

Greens call for re-joining the EU “as soon as political situation is favourable”



2 October 2022

- **“The country is paying a high price for Brexit, in economic, social and environmental terms. We should look to re-join the EU as soon as it is practicable to do so” – Molly Scott Cato, former Green MEP**
- **Call for speedy return to free movement and re-joining the customs union**

The UK should make a speedy return to the free movement of people between the UK and the European Union and re-join the customs union, to lessen the problems resulting from Brexit, say the Green Party. Members at the Party’s conference in Harrogate also voted in favour of pursuing a policy to re-join the EU “as soon as the political situation is favourable and the right terms are available [1].”

Members backed continued participation in the Erasmus+ scheme, to ensure that “all young people, regardless of background and socio-economic status, continue to enjoy the opportunity to explore the continent they share with those from the 27 EU member states.”

Reacting to the motion on “Closer Alignment to the European Union”, former Green Party MEP Molly Scott Cato, who is also Vice Chair of the European Movement, said:

“The country is paying a high price for Brexit, in economic, social and environmental terms. Whilst the decision to leave the EU cannot be immediately reversed, it is clear, given the damage Brexit is inflicting on our country, that long term we should look to re-join as soon as it is practicable to do so.

“In the meantime, the worst problems resulting from Brexit would be eased by re-joining the customs union, signing up to a comprehensive agreement with the EU covering the protection of human, animal and plant life and reintroducing free movement of people between the UK and the EU.

“It is also clear that the best way to maintain high standards on workers’ rights, health and safety and environmental protection is to mirror the legislative rules governing the EU single market. The proposed Brexit Freedoms Bill is utterly horrific and has fired the starting-gun on a race to the bottom on environmental and social standards.

“It is particularly vital that young people, who overwhelmingly rejected Brexit, should not be penalised. They must be able to continue having opportunities to study, work and form relationships across the 27 EU member states. The continued participation in the Erasmus+ scheme will help enable

this.

“Brexit has severely disrupted diplomatic relations with our EU neighbours and undermined the UK’s trustworthiness around the world. The readiness to breach international law and threaten the peace by tearing up the Northern Ireland protocol has reinforced this. If acted on, the motion agreed by Green Party members today will help rebuild trust within our country and with partner nations around the world.”

ENDS

Notes

Full text of agreed motion:

<https://greencoordinate.co.uk/agenda/motions/closer-alignment-to-the-european-union/>

For more information or to arrange an interview contact the press office on press@greenparty.org.uk or call 0203 691 9401

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[Amelia Womack speech to Autumn Conference 2022](#)



2 October 2022

Hello, conference. It’s wonderful to be here with you in Harrogate – and a warm welcome, to all those joining us online too.

How much has changed since we were last here, in 2017.

Back then, Theresa May had just lost her majority.

The government was in the middle of negotiating a Brexit deal.

We had no idea what was to come: a global pandemic, war in Ukraine, and unprecedented shifts to our society and our politics.

I’ve been doing a lot of reflecting lately, as my time as Deputy Leader comes to an end. I was elected eight years ago, at the age of 29. I was the youngest person in a political leadership role in the UK.

In that time, I’ve witnessed a lot.

Four prime ministers. Three general elections. Two referendums.

Not to mention the immense change that has taken place within our party.

In just a few years, we have gone from a small party with a few thousand members to a mass movement of tens of thousands. From being ignored by the establishment to becoming a voice of authority not just on climate change but on social justice too. To almost quadrupling our councillors to the powerful team of 558 councillors representing their communities across the country.

The press reported the Green wave as if it was going to crash. What they didn't see was that we were flooding communities with volunteers and activists determined to transform the places they care about, and demand action for people left behind by complacent politicians.

The unstoppable power of our Green wave won't end until we have control of councils, Green MP's and Greens in Government.

It was actually here in Harrogate that I launched one of the campaigns I am most proud of – to make misogyny a hate crime. Being here today made me think about how much has changed since that. A few days later the Me Too movement dominated the news. We still need to win the rights we so desperately need to end the oppression of all women and understand the intersectional issues faced by women of colour, disabled women, LGBTIQ women, trans women, young women, older women and, working class women, there has been a definite shift in women's representation.

