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It's great to be given the opportunity to address you all today. I feel a little bit like Al Gore, who described himself as a recovering politician. I'm still in recovery from my role as the Green Party's second MP who wasn't. But let me begin by thanking the hundreds of you who came to Bristol to support me in the spring. It was some consolation for me personally that I was able to rejoin my Green colleagues in the European Parliament and continue my work there.

The question people ask me most often at the moment is 'What's life like for a Brit in the European Parliament these days?' They've heard rumours of a punishment Brexit and anger from our European colleagues and want to know what life is like for me. I have to say that nothing could be further from the truth than the tabloid lies about recriminations and reprisals.

Rather, I find sympathy and concern. Not only do other Europeans like us, they also highly value our skill in policy- and law-making. When closing the debate on the Brexit negotiations in Parliament this week Michel Barnier underlined again his huge admiration for the UK and recalled his support for our accession in 1972. And my colleagues in the Parliament will be sad that there is nobody left to tell them untransparent isn't actually a real word. And of course there are the constant demands from the true Anglophiles for me to bring them back some proper Yorkshire tea.

The attitude I've experienced is not that of an adversary but one of a concerned parent whose teenager has gone off the rails. Like all good parents they are showing tough love to the Brexiteers like Johnson and Davis. They are offering clear boundaries that are rigorously enforced. As has been made clear from the beginning there will be no cherry-picking. Attempts to have freedom of movement for goods and capital but not for people will be robustly, and rightly, rejected. As Greens, we will always vigorously defend freedom of movement.

No amount of discussions of the importance of German car exports is going to persuade Europe's leaders that they should allow Brexit to undermine the Union they have spent decades building. No number of trips to foreign capitals is going to break the unity of purpose of EU heads of government. This posturing is for the benefit of the Express and the Mail. It has been clear from the start that the decision we have is a binary one: to accept the single market rules and laws or to go our own way under WTO rules. There will be no bespoke deal for the UK because it would be directly opposed to the EU-27's interests to agree one.

We also need to remember that Brexit is just one item on the list for European policy-makers and one they have grown accustomed to over the months it took us to trigger Article 50. As my political pin-up Margrethe Vestager, the Competition Commissioner, put it: they have moved on from the Bridget Jones stage of sitting on the sofa eating ice

cream and are anticipating all the new possibilities opening up for the EU without the UK as a member. First they were afraid, they were petrified, just thinking they could never live without us by their side. But then they spent so many nights negotiating with David Davis that they were glad to see the back of us.

I'm tempted to ask what is the difference between Theresa May and Gloria Gaynor. But there are just so many answers to that question that it sounds like a joke without a punchline. Of course the answer is that only one of them will survive.

Theresa May says that the United Kingdom has never totally felt at home being in the European Union. I say many of us have never felt less at home in our own country since the vote to leave the EU.

May's inability to negotiate Brexit successfully is a natural consequence of the Tories' historic inability to be anything other than bad Europeans, focused exclusively on our own self-interest and imagining that we are stronger when we stand alone. This is a dangerous national myth which has pervaded the public debate since the end of the Second World War which many British people still think of as our finest hour.

Those myths were essential to build the national resolve to fight fascism. But the reality is that we needed our then allies the Americans and, yes, the Russians too, to defeat Nazism. Unlike our European friends we endlessly replay this moment of history in our popular culture, refusing to move on and join them in building the successful peace that we were really fighting for. There have been notable exceptions, Winston Churchill among them, but too many British politicians have preferred the fantasy of noble isolation and British exceptionalism over the reality of the need to build strong alliances and enhance our links to the continent that we will always be part of.

I know that while 80% of Green voters chose a future for our country inside the EU there will be plenty of people in this room who voted Leave. I know you made that choice with the best of motives and believing it was in the best interests of our country. But I can't believe anybody in this hall wanted Brexit to turn out the way it has, with continuing chaos and conflict on our TV screens each night.

