



green
party

Green Party Northern Ireland Co-Chair Kelly Andrews address to the Green Party National Convention, Dundalk 2008 entitled 'Engaging Young People In Politics'

When I've asked young people what do you think of politics? Some of the answers I have heard have been government, men in grey suits, irrelevant, and even boring.

While for some young people politics is rock and roll for ugly people- green politics is certainly not! When we look at our average stereotypical politician, we find the following overwhelmingly male, over fifty, middle class, professional. Young people can be forgiven about feeling detached from the political process. That is why it is so important that we as a Party actively engage, encourage and promote the talent of our young people so they too can become role models.

We are a young movement, a growing party and we need to promote young people in the party into positions as well as encouraging them to stand for election. Equally it is a central aim of green politics to re-engage young people in the political process. The campaigns to lower the age of voting which the Green Party in Northern Ireland has been promoting for some time not only accords with our principles, but also generates media interest and recruitment of new members.

The Green Party is for anyone who wants to make a positive difference in the world we live no matter what age. Our policies are driven by the protection of our planet for future generations, ecological sustainability, equity and social justice as well as self-reliance of local and regional economies, encouraging a true sense of community. This vision of the future has to be based on democracy, transparency, gender equality and the right of all people to express themselves and participate fully in decision-making process.

We have heard from the Panel how young people in our Party are having a real impact and are being consulted on policy development. We must encourage and nurture this participation, the Green Party must value the contribution that young people make so that their ideas and experiences are actively sought, and not dismissed out of hand. I have been fortunate in that I have had the support from senior members of the party, who encouraged me and gave me the opportunities to learn and development my skills.

Young people in our party are not there to be patronised, they are there to make a difference, to learn from others experiences, to help build up local branches, work on campaigns, and share in our green vision of society and work towards achieving this.

Being involved in politics is not only about becoming an elected representative; there are a range of roles and areas which we need talented people for: fundraising, research, community activism, leafleting, canvassing, and taking part in internet forums and blog sites. We have heard some examples where young people are fulfilling many of these roles. We have always taken great pride in being a family friendly party, allowing members to bring children to meetings, being flexible in terms of balancing family commitment, work and party work. It is imperative we develop political awareness in our younger members, so that they don't suffer the apathy with politics which many in our society feel. . We can do this by encouraging greater participating in our local branches, the Young Greens and in the Party generally; by sharing roles and responsibilities we will build a Party where the young members of the Party will know that they are a valued member of the team.

I am proud to be part of a political party which had a radical vision and pragmatic policies to deliver social and environmental change. By actively engaging with young people we will guarantee our progress towards achieving our aims. Martin Luther King had a dream, not a nightmare- we have to get better at inspiring young people with our vision of a green, safe future. We can start here and now. So thank you for being here- it really does make a difference.

The Greens in Europe have been the major drivers regarding the campaign to keep the European Union GM free. Thanks to the Greens the adoption of the existing European legislations regarding the authorization, traceability and labeling of GMO and GM products is now in place. However, at present the European Commission a non elected body is currently considering the authorization of two different varieties of GM maize, the Commission is in the process of preparing its decisions for submission to members' states government in the European council. It is important we maintain our strong position against GMO.

Dr Caroline Lucas, Green MEP for South-East England, endorsed the firm stance of all greens when she said, "There is every reason why we need to keep up the fight to keep Europe GM-free, the tragedy is that it is such a relentless fight, despite not only the rapidly accumulating evidence in our favour and the enormous relevance of the precautionary principle, but also the overwhelming public opposition to GMOs." Public opinion polls consistently show that 70 percent or more of consumers in Europe do not want to eat GM food.

In Europe the Greens will continue to strive for greater measures to address Climate change, improve food standards and farming practices, improve animal welfare, keep Europe GM free, fight nuclear power in all its forms, build a society based on social justice for all. Being green is not about being backwards-looking; it is about looking forward to a future which uses cleaner, safer and more efficient energy. We need progress which is environmentally, socially and politically sustainable. In fact the policies we need for an improved quality of life are precisely the policies we need to tackle climate change.

I am so proud to be part of a political party which has the radical vision and pragmatic policies to deliver social and environmental change. Martin Luther King had a dream, not a nightmare - we have to get better at inspiring people with our vision of green, safe, future. We can start here and now. So thank you for being here - it really does make a difference.

Kelly Andrews