



AMITA
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interim leader

green party of canada

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My dearest Greens,

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your interim Leader. It has been the honour of a lifetime. I took this position out of gratitude to and in service of everyone who has built, grown, supported, and worked for this Party since its foundation nearly forty years ago and in dedication to our phenomenal caucus and all the elected Greens across the country in provincial and municipal parties.

My faith and commitment to you all comes from our shared goal of transforming this country into one that understands humanity as a part of nature, that is equitable and sustainable for generations, and that is ready to face all crises with care, compassion, and resiliency.

Our beloved Party has had a rough time over the past couple of years, and we are on a long road to rebuilding. We have the opportunity to reset our foundation so that we may grow sustainably, rooted firmly in the values we all share of Ecological Wisdom, Sustainability, Social Justice, Non Violence, Respect for Diversity, and Participatory Democracy.

What I witnessed of this Party is truly beautiful. We are a community of amazing people dedicated to a better world, founded on a concept no other Party can represent because it goes against the system that props them up. We have a core of wanting life in balance, politics that bring everyone together, and an economy for well-being instead of extractive profit. We are very clearly needed on the national stage, and to be there effectively, we must be strong, self-consistent, and unified.

I present to you here what I found, my reflections, the beauty of us, and recommendations for sorting through the complexities that are holding us back. An honest look at our issues and the follow-through to transform ourselves is necessary for us to become everything we want to be.

With love for you and for everything we will grow to be,

Amita Kuttner

Finding Balance: Reconnecting to our Values

As I crossed the country and met with many of you on my *Reconnection Tour*, we gathered notes on the challenges people face, feedback for the Party, and the members' vision, and I shared with you my thoughts on this particular moment in history.

We face a world in crisis, escalating global violence, and political and interpersonal division. People appear either to be in despair at the realities we have to contend with or in denial because facing the facts is too painful, and we are ill-equipped. Many have forgotten what it feels like to be cared for, no longer being able to expect that if something happens, anyone will be there for them or even care.

Oddly, I have been overwhelmingly hopeful, which is a juxtaposition I must explain. Perhaps hope is the wrong word for it; I am feeling excited. Because we know the road before us will not be easy, but I am excited to go down it with you.

Though it seems we face crisis upon crisis, really it's one big crisis because the root causes are the same.

Centering Indigenous sovereignty and justice

Colonialism is a core cause of the climate crisis and many of our systemic problems and failures. It's a word that sometimes has many definitions, so I want to clarify that I mean colonialism's prominence in Canadian society and culture.

Our work for environmental, social, and climate justice must always be grounded in Indigenous sovereignty and working for true justice. It must go beyond acknowledging territories to having those of us who are settlers step up to dismantle structures of harm.

Politics in Canada is founded on colonialism, with elements of ableism, white superiority, extractivism, individualism, and more. It should come as no surprise that political organizations default to functioning this way, the Party itself is not at fault for this being the case, but can take responsibility.

It is easy and justifiable to be angry against a world that is so wrong and steeped with injustice. Though there is individual responsibility in this, we should not blame each other for carrying trauma or having learned to perpetuate oppressive structures, nor should we expect marginalized people to do the work.

In difficult times, we are challenged and called to be our best selves. We have always dedicated ourselves to structural transformation and values-based organizing. Because the Party wishes to change, decolonize, and become self-consistent, it is necessary to discuss the details openly, honestly, and with love.

It gives me hope that so many of you are stepping up to do the hard work. I am honoured to be able to share back with you the vision you collectively shared with me on tour.

Vision Green

When I became interim Leader last year, Federal Council mandated that I "unify Greens around shared values and a shared vision," I immediately asked myself, "What is the members' vision?" As the leader of a grass-roots organization, I knew it would be inappropriate to decide or assume I knew the members'

vision. I needed to connect with the members and bring them together so they could define their vision. Thankfully, the Federal Council also mandated that I "travel to meet Greens in person across Canada," so I began my journey.

As I embarked on the *Reconnection Tour*, I was delighted to discover, perhaps unsurprisingly, that we Greens already have a cohesive shared vision for our collective future, and goodness, it's what we need right now.

From downtown Toronto to the farms of Cowichan, from the streets of Montréal to the old-growth of Ada'itsx (Fairy Creek), from the shores of Prince Edward Island to the valley of Cowessess Nation, we kept hearing of one concept: ***Balance***.

Balance is an admission that we live in abundance but are not living abundantly, that we are living out of balance with the planet, and that we are living out of balance with each other and ourselves.

Balance is a need for us all to be connected and part of a community.

Balance is healthy people working because it gives them meaning, not to pay for commodified necessities.

Balance is a nation of interconnected local, self-sufficient communities where people live in dignity and without fear.

Balance is living in circularity in our economy, with resources, and our own energy.

Balance is a world at peace with shared humanity, care, and compassion, not because it was imposed but through self-determination.

Balance is a planet that provides clean air, water, and food for people, plants, and animals for generations to come.