I keep thinking about an experience I had in the 2015 general election, I was representing the party on a panel chaired by Jon Snow. One question from the audience was a really good one – 'why aren't there more women and young people in politics?'

There I am sat there. The only woman on the panel, the youngest person on the panel by at least a decade – I assumed Jon would go straight to me to answer that. Instead, he went first to Hillary Ben from Labour to hear what his knowledge was about women and young people in politics, then to the man from the Conservatives, next the man Liberal Democrats, then to a man from Ukip. I thought my moment had come,, but instead he said "That's all we've got time for tonight, tune in next week..."

As the credits roll you can see me talking to Hilary Benn about why moments like that are exactly why young people and women feel excluded from politics.

I realised afterwards that I had missed an important opportunity. In reaction to this I should have said "When it comes to women and young people in politics, you know nothing Jon Snow". That's one for all you Game of Thrones fans.

That kind of moment feels unthinkable now. And I'm so proud to be part of the movement championing young women in politics, and fighting for the rights of all women.

But there is so much more to do. Making misogyny a hate crime. Standing up for survivors of domestic abuse. Fighting against sexist policing. I've fought for our rights as deputy leader, and I won't stop until we have won.

I began my leadership just weeks before the Scottish Independence Referendum. One of the defining memories of my leadership is the night of the referendum, marching to Holyrood with thousands of other independence supporters.

It was a huge moment, not just for Scotland but for the whole of the UK. It made us ask what we could achieve if we had the courage to go against the status quo. As I marched that night I was moved by what I felt from the crowd, something that is so rare in politics – hope.

And although we didn't win that night, that hope has endured.

Hope defined the Green Party the following year, as we were heading into the 2015 general election, and I don't think any of us saw coming the impact that campaign had.

Our bold anti-austerity message resonated deeply with the public, and it caused a seismic shift in politics.

Over a quarter of a million people signed a petition calling on the BBC to include us in the leaders debates. Polling put us ahead of the Liberal Democrats. On the night of the election, we won our highest ever vote share.

But that wasn't all. We had successfully changed the narrative in politics, giving a voice to the millions of people who wanted to say no to cuts and yes to investing in our public services.

A voice to all those who knew that our broken economic order wasn't working for them and that another way was possible.

A voice to everyone who wanted a fairer future.

Since then, that is what we have continued to do. Spoken up for those who are marginalised. Brought dissenting views into the mainstream.

Take our EU referendum campaign. We held on to our principles, and campaigned unapologetically for freedom of movement, migrants' rights, and international solidarity.

When COVID hit, we called for an approach that would support everyone – with statutory sick pay for people isolating, a ban on evictions, and increased benefits.

And when we began to emerge from the pandemic, we called for a green recovery. With business as usual clearly redundant, we were ready with the policies the moment demanded – from a universal basic income to a green new deal.

I can't pretend that we have won every battle in my time as Deputy Leader. It's been a challenging eight years, with the far right ramping up attacks on

minorities, and those in power stripping away our public services in order to hand more wealth to the rich.

Never has the struggle we face been more stark than with last week's shocking budget announcement: tax cuts for the ultra-rich, while across the country extreme poverty is tearing apart the fabric of our communities.

Because there is an alternative, and it's needed now more than ever.

The Green Party – and our bold voice – has never been more needed.

The Labour party are spineless. The Liberal Democrats are invisible. And don't get me started on the Conservatives.

We alone have the courage and principles to offer a different vision for the future.

This country is crying out for the kind of policies we offer.

A majority of voters support nationalisation – including Conservative voters.

People are sick of paying rip-off energy prices for their money to land in the pockets of wealthy shareholders.

They want action on inequality, on the climate, on our neglected NHS.

In the Green Party, our strength has always been that we don't shy away from offering bold solutions.

We say what the other parties are too timid to say.

