

Young Green Co-Chairs (Rosie Rawle and Thomas Hazell) speech to Autumn Conference, Newport, 2019



5 October 2019

Good afternoon, conference.

There has never been a more exciting time to be addressing conference as Young Greens co-chairs.

Across the globe, young people are rising up.

Last month, from China to Uganda, Fiji to Romania, Nigeria to right here in the UK, more than four million people took part in the global strike for climate justice in all four corners of the world.

Together they were all part of the largest climate mobilisation in history.

And at the forefront, leading the charge were the schoolchildren who have taught us all so much about what it means to fight for a better world.

It's young people like the unstoppable Greta Thunberg who will go down in history as the 21st century's greatest heroes.

But it isn't just the school strikers who are leading the way.

It is young people who have been leading the divestment movement in our universities.

Their bold and inspiring action has taken us so far. In 2012, not a single university had committed to end their financing of the fossil fuel industry.

Now – today – half of all UK universities have cut their ties to fossil fuels, taking a phenomenal £12 billion out of the most morally, environmentally and socially bankrupt industry on this planet.

What an incredible achievement.

And in the battle against exploitation and economic injustice – again, we see young people at the centre.

In the worker's rights movement when the bandit capitalists and the money grabbing bosses – we're looking at you Deliveroo – try to get away with paying a pittance and stripping people of their rights, it is young people who have got organised and have fought back.

These inspiring social movements, and many others like them, are shining examples of how young people are speaking truth and making change in the streets, their schools, campuses, workplaces and communities.

And in the Young Greens we back them. From supporting school strikes to standing up for democracy, we stand shoulder to shoulder and we're fighting for change.

We are organising! We will not, we cannot, sit down and let our futures be stolen.

And we've been working for change at the ballot box too.

In the last year alone, the Young Greens mobilised Young Greens to over 20 action days in support of Green candidates the length and breadth of England and Wales.

That was over 700 volunteer hours given to get Greens elected into council chambers.

And it's work paid off. Hours of hard work from Young Greens not only played a key role in the party's record local election results, but from Bury to Brighton, Norwich to Devon it also helped get 7 fantastic Young Green councillors elected.

There's now a record number of Young Greens sit on councils at all levels.

And when Young Greens get elected they really make a difference.

We've seen that in been Brighton and Hove, where three Young Green councillors now sit in the chamber after May's local elections.

Councillors Hannah Clare and Martin Osborne were instrumental in ensuring the council supported the city's youth strikes and allowed its workers to strike in solidarity. Councillor Amy Heley has held the Labour to account on their environmental action as the Greens' climate emergency lead.

We applaud them.

And Nannette Youssef and Jamie Osborn in Norwich, Sabrina Poole in Cirencester, Jo Norton in Mid-Devon, and Robert Nixon in Bicester were all successful in getting their councils to declare a climate emergency.

Having Young Greens in the room makes a difference.

But while these examples show how valuable a Green voice is, much of our politics won't be making many of us cheerful at the moment.

And that's especially true for young people.

Conference, the world's political leaders are gambling away our futures.

Policy after policy stamps down on our generation.

Politicians fail to act on the climate crisis. We have just eleven years left to avoid the worst effects of climate change. Eleven years.

And yet if you looked to the government, you'd think we had eleven centuries.

The Tories are continuing on the path of ever more fossil fuel extraction, made easier by government subsidies.

They're still planning to add a third runway at Heathrow, despite Boris Johnson's promise to lie down in front of bulldozers to stop it from happening.

And their dogma of austerity and privatisation has left us with a crumbling, de-regulated public transport system, where shareholders make millions, the public pays through the roof, and the planet suffers the consequences.

This is wrong. This is dangerous. And to borrow from Liz Truss, this is a disgrace.

Our own government threatens our rights, freedoms and livelihoods with a disastrous no-deal Brexit.

Time after time the Brexiteers have proven they don't care about young people.

We voted overwhelmingly to remain, yet we will lose so much: the Erasmus program, the freedom to live and work in 27 other EU countries, visa-free travel, interrail passes, and so much more.

Millions of us people, like me, who weren't 18 at the time of the referendum will lose out as a result of a decision we couldn't even take part in.

Disastrous education reforms have left young people with a limited curriculum and bigger classes in poorly funded schools.

English students can no longer receive the Education Maintenance Allowance which enabled many to access further education.

And of course, our universities now leave young people graduating into a world saddled with a £50,000 of debt because Nick Clegg and the Liberal Democrats jumped into bed with the Tories at the first sign of power.

All around the world, right wing politicians like Johnson, Trump, and

Bolsonaro preach fear and hatred.

Migrants are branded unwelcome and our own home secretary celebrates the end of freedom of movement.

This is the language of hate and division. It's dangerous and it's deadly.

Conference, it is against this backdrop that we're speaking to you today.

Against this backdrop it's clear that the Green Party is more important than ever.

We're committed to fighting for a fairer future, from inside and outside the ballot box.

We'll fight for a people's vote, and we'll fight to remain in and reform the European Union. We demand freedom of movement, and not just inside the EU. We say abolish the Home Office and all that it stands for.

We'll fight for housing justice for our generation, with a Living Rent through rent controls, renter's unions, and mass social housing programmes. We won't stand for homelessness.

We'll fight for a fairer working world. It is high time for a genuine, real living wage for everyone, regardless of age. And yes that includes apprenticeships and internships. Equal pay for equal work.

We'll fight for free, fair and liberatory education. Reinstating the Education Maintenance Allowance to England, introducing full, living university grants and an end to student debt and tuition fees.

And Conference, we stand fully behind mandatory LGBTIQ+ inclusive sex education. There is no age appropriateness to learning about love. And we need proper, mandatory sex and relationship education which must place front and centre consent.

We'll fight for a global Green New Deal. Environmental justice cannot be achieved if we leave social justice behind. That means rapidly transforming our economy while ensuring we build good, decent, living wage, unionised, sustainable green jobs here in the UK and also throughout the whole of our supply chains.

We'll fight tooth-and-nail against the hollowing out of local government, and for pioneering programmes of municipal socialism. Think housing and utility co-operatives, reclaimed public land and locally-run transport. In every town and city across the country.

And we'll fight for freedom from oppression. Conference, hatred in all its forms – racism, transphobia, anti-Semitism, homophobia, sexism, Islamophobia, ableism and biphobia – are wrong, and we must stamp them out whenever and wherever they rear their ugly heads. Trans men are men, trans women are women, and non-binary identities are valid. We will fight for this to be recognised within and without our party.

And finally, we'll fight to ensure young people are heard, calling for not just votes at 16, but seats in parliament too.

Conference, this is our radical, green and just vision for the future. That is the world we want to live in. And we'll keep on fighting for it.

Because throughout history, when people have come together to fight for a better world, they've won it.

Whether it's the suffragettes, or the Chartists, the people who gave their lives at Peterloo, or those who fought apartheid in South Africa – time and time again people have shown that when they come together to fight injustice they can overcome all the odds, and shape the future.

And Conference the odds are stacked against us. But from the climate crisis to Brexit, austerity to discrimination, we are on the right side of history. Let's work together to make our future. Let's work together to make history.

Thank you conference, solidarity!

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