I am sure we can also all agree that the way the referendum was managed was deeply flawed. Of the many criticisms perhaps the most damning was the simplistic nature of the question on the ballot paper, reducing a choice of such massive complexity to a simple In or Out. As a result the country divided. The referendum campaign was full of dishonesty and distortions about the EU and our place in it, from both sides of the fence. In some cases we witnessed downright lies. I am sure we all now take much more interest in messages on the side of buses. It feels like only now are we beginning to have more substantive debates about the EU and what our relationship with the EU means.

What we should really have been considering is a much deeper - a much Greener – question. A question about where powers should really be exercised: the subsidiarity question. This may sound like Eurospeak but is really based on a fundamental Green understanding that we need to move power downwards as well as upwards.

And don't for a moment believe that we aren't critical of the EU. Put TTIP, farming policy or President Juncker into search on my website and you will see that we are often as critical of EU policy as we are of UK government policy. It is this which makes us so distinctive from the Liberal Democrats on Europe. We will never shy away from being critical of the free market corporate agenda that drives much of EU policy. Greens in Europe are fighting every day for social, economic and environmental justice. We have always believed that the EU must be reformed and that another Europe is possible.

The EU isn't perfect, but we cannot reform it from outside. Neither can we address some of the deep rooted global problems we face in isolation. How can we solve problems like climate change or corporate tax avoidance at the national level? The atmosphere has no respect for national borders. And taming the behaviour of corporations operating subsidiaries across the globe requires cooperative working between countries.

We are living in a single global system now and, while many find this disorientating and want to turn back the clock, if we embrace it we can find ways to tackle some of the most difficult political problems facing us.

Greens have the courage to work with this change which is why we are the only truly global political movement of our times. We have the commitment to work with the countries who we are signing trade deals with rather than using our economic muscle to exploit the poorer countries of the world. We understand that when we launch wars in the Middle East we will be responsible for the refugees that the war produces. And most importantly, we recognise that while the effects of climate change are hitting the most vulnerable hardest, there can be no solution that does not include equal living standards and security for all the world's citizens.

From this perspective, Brexit looks like a retreat into oblivion and irrelevance and a decision that runs spectacularly counter to the Zeitgeist.

Let's look back from 2030 and imagine the impact Brexit has had on our country. Aside from letting you know that Caroline still rules supreme in Brighton and has been voted the country's best parliamentarian for a record tenth time I am not going to distract you with the detail of domestic politics. But let's look at what's happened to our economy and society and to our precious environment in the ten years since Brexit.

The Japanese companies we had relied on to provide jobs for nearly a million people since the Tories trashed our manufacturing sector in the 1980s gradually shifted their investment abroad. The banking jobs moved mainly to

Frankfurt and car manufacturing to Poland and Spain. The massive Honda site near Swindon is now a vast concrete wasteland, one corner of which has been turned into an organic vegetable garden by some enterprising local Greens.

This is just as well because the price of food has gone through the roof over the past decade. Fresh fruit and vegetables are now mainly the preserve of those with green fingers and there are long waiting lists for allotments. The five-a-day campaign has had to resort to pushing imported tinned and frozen fruit and veg. You can still buy beef and chicken imported from the US, Turkey and Thailand, three of our key trading partners now, although most of the trade is predominantly one way. And the meat is very poor quality: full of hormones and antibiotics.

Brexit was the death blow to remaining small scale dairy farms. Mega dairies now produce the country's milk, but there have been numerous health scares and stories of dairy cattle being maltreated. An increase in vegetarianism is seen as one upside – for those lucky enough to get their hands on some vegetables! Overall there have been steep declines in the health of British people, especially children, relative to their European neighbours. We daren't ask about the health or welfare of the animals in distant factories. In a desperate attempt to compete with imports, animal welfare standards in the UK have also hit rock bottom.

Austerity has continued for two decades now. The crisis in the health service caused by the exodus of EU workers and the collapse in tax receipts after corporate tax rates were slashed to 5% was the smokescreen behind which privatisation accelerated. Those in secure employment mostly now use private insurance schemes. Those without have seen a rise in premature mortality. Again, children have been the worst affected.