We stick to our principles when others chase public opinion. And voters know that.

But as we well know, the victory of our ideas cannot be taken for granted.

We have to be brave. We have to be loud. And we have to build from the grassroots up.

In my role as Deputy Leader, one of the things I've become perhaps most well known for is my ever-growing stack of train tickets.

I've spent my time in the leadership travelling across the country, visiting local parties to see the amazing work that you're doing and support you to grow even further.

It's down to the hard and often unsung work of local party members that we recently hit the incredible milestone of electing over five hundred and fifty local councillors across England and Wales.

It's local party members who spend cold winter evenings knocking on doors, speaking to voters, and getting the Green message out there.

And it's only through investing in our local parties that we will achieve the breakthroughs we need at the next General Election.

As it's my final speech to conference, I want to leave you with a few words of advice:

- Never shy away from being radical yet rational in the policies we offer
- Hope is contagious. Never forget what gives you hope, and make sure you pass that on
- Remember your own power to make change happen. That's about action on doorsteps, on the streets, and in Parliament.

As I step down after eight years as deputy leader, I am absolutely thrilled to be passing the torch to my good friend Zack Polanski.

An inspiring campaigner, a tireless activist, and above all, a dedicated Green.

But most of all, conference, I want to hand over to you.

This is the moment to get the Green message out there.

To make our voices heard on the doorsteps, at rallies, in council chambers and in the media.

Your passion and your work has got us this far. But I know there's so much more we can achieve.

It's been a pleasure and a privilege to do this work alongside you.

Now – over to you.

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[Greens back positive charter of worker and trade union rights](#)



1 October 2022

Green Party conference today pledged to support working people resisting the latest anti-trades union laws and committed itself to working with unions to establish a charter of positive rights. [1]

Professor Catherine Rowett, Green Party Work, Employment and Social Security spokesperson, said:

“The Conservative government is enabling firms to use agency workers to replace striking workers and break strike action, further undermining people’s democratic rights. These laws are the latest in a long line designed to restrict trade unions and worker organisation.

“Trade union rights are fundamental to a free society and enabled us to achieve major improvements in working conditions during the 20th century. It is terrifying to see those improvements being rolled back and the democratic freedoms that secured them taken away.

“The erosion of workers’ rights under successive Tory governments since Thatcher has contributed to rising inequality and exploitation of workers, leading to a dystopian prospect as the current government seeks to repeal protective EU regulations.”

Matthew Hull, Chair of the Green Party Trade Union Group, who proposed the successful motion, said:

“I’m delighted that the Green Party is standing shoulder-to-shoulder with working people struggling against precarious work, soaring prices and stagnant wages.

“We want to see the repeal of existing anti-union and anti-strike laws.

“They should be replaced with a positive charter of worker and trade union rights, enshrining the fundamental right to organise and strike, drawn up in consultation with trade unions. Those rights must include the right to take industrial action to demand ecological justice.”

Notes

1 The full motion can be read here: <http://greencoordinate.co.uk/agenda/motions/stating-opposition-to-anti-union-and-anti-strike-laws/>

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No environmental justice without social, racial and economic justice,

says deputy leader Zack Polanski



1 October 2022

- **Zack Polanski highlights importance of diversity, representation and electoral reform in speech to Harrogate conference**
- **“There’s only one authentic response to people struggling just to get by and that response is solidarity” – Zack Polanski**

The new deputy leader of the Green Party, Zack Polanski, has told the party’s conference in Harrogate today that there is no environmental justice without social, racial and economic justice too.

Polanski used his maiden speech to pledge to campaign and speak with – rather than for – those people who don’t have a voice.

He said:

“Representation is important. Diversity is important. It’s massively important that I use this platform to campaign and speak with – rather than for – those people who don’t have that voice. There are so many people who feel unseen, unheard, unrepresented and we as a party can both connect with these people and take their worries and needs and speak truth to power.”

“Ultimately there’s only one authentic response to people struggling just to get by and in the Green Party we know that response is solidarity.”

