmingham.

Keep following the covid precautions – as we know we're not out of the woods yet and there is still risk.

And while it's so fantastic to be here together – keeping one another safe and well, has to be our priority.

We are Greens afterall.

Thank you.

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