The grand plans for making Britain Great Again evaporated in the early 20s as the largest trading blocs offered us poor terms of trade and our services sector was hit by competition from the US and India. Commonwealth countries continued their close alliances with countries in their own region - Australia with Asia, Canada with the US - and, in desperation, Liam Fox focused on signing contracts for the export of arms to Saudi, Turkey, and the Philippines, arms that were used to kill civilians, adding to Britain's shame in the world.

In an attempt to attract corporations to set up factories, environmental standards were slashed. Following a series of chemical fires, some tightening of regulation was introduced, but cuts to staff at the Health and Safety Executive meant these could not be enforced and the accidents and pollution incidents continued. Britain fell rapidly down the Human Development Index and for the first time the rate of infant mortality rose. Wildlife was also devastated in a process some referred to as the Second Silent Spring.

Britain is a much less diverse country than it was a mere decade ago. The first to leave were our EU friends who just could not stand the insults and attacks their children were subjected to in the playground. As xenophobia increased, encouraged by a government seeking to distract attention from the disastrous economic situation, many skilled

workers chose to move to other countries. Far right parties exploited the fall in wages and decline in social services to whip up hatred against minority ethnic groups, many of whom also chose to leave for friendlier countries.

Political commentators noted that the doomed and now nearly forgotten former Prime Minister Theresa May had criticised the Conservatives as the nasty party but had presided over a time during which the United Kingdom became the nasty country.

This is one possible imagining of the dystopian future after Brexit. I'm sorry that it's rather more like the handmaid's tale than you might be used to in conference speeches. I'm feeling like those guys who used to wander around with sandwich boards saying 'The end of the world is nigh' and I am sorry that this is all so biblical. I'm expecting the four horsemen of the apocalypse to ride in, except that would probably be counter to our animals rights policy.

I've tried, I really have tried, to imagine alternative futures, futures in which we grow more of our own food and rebuild strong local economies, futures where we take control of the banks and stop corporations avoiding their taxes, futures where Michael Gove really means what he says about Green Brexit, but I find it hard to believe that we can make those futures happen in the diminished democracy that the UK has become. I don't lack vision or hope - and you're going to be hearing much more about that from Caroline and Jonathan - but what I do lack is the belief that Brexit was ever intended to make life better for you and me or the millions of caring people who we share our country with.

I'm astonished, quite honestly, that it is down to the likes of you and me to stop both Tories and Labour pushing us off the cliff edge. I find myself to be some sort of accidental patriot, one of a bunch of people defending our country against politicians who are out of control.

We have heard more talk about democracy in the past year than in my whole lifetime and quite frankly most of it is nonsense on stilts. Democracy is about making choices between real possible futures. The referendum wasn't that. Instead it was an invitation to bundle up all your frustrations and disappointments and hurl them at a distant target labelled 'Brussels'.

As a party with a historically vital role but operating in a political system that starves us of power it is easy to view the leading players in the Tory and Labour parties with disdain. But I have never known a time when our country was so poorly governed and when there were so few politicians with the stature to rise to the task at hand.

Let's begin with the Conservatives. The analogy of ferrets in a sack feels unfair to ferrets, as the Brexit schoolboys and then Brexit bulldog himself take chunks out of each other. Cabinet ministers contradict not only each other but even themselves on a daily and sometimes hourly basis, in full glare of the world's media.

We have the fatally weakened and tragic figure of Theresa May speaking on public platforms from Manchester to Florence (why Florence? Machiavelli? Medici? The symbolism was dreadful) while Boris writes the opposite in The Sun or The Torygraph. Watching their current antics reminds me of Lord of the Flies as they struggle for supremacy, focused on their own narrow self-interest. They are living out their own fantasy of free-market economics in the absence of social constraint.

I have some colleagues who are Tory MEPs and they are just as horrified by what is happening as I am. The Conservative Party that is trashing everything from our constitution to our standing in the world! The Conservative and Unionist party that is putting intolerable stress on the situation in the Union of Northern Ireland! The party of economic stability whose disastrous Brexit gamble has seen us lose our triple A credit rating!