Polanski also drew attention to “our broken voting system” as one of the key barriers to representation and urged Labour leader Keir Starmer to listen to his members on electoral reform:

“We have a broken voting system that means people are not represented properly in decisions made on everything from policing, transport to the NHS. We also know that if we want grown up politics; grown up collaborations that work in people’s best interests, then we need Proportional Representation. We’re delighted that Labour members, and unions, have backed Proportional Representation in overwhelming numbers. But Keir is saying no: no to fair votes. So let me say to Keir Starmer – listen to your members.”

Zack Polanski also praised his predecessor Amelia Womack, noting how her dedicated service has resulted in the huge growth of Green Party councillors during her eight years in post.

ENDS

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Deputy Leader Autumn Conference speech 2022



1 October 2022

Thank you.

Let me tell you about what happened in my first engagement as the new Deputy Leader, I was at a community garden: a group of urban food growers were launching a handbook called Growing for Change. I'd been invited to speak to everyone and I got there early as I was keen to see what other people had to say too.

They were making the clear, excellent points that we should all have access to growing our own food – particularly in a cost of living crisis.

I too was already pretty clear about what needed to be said: that there is no environmental justice without social, racial and economic justice too – and that urban food growing is a perfect, really tangible example of where these different aspects come together particularly for those struggling with the rising price of food and being able to grow their own.

I was just about to speak

-The speaker before me finishing up about their work at lots of community gardens, when suddenly he stepped into the audience, got down on one knee in front of the person next to me. And delivered a spontaneous wedding proposal!

Not something I was expecting. Could have gone very wrong, but luckily she said yes. And, although a hard act to follow, we then did get back to talking about the climate and nature emergency.

So as well as congratulating Noemi and Andy on their future together and barring another proposal in the offing – I want to talk about another hard act to follow, indeed a spectacular act to follow and that's our outgoing deputy leader Amelia Womack.

Amelia has been our deputy leader for 8 years, seen us through several general and local elections, a pandemic, brexit and very wonderfully, she told Piers Morgan live on TV that he was getting his knickers in a twist over a vegan sausage.

Amelia in her time as Deputy Leader has seen the party grow with her dedicated support. When you look at the trajectory of Green Party councillors we've won, yes, it was trickling upwards by a handful each year but it accelerated during Amelia's term of office as she toured the country week after week for around, I make it 416 weeks of her term, and in the last few

years we all know what has happened.

I want to take a moment before talking about what comes next, to say on behalf of all of conference, those now 558 councillors and the entire Green Party, – Amelia Womack, thank you!

It's now been a month since I was elected as your new Deputy Leader and what a month it's been. My first week wasn't even over and Liz Truss had become Prime Minister.

As with any new Prime Minister we have to hope for the good of the country that she can rise to the scale of the challenges facing us. But previous experience suggests she won't – in fact in a very short space of time, she's already made things considerably worse and rather than reversing her awful decisions, she looks like she's just going to dig deeper and deeper.

And we know all this not just because we listened to that catastrophic mini-budget last Friday but because we talk to people every day – on their doorsteps, on picket lines, at bus stops – we know the problems. And in the Green Party we know the solutions too.

We know that the same actions to tackle the cost of living crisis are often the exact same actions that we need to tackle the climate crisis.

From insulating homes to investing in renewables to pushing hard for the fundamental human right to breathe clean air – we have been pushing our plans for decades and more recently across the country implementing them into real action that changes people's lives.

So when I say there's no environmental justice without racial, economic and social justice too – what do I actually mean? It's the idea that everything is interconnected. We want system change. We cannot have business as usual. So- Let's look into that a little deeper – let's begin with environmental justice.

The IPCC – the intergovernmental panel on climate change – says we need to reach peak emissions within the next 18 months. It seems to me that other parties simply haven't heard this call or are choosing not to hear it. As Greta Thunberg said "Is my microphone on?"

We in The Green Party have consistently placed protection of our planet at the heart of everything we do. And we will continue to do so.