The premise of my mandate to "unify Greens under a shared vision" was that we are divided. Yet I did not find a party divided; I found a party united in a beautiful, bold vision grounded in our six core values.

Our party is much like the rest of our country, appearing or made to appear divided, but this does not reflect reality. We must break through the dystopian fog people have constructed for us and stop fearing our optimism.

With this vision in hand, I am confident we will navigate through these troubled times and come out on the other side stronger than ever. However, vision alone will not get us there, so I'd like to highlight a few observations I made as Leader to assist us all in realizing this beautiful vision.

Role of the Leader

In my experience as Leader, people have various expectations of what the Leader should do. The multiple definitions of the Leader create an opportunity for confusion, with significant variations between our Constitution, Bylaws and Policies, the Canada Elections Act, and societal norms. A definition of the Leader that everyone universally understands would be useful.

Where we find consensus is that the Leader is the principal spokesperson of the Party. Still, we have sometimes needed clarification about whether the spokesperson has any agency, which has made us vulnerable.

Structurally the relationship between the Leader, caucus, shadow cabinet, council, fund, members, party staff, volunteers, EDAs, and the public, needs to be clearly defined. This confusion creates a vacuum in the system, which naturally tends toward power struggles that don't make sense and removes time and energy from important work that needs to happen.

Undoubtedly, we operate differently from other parties. Still, we must recognize the political reality that we only hold mindshare with the public if we have a well-supported leader and caucus. We need a much deeper understanding of how the public understands politics, how we function as a political party, how the public views us, and how we define ourselves. These all must be in *balance*.

It is my recommendation that the Leader should neither direct nor be directed. Still, they need a defined place within the structure that is universally understood and supported. All of this has to exist within the larger picture of the political reality that the public expects.

Governance

The Green Party is a member-led grassroots organization with power distributed among the collective. The status quo parties concentrate power with the leader, federal council, and their inner circle.

As interim Leader, I have seen an organization of dedicated, passionate people working extremely hard, often volunteering more than full-time hours every week for months and months and months on end, often without recognition. We are prone to honest mistakes and face systemic issues of disconnection, accountability, transparency, demoralization, and confusion that we need to be able to resolve collectively with dignity and grace.

I don't have all the answers, but at this stage, the most important thing is to collectively reset and look at ourselves through the lens of our core values, continuing the conversation we started on the *Reconnection Tour*. Stepping into living our core values is what we all deserve as members, and it is what our country needs from the Green Party. We must do this at a structural level.

Ecological Wisdom

To me, ecological wisdom is about having networks of small systems and circularity and moving at the pace of our well-being, like an old-growth forest. However, I have seen that our consensus-building system needs to be balanced, with rules applied consistently, and open spaces for people to come to consensus.

Much like society, we are operating under a scarcity mindset, overusing the resources we have directly in front of us, whether money, volunteers, or supporters, and manufacturing crises because we can't see beyond an arm's length.

To bring ourselves back into balance, we should broadly restructure to work in networked groups of a reasonable size, transforming the party into a healthy, thriving ecosystem. I urge consulting the Indigenous Peoples Advisory Circle to structure ourselves along non-colonial systems of governance. We do not do well with hierarchies, but distributed governance requires clear definitions and process.

Social Justice

Social Justice is about equal rights and access for everyone, which requires facing truths about ourselves, even difficult ones, with radical honesty, respect, compassion, dignity, and grace.

While we are not unique in having systemic issues, we could be doing much more to ensure everyone can participate, including people without exclusion, and equitably distributing resources.

The work of transforming the party into one where all are equal begins with auditing systemic barriers to participation, eliminating those barriers, and talking openly and honestly about systemic issues like ableism, patriarchy, colonialism, racism, misogyny, transphobia, and homophobia.

Participatory Democracy

Participatory Democracy is about power granted to representatives and decision-makers, not precluding consultation with constituents and stakeholders. Participatory Democracy is consensus building, but for participants to realize it fully, they require trust, honesty, transparency, and consent.

I've observed that members feel disconnected, disempowered, disenfranchised, and disengaged from their democratic process. There are significant barriers to participating in this party, partly because of a lack of accommodation for accessibility needs but most importantly because we don't have systemic clarity.

To ensure every person can participate fully, we need to actualize empowering and enfranchising members as the highest order of governance. We need to create a democratic structure that is functional and maintains full participation with guardrails against stratification.

Non-violence

Non-violence is about having systems that are not just non-violent but strive to be anti-violent and anti-oppressive. Nobody in the system should fear open conflict, and nobody should fear making mistakes.

There seems to be a cultural acceptance that passive aggression is not violence when it is, and that insulting or dehumanizing someone is okay so long as you do it politely. I have observed people blaming and shaming others for the trauma they carry, with different definitions of violence, crossing each others' boundaries, and violating each others' consent quite often. There is a lot of unconscious bias at play here for everyone, which will take humility and collective learning to overcome, but it is possible.