The Conservative party are disfiguring our country beyond recognition. They have proved themselves to be incapable of governing and their petty squabbles are destructive at home and embarrassing abroad. As Guardian columnist Marina Hyde tartly observed, their negotiating strategy is based on the assumption that Europe doesn't have the internet. So it's fine to insult Barnier at the weekend and then turn up smiling on Monday and expect him to be friendly. I'm sorry to have to tell you that whatever adolescent rutting has taken place over the weekend is always the talk of Brussels when I reach my committee on Monday afternoon.

But when we look to Labour for a clear and strong alternative we find a party as terminally divided on Brexit as the Conservatives. And worse still, a party whose Lexit wing is prepared to block the party from holding a debate on the most important question facing the country. Nobody would welcome a change of government more than me, but Labour cannot claim to be a government in waiting when they won't even provide opposition on the dominant political issue of the day. Governance demands courage and leadership and Labour has failed to show either on Brexit.

We know why this is happening. We know that the group now leading the Labour Party have historically opposed the European Union as a bosses' Europe. We know that they misguidedly believe that the vision they have for more state intervention in the economy and wider public ownership would not be possible within the EU, in spite of the fact that in almost all EU countries the government plays a larger role in the economy than is the case in the UK.

But most importantly, Labour seem to have failed to grasp that the economic damage that Brexit will do will make all the dreams of a better future for Britain and for Britain's working people turn to dust. The fall in the pound, the loss of investment, the falling tax revenues, all of these will make it simply impossible for Labour to introduce the programme they proposed at the 2017 election. There is one simple message for Labour on Brexit: you can't be anti-austerity and pro-Brexit.

The Brexit dystopia I have outlined is about as far removed from the Green vision for a fairer society and a protected and healthy environment as is possible. The future we dream of and work so hard to bring about at council and Assembly level and in the UK and European Parliaments is made ten times harder by Brexit.

I was proud to announce our policy of holding a ratification referendum during the general election campaign. And that remaining in the EU should be an option in this referendum. There is nothing undemocratic about this. We are asking for more democracy, not less. We are asking for a real democratic choice between two real, possible futures at the end of the negotiations: the deal– or remaining a member of the EU.

It is the Brextremists, fighting tooth and nail against the ratification referendum, who are the anti-democrats. They are terrified that the British people will next time round be armed with the full facts and have a much clearer idea of two alternative futures.

Does Boris Johnson believe in democracy? The man who touted for votes on the basis of the biggest lie in the history of British politics? The man who has since claimed that ‘the promises made by the Leave side were a range of possibilities’?

Does Steve Baker believe in democracy? The man who received funding from the secretive Constitutional Research Council that gave the DUP more than £425,000 for its Brexit campaign. Baker is now minister in the Brexit department, the very same man who is now refusing to release the secret Brexit studies that reveal the potential impacts of Brexit.

And what of Dan Hannan? Does he believe in democracy? The man who famously said ahead of the referendum that absolutely nobody is talking about threatening our place in the single market. This is the same Hannan who was the founder of the European Research Group (ERG), a group of Tory hardliners advocating a hard Brexit including full withdrawal from - you guessed it - the Single Market.

The real attacks on democracy are not coming from us but from a Prime Minister who went all the way to the high court to fight Gina Miller over the right of our democratic representatives to vote on the triggering of article 50. They are coming from those who would give vast powers to one minister with no parliamentary scrutiny. From those who are already lobbying ministers to repeal legislation that has protected our environment and our rights at work for decades. From those who seek to deny us our right to say that we continue to consider ourselves as European citizens and the right to condemn Brexit as a historic act of folly.

The hard Brexit being driven by extremist Tories is nothing less than a soft coup. Behind the myth of taking back control is the reality of a power shift away from Parliament and to Ministers. This is why we will fight the repeal bill every step of the way.

Conference, I believe that the historic mistake to leave the EU can and must be reversed. It is through championing our ratification referendum and campaigning to remain in the EU in such a referendum that the people will bring an end to this damaging and dangerous chapter in our country's history. I believe as Greens we must add our voices to the growing chorus demanding that we can – and we must – Stop Brexit!