We know though that in order to achieve that our society must simultaneously tackle the other injustices too. They are embedded in it so let's talk about those. They are often the consequences of colonialism – we need to name that.

A society built deliberately on the exploitation of people in order to feed our society's reliance on fossil fuels. The most recent United Nations report finally included a line about colonialism. Brazilian Indigenous activist Taily Terena opened the Peoples Pavillion at COP26 with these words: "Colonialism caused climate change.

Our rights and traditional knowledge are the solution.” And she’s right. Not only do colonial states exploit the land and resources that others are dependent on – they devastated ecosystems too. We need to listen to the people who are bearing the worst brunts of the crisis who have often done the least to cause it.

That’s why you can’t have environmental justice without racial justice too.

And here in the UK, let’s take air pollution for example – whether it’s campaigning against incinerators or new road building projects or voting against cuts to public transport, far too often these occur in the middle of communities of people of colour who can feel like they don’t have access to representation or power. That there is nothing they can do.

I was having this exact conversation this week in Manchester with Cllr Ekua Bayu who has joined the Green group from the Labour Party (welcome Ekua!) joining Astrid Johnson and Rob Nunney as our Manchester Councillors.

We were speaking at an event with the Young Greens where Ekua spoke powerfully about the community she serves in Hulme. She spoke about the need for Green politics to not be abstract. but to be with communities – to be active, supporting people who may never have had the resource or opportunity to literally get their hands in the soil.

We know as a party we need to do more to reach out to these communities and be clear that we will always stand by them.

And then on to social Justice. We are in a cost of living crisis but we know that this is really an income crisis. For years peoples wages have remained stagnant or fallen whilst shareholders take home large dividends, while people at the top have seen their profits skyrocket and lucrative contracts awarded to their mates.

The Tories never acknowledge their mismanagement of our economy, their ideologically driven so called “trickle down economics” , the unforgiveable lifting of the cap on bankers’ bonuses. Conference, haven’t they noticed? people are suffering. And with the inequality crisis too, it’s the most vulnerable people who are always being hit the hardest.

I’ve been proud to be out on picket lines with working people. We know in this party that when people ask for our help we give it. Ultimately there’s only one authentic response to people struggling just to get by and in the Green Party we know that response is solidarity-

And here we have yet another cabinet set on ripping up our human rights and creating phoney

culture wars. They only have one tactic. To scapegoat. To other. To blame. When I was elected as Deputy Leader I talked about being the first Jewish and gay Deputy Leader in British History – and some people online asked me why that was relevant. It’s a fair question – but I think there’s an even fairer answer.

Representation is important. Diversity is important. Not just for me to advocate for my communities – although I will certainly do that too – but it's massively important that I use this literal platform to campaign and speak with – rather than for – those people who don't have that voice.

There are so many people who feel unseen, unheard, unrepresented and we as a party can both connect with these people and take their worries and needs and speak truth to power.. And crucially – be there to protect them when they want it when the powerful hold them in their sights.

Whether it's refugees, Gypsy Roma Traveller communities, people with disabilities and/or the LGBTQIA+ community (and of course that includes trans people as there's no LGB without the T) – history has horrifically demonstrated that when they come for one of us, they come for all of us...and conference, we will stick together.

Environmental justice, racial justice, social justice:

We won't let them get away with any dereliction of duty. People can say we're virtue signalling – I don't think there's anything wrong with wanting to signal towards virtuousness and they can call us woke – Fine. Yes! We're awake, alert and ready to go.

And whilst others may sleep through all the alarms – ringing for climate ringing for the cost of living – ,we are the ones leaping to action. We do not have time to keep hitting snooze!

And then there's economic justice. We talk about this winter being difficult – if not impossible for people. And that's shockingly true. But those in power need to also face up to the fact that millions of people in the UK in 2022 are already living in extreme poverty.

Damp, cold and mouldy homes, struggling to keep food on the table, struggling to pay their rising bills We as a party have long advocated for plans like a Universal Basic Income – we know that this has the potential to lift millions of people out of poverty.