To help people get there together, we need to implement a restorative justice system. We should learn from the other Green parties at home and abroad who have had more success at this recently. We need a healing process that allows us to break the cycles of violence and come to a shared understanding of violence in a way that does not blame and does not shame.

Sustainability

Sustainability is about building resiliency into everything. It takes operating in a way that isn't burning people out and making sure we have the capacity not to fall apart when a single person isn't available, and no one person should be able to unbalance the system.

A problem for us is that we have too few people taking on way too much in a volunteer capacity. We have far fewer resources than the other parties, but this has always been the case. We must therefore be good at investing those resources efficiently and effectively.

We tend to rely too heavily on volunteers who have the means and privilege to donate vast amounts of time. We also desire staff to have the same dedication as volunteers giving their lives to the cause. Rarely do we pause to evaluate whether we're working sustainably or repeating work unnecessarily. Quite simply, this is not sustainable.

To build an organization that is resilient for the long term, we need to stop placing more value on the work an individual does than on their well-being and that of others. We must determine our operational capacity and actual and projected growth curves and operate within them, constantly reevaluating so we can grow and maintain resources without burning people out.

Respect for Diversity

Respect for diversity is about ensuring the dignity and well-being of all people, regardless of a person's background, means, or ability, and being able to work or deliver and receive feedback without shame.

In my time as interim Leader, the vast majority of people have been lovely, but often lack the training needed to identify microaggressions and systemic issues. They have asked for help and need the resources to be able to do something about it.

These problems are not unique to us as a party. Having a large membership willing to confront these challenges is rare and beautiful. A strong desire to live our core values creates the potential to overcome these challenges, but it also requires this of us, and we should embrace it.

To become a party that treats everyone with dignity and ensures their well-being, we should provide everyone with the resources to learn about systemic issues to dismantle them collectively, both in the party and across society. Federal Council has already begun some of the necessary work. Still, at this stage, I see a party that would benefit from the input and support of experts, even hired professionals, to give us the resources to succeed.

Parting words

In summary, I believe we need to professionalize without consolidating power, implement robust processes for accountability and transparency, and clearly define the leader and elected caucus in our structure. These would be best accomplished as updates to our governance documents, through a process with the members. We must also set up better systems for dispute resolution, anti-oppression, and more. I will provide more in-depth analysis and recommendations to the new leader, along with passing on work I started but have not completed.

This must also, I believe, include a growing understanding and infrastructure for working with trauma, and understanding how we react differently because of it. Creating trauma informed processes is one piece, and so is having the right experts and supports available. I will note that this is more important for us, and crucial at this time, because we are a community, and because we are facing existential risk and trauma constantly in our shared work. By healing ourselves as individuals and as a community we can be there for our broader communities as they face the climate crisis and everything that comes with it.

As I alluded to when I began in this role, the changes this party needs cannot be accomplished by one, or even a few people; it is up to all of us. I call on each and every one of us to maintain compassion for each other, to never be willing to harm even when we feel hurt, and to empower ourselves to organize collectively. I believe the problems we face are structural, and when we reduce them to thinking they're solvable by focusing on individuals we miss the bigger picture, though individual accountability is always necessary as well.

Systemic and structural change are often seen as impossible, but this is simply not true. This is an argument made to paralyze us and make us give up in the face of challenges. We must set the example of this for the country, becoming what we've always intended to be. Our journey of transformation is an opportunity to practice the changes the country needs, and thus be prepared to lead it at a critical time. You have my unending support in this work of turning our microcosm into a shining beacon of hope. I urge us to find balance within, with each other, and with the planet.

Acknowledgments

We have a truly bright future ahead of us as Greens. With a new leader in place on November 19 and a beautiful vision in hand, we have the tools needed to start shifting this party, the country, and the planet to balance. The path isn't easy, and we certainly have our challenges, but if we face them head-on with humility and honesty, we will set ourselves on a path to electing a Green government.

It has been the highest honour of my life so far to have served you as interim Leader this past year. At times this has been the most stressful job I have ever had, but most of the time, it was the most beautiful and rewarding experience. The members of this party are outstanding, and I cherish you all.

In particular, and in no particular order, my gratitude to:

All of the people who have stepped up into governance roles in the party, often tiresome thankless work in a confusing environment.

Our phenomenal party staff at the office (or working remotely) brought me so much joy, and do excellent work.

All of the current and former members of our shadow cabinet during my term and deputy leaders, whose expertise and kindness I would not have survived without.

The staff and volunteers working in the MP offices, whose company I will miss greatly.

Our outstanding and mighty caucus of two MPs, their dedication, service, passion, and care are inspiring.

The many volunteers who build and continue to build this party at the grassroots.

My dear friends and family who sacrificed time with me for the year, and kept me company along the way.

The kind and generous folks I met along the way.

To all members and supporters - I could never thank you all enough for the love and support you have shown me, and I hope I have returned that love in kind.