

Amelia Womack speech to Autumn Conference



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Conference, it's an honour to be here in Bristol. A city that back in 1821 gave us the first woman to qualify as a doctor, and whose 1963 bus boycott inspired the UK's First Race Relations Act.

A city with a history of making change – and a future being created now, by our Green councillors and Green Lord Mayor.

It's an honour and privilege too that I stand before you having already served as your deputy leader for the last four years – and am ready to do so for another term. Thank you for putting your faith in me once again.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Jonathan and Sian on their election – two formidable Greens who I've already worked with to achieve so much – and I look forward to what we can deliver working together over the next two years.

I am incredibly proud of our dynamic and fearless Party. Of what we achieve against the odds. And I am incredibly proud of the difference each of you makes.

In the Green Party, it's dynamic activists on doorsteps who go out and share the passion and principle behind our unique message.

In the Green Party, it's members who make policy and who live that policy by our actions. Whether that's fearlessly laying our bodies on the line to stop fracking or challenging injustice within our communities.

It's your work in the party that sets the agenda – and your tireless campaigning and drive that inspires and makes me proud every day.

Conference, I want to let you in on a secret.

I am not here to just get a few more Green votes,

I am not here to enable other parties to look progressive by adopting our policies,

I am here to work with you to build the foundations of the first Green government.

It's a big and bold goal but we are part of a big and bold movement, with a thirst for change.

A movement that knows we must radically overhaul our broken economic order – putting the environment at the heart of everything we do.

We are the pioneers with the only possible vision of the future. Who boldly go where others dare not tread. No wonder the ultimate pioneer, Patrick Stewart, Captain of the Starship Enterprise, has recently given us his support. Although I am not sure he realises how we feel about long distance travel!

The spirit of who we are as Green pioneers is unbreakable, immeasurable and tenacious.

Our task is building a politics, not only “for the many” of today – but also for future generations. A politics for humankind, and for the natural world too. That will be achieved by working internationally and collaboratively.

Our task is rebalancing and redefining politics – because the environmental and social crises we face demand nothing less.

I dream of a dynamic, fearless Green government because I cannot tolerate injustice.

Whether that's people without a home forced to sleep on the streets tonight. The Windrush generation who gave their lives to the UK and got threatened with deportation in return. And a generation of young people who still do not receive equal pay.

Right now if you are under 18, you receive £1.70 less minimum wage than someone between the ages of 18 and 21.

So today I am proud to announce our policy of equal pay for everyone under 21.

If we want to build a working environment that is fair for everyone, we have to make things fair from your very first job onwards. So if you are under 21, the Green Party promises you won't lose out because of your age and we promise you equal pay for equal work.

It doesn't stop there though.

A fair workplace has to be fair for apprentices as well. So today we are pledging official support for a living wage for apprentices.

The current minimum wage for apprentices is £3.70 an hour. An unfair sum, we can all agree.

Meanwhile, three quarters of young people polled this year have said that low pay would put them off taking an apprenticeship. It is no wonder that we have a skills shortage in this country.

It is time that the political class woke up:

To the value of investing in training and apprenticeships.

To the hardships facing young people today.

And to the realities of pay inequality in Britain.

While other politicians seem to have recently discovered the looming climate crisis, we have long known that you cannot separate social, economic and environmental injustice.

The climate catastrophe is affecting everyone, even the rich, but those causing most of the emissions are outsourcing the damage. To poorer countries and future generations.

This summer – fires were burning in the arctic circle. Floods washed away homes and lives in India. Storms raged all across the world.

You'd have to be wilfully ignorant to not see that climate chaos is upon us.

I'd like to think people have woken up to the climate emergency.

That Caroline Lucas will never again have to walk around Westminster, with a big green question mark to challenge the total absence of the environment in the media's election coverage.

I'd like to think that Rupert Reed won't ever again have to explain to the BBC and other media why giving air time to climate deniers isn't balanced debate – it is dangerous.

But conference, whilst together we have already achieved remarkable things, we need to do more.

Although they are welcome – commitments on everything from reducing plastic and food waste, to investment in green energy, simply do not add up to the transformation we need to secure a future for our planet.

On the one hand – we are facing an ecological crisis.

On the other – we have Michael Gove acting all super hero because he's

carrying a keepcup to cabinet meetings.

Conference, the Green Party is needed more than ever before.

Because only we truly recognise that whilst our individual choices make a difference, it's deep seated structural change that will deliver a safe, green and just future.

The change we need is about looking forward. Not into the rearview mirror.