In London where I'm elected to the Assembly and chair the Environment committee, I've been making the case to the Mayor to do a pilot scheme and have recently commissioned a report looking at how we can best engage with local communities and have these conversations.

It's these examples that are happening all across England and Wales: elected Greens and local members understanding the power of good ideas and making change in their communities.

And we know economic justice isn't just about money: all too often with poverty it is a lack of space and time as well as a lack of resources that means people struggle to properly manage their everyday circumstances, to get everything sorted and in order, to overcome the anxiety that can literally grip their chest on a daily basis That's why it's so crucial that we get more Greens elected so we can turn the power of our good ideas into reality.

And talking of good ideas you can't have environmental, racial, social or economic justice without democratic justice too.

You didn't really think I was going to give a speech without mentioning our broken voting system? First Past the Post has never worked for anyone – the difference now is that everyone has started to notice that we are stuck. Time and again in General Elections people see candidates like our Prime Minister say she doesn't even mind being unpopular – as she knows she can still get first past that post on a minority of votes. We know that if we want grown up politics, grown up collaborations that work in people's best interests – then we need Proportional Representation. It's no longer if – it's when.

So let me say this to Keir Starmer – listen to your members. We're delighted that Labour members, and unions, have backed Proportional Representation in overwhelming numbers. We saw the feed in the conference hall as people raised their hands to vote for a fairer system. I punched the air and celebrated but very quickly reality started to bite. Keir is saying no. No to fair votes.

He says "It's not a priority." We have a broken voting system that means people are not represented properly in decisions made from everything from policing, transport to the NHS. Literally being people's representative is one of the most fundamental duties and privileges of being an elected politician. It's not OK to present representation as unimportant or a distraction. It's not ok to continue to support a broken status quo and hope that no one notices. For a society that includes everyone that has to include the right to a fair vote for everyone. And in the Green Party – representing people IS our priority.

And conference we ARE representing people. Greens all across England and Wales are proving even with the odds stacked against us, even with the huge sums of money ploughed into the other parties by big business – we will still win even under the current voting system.

Just this month in Lancaster we saw Sue Tyldesley take us from 33% to a whopping 65.7% of the vote becoming one of our newest councillors. Huge congratulations to Sue and the entire team.

This isn't even an unusual story. Over and over again as local results come through – we see the power of an organised Green campaign team, embedded in a local community, knocking on doors and getting out the vote. And it's not just at local level, The media are noticing too with Professor Sir John Curtice saying that the Greens "are a force in British Politics and we simply can't be ignored" and Labour copying our conference slogan almost identically – what can we say other than that we love recycling?

Joking aside, it's heartening when other parties take our ideas and in London with my colleagues Sian and Caroline – London Mayor Sadiq Khan regularly takes up our ideas and implements them and in doing so makes millions of people's lives better – but it's time to cut out the middle man. And so we all look to Parliament. Caroline Lucas is an amazing MP. She's doing brilliant work and punching far above her weight. Just imagine a whole parliament of Caroline Lucases – or rather less weirdly, a whole parliament of people

embodying what she does speaking truth to power, with an authenticity, a compassion and a care we rarely see in our politics. We need to see people like Carla Denyer join her and let's get more Green MPs urgently speaking out and taking action on the change the country desperately needs.

To do this – we need to grow. It's wonderful that you're here and that you're engaged. We all know people who would be here too or join the party – but no one has asked them. Please, talk to your friends, to your family, to your work colleagues. Now is the perfect time to join our movement and to see it grow.

Conference – we know we're not powered by big business. We're powered by people. People like local party chairs, leaflet deliverers, people who manage social media accounts, collect data or make food for activists on action days (a vital job!) – everyone's contribution is hugely welcomed and has played a part in our past success.

I want to thank every single person both in this hall, watching online and more widely who have worked so hard to gain us the success we already have earned.

But there's still a lot of work to do.

Let's get to it – Person by person. Town by town. City by city. That's how we grow. That's how we have justice.

That's how we change our country.

Conference – let's go.

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