Looking towards a resilient, diverse economic system.

Be a party that is pro-business – because business, like all of us, needs a planet.

Where would we be today, if those who profited from investment in Deepwater Horizon had been made responsible from the very start for the colossal public risk they were creating?

That disaster took the lives of eleven workers, killed off fishing and tourism industries, and as we now know, altered the very building blocks of ocean life.

Corporate social responsibility has to mean more than a glossy brochure and good intentions.

That's why today I am committing to work with business to bring forward policies that will reward green investment and innovation, outlaw the environmental pirates and build a future for pioneers.

A radical Green economy isn't just about the state and the individual.

It embraces start-ups and co-operatives, land trusts and community interest companies, social enterprises, enterprising communities, new models of worker ownership and things we haven't even begun to imagine.

It fearlessly reimagines business as a force for good, for creativity, with a positive role to play – in an economy where wealth is shared and our environment enhanced.

Politics needs the Green Party because we are always pushing the boundaries of what it means to be radical and forward facing. And we will continue to do so, even as others cherry pick our ideas.

We will also continue to uniquely define politics as so much more than putting a cross on the ballot paper.

Greens are at the heart of communities pushing back against the construction of HS2. Against the Wylfa nuclear plant on Anglesey or, in my own community, the toxic sludge being dumped into Cardiff Bay from Hinkley Point.

Where abhorrent inequalities are in evidence – Greens will be there.

Where injustices are being perpetrated – Greens will be there.

Where our environment is under attack by powerful moneyed interests – you can bet that Greens will be there.

Speaking out.

Fighting back.

Leading the resistance.

Politics for us is inspiring people to hope.

Hope allows us to believe change is always possible. And Green changes everything.

The power of every small action reminds me of the regular trips I used to take as a child just down the road to Weston-Super-Mare to visit family. We'd spend our time scrambling over the rocks, eating ice cream at Anchor Head and wandering to the Pier to try our luck on the arcade machines.

I'd put my 2ps into the machine. Wait to see if it was my coin that would tip the balance. And watch as those couple of coins hung just over the edge.

You'd stare at it, knowing that the next person who came along could be in for that big win, and it might not be you.

I often see activism like those machines, it takes just one 2p piece for a win – but it's only made possible by all the people before you who did their part to tip the balance. That's what it's like to be a member of this party. That's what it's like to create political change.

Every Green electoral win comes not just as a result of a single great campaign, but as a result of the hard work of people like you bringing others over to our way of thinking. It is that work that tips the balance.

And the balance is starting to tip well and truly in our favour. Conference we now have a record number of Green councillors and please join me in a round of applause for our newly elected councillors in Peterborough, in Lambeth, in Cannock Chase, in Trafford, in Knowsley, in Richmond upon Thames, in Burnley, Birmingham, Ryegate and Banstead, in Sheffield, Solihull and Worcester.

Small actions can change history.

2018 marks one hundred years after the vote was won for some women. The words of Christabel Pankhurst seem more poignant than ever:

"We are here to claim our right as women, not only to be free, but to fight for freedom. That is our right as well as our duty".

The Government marked this historic milestone by issuing a pardon to all the suffragettes imprisoned and force fed for fighting for their rights.

Then, just eleven days ago, three activists were imprisoned for taking on the destructive fracking industry.

I want to thank them for their fearless principled actions.

I want to thank the Greens up and down the country who have been at the heart of the anti-fracking movement.

And I want to tell the government that, like the suffragettes, these people are the heroes of this story.

That we cannot wait another 100 years before we recognise those on the front line of environmental destruction are freedom fighters not criminals.
That we must ban fracking and must Free the Three.

In the darkness, we need to light candles of hope.

And we must continue to make the case that democracy didn't end on 23rd June 2016. Whether you voted leave or remain, you have a right to still be heard.

We must do whatever we can to stop our country crashing out with no deal

because it's increasingly clear that this Tory Government, would rather wreck our economy and society than trust the people with their own future.

We must bring this question back to the people.

We must build a genuine People's Vote.

In the darkness we need to hold onto what we believe. And after what's been a tough summer for our party I take some inspiration from former President Obama, and I quote:

"The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness."

The Green spirit that surges through each of us is enduring.

And as we lay the foundations for a future Green Government, as we stand on the shoulders of the giants that have achieved change before us – whether it be big or small, whether they realise it or not – we reaffirm our belief that tomorrow will be better because of what you, I, all of us – do today.

Thank you conference.

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