

Amelia Womack speech to autumn conference



10 October 2017

Green Party deputy leader Amelia Womack's speech to Autumn Conference in Harrogate.

*Check against delivery.

STARTS:

Conference. Thank you all for being here with me in Harrogate.

I want to start with a warning: this speech contains descriptions of domestic violence, abuse, and references to Donald Trump being president – which some people might find disturbing.

But seriously, it inspires me to see so many Greens together, building a shared vision for the future, asking the important questions, and looking to push the horizons of what we see as possible.

But as our time together draws to a close, I am concerned as well.

In this space, we stand united in the face of the injustice damaging our society.

We know we must bring about change. We know we can do this together.

But outside this hall, and across the world, the climate is very different.

In the US, Donald Trump ploughs ahead with a hateful and bigoted agenda.

In Germany, the far right surged on a tidal wave of Islamophobia.

In Catalonia, state repression is being used to crush a grassroots movement.

But conference, for every bigot, for every fascist, for every brutal riot cop there is a resistance. We are with that resistance.

We're with the activists in the states standing up to Trump's white supremacy and saying that Black Lives Matter.

We are with Greens in Germany saying yes to refugees.

And we are with Catalanian mums, dads, grandparents, kids, activists, and ordinary people – we're with them as they stand up to horrifying police violence.

Here at home, the Conservative Party has thrown cash at the anti-abortion and

climate change denying DUP to keep themselves in power.

We are being governed by a coalition of cruelty, propped up by a cabal of dinosaur MPs who between them got half of the votes that we did in the general election.

The government has become an unscripted farce, dominated by the egos of Boris Johnson, Rees Mogg, and David Davis.

So while we all watch Carry on up the Cabinet, our planet is heating up and Brexit threatens our future.

But conference, do you know what the Tories fear the most?

It's people like you.

People willing to take a stand.

Willing to speak truth to power.

Willing to dream the big dreams.

And willing to say loud and clear that there is an alternative.

Politics isn't something abstract. It isn't removed from our lives. It is our lives.

And today, I want to talk about an issue that has affected my life, and affects the lives of 4.3 million other women in the UK.

In England and Wales, an average of two women are killed by their partner or ex-partner every week.

Women killed by someone they loved, trusted or shared a home with.

The statistics for trans women are even more harrowing.

An estimated 80 per cent of trans people have experienced emotional, sexual, or physical abuse from a partner or ex-partner.

Earlier this year I spoke publicly for the first time about my experience of being in an abusive relationship.

It wasn't easy and it's still not easy to talk about.

But reclaiming that dark time in my life was empowering for me. And I want to empower other women who feel trapped by their experiences.

The response to me going public was overwhelming.

I received messages from friends, acquaintances, strangers. They all wanted to tell me that the same thing had happened to them, or worse – it's still happening to them.

But like me, they had never felt able to talk about it.

They felt voiceless.

They felt frightened.

And they felt alone.

It was a feeling I could identify with.

I had turned to the police – but they let me down.

I turned to my university – they let me down too.

It's not an unfamiliar story.

Every minute police in the UK receive a domestic assistance call. Yet only one in three domestic violence incidents are even reported to the police.

We are failing women.

We are failing all victims of domestic violence and we as a nation can and must do better.

Grassroots organisations and charities do amazing work to support survivors.

But their job is made harder when the government is running a brutal regime of austerity that punishes the most vulnerable.

Domestic violence services cut.

Refuges starved of funding.

Legal aid scrapped.

And they told us we were all in it together.

Let's face it: British politics is still predominantly male, pale, and stale.

Labour has never had a female leader. The Lib Dems have never had a female leader.

It fills me with pride when I look at the front-benches of the other parties and then think of our amazing women – Caroline Lucas and Caroline Russell, Jenny, Molly, Jean, Tina and Gina, Sian, Vix, Alison Teal and many more – who lead and represent our party.

But what of our female prime minister?

Let's make one thing clear. The Conservative party has let down women at every turn.

They cut midwife services, refuse to give public sector workers the pay rise they deserve, and lock up female asylum seekers who have gone on to be beaten

and raped.

Conference we can be, should be even, the party to finally deliver real equality for all genders.

But as a party we cannot be content with staying one step ahead.

I'm proud to help lead a party that champions gender equality for all.

We are setting the agenda.

We are calling for the cuts to domestic violence services to be reversed.

We are calling for a comprehensive strategy to tackle domestic violence at its core.

We are calling for an end to the detention of refugees.

And we are standing against not just the policies of austerity but its principles too, knowing that it affects women worst and BME, disabled and LGBTIQ+ women worst of all.

We are speaking truth to power.

Earlier this month I asked the Home Office for data on hate crimes in the UK and the gender of victims.

The response I got wasn't just disappointing, it was shocking.

The Home Office recognises five types of hate crime – transphobic, racist, homophobic, disability and religious.

But they do not record hate crimes according to gender. They couldn't give us the information we needed because they don't even record it.

To me, that's a powerful symbol of the way misogyny is treated in this country: sidelined, ignored, brushed under the carpet.

That's why today I'm announcing that the Green Party is calling for violence against women that is clearly motivated by their gender to be considered a hate crime.

From domestic abuse to rape, groping to stalking and harassment, we know that women suffer abuse because of their gender.

In order to eradicate a problem, you've first got to acknowledge it exists.

One police force has already started recording misogynistic hate crime.

In Nottingham, in the first two months after the change was announced, police investigated a case every three days.

Many of these are cases that would go unreported in other parts of the country. By showing that they take the issue of gender violence seriously,

Nottingham Police helped women to come forwards.

Now North Yorkshire police has joined them, announcing a similar crackdown on misogyny on International Women's Day earlier this year.

Sadly our government has shown no such leadership. The Home Office is failing in its duty to protect women.

My experience of domestic violence is behind me now, but it was a long and difficult path.

When I ran for election in 2014, I was terrified that it would give my ex partner the opportunity to make contact.

But looking back today, I can see now it was one of the steps I took to get my life back after being in an abusive relationship.

Politics has changed me and changed my life for the better. And I want it to help other women find their power in society too.

In May next year we will be contesting hundreds and hundreds of seats on councils across England.

From Knowsley to Norwich, Worcester to West Dorset.

We will be fighting to get Green voices into positions where they can be heard the loudest, challenging the Conservatives and holding Labour to account.

Today, I want to issue a challenge.

I don't want us to just contest more seats than ever before. I want more women to contest seats than ever before.

A woman's place is not in the home, it is in the house of commons, the council chambers and at the centre of our political struggles.

We've won the vote for women. But now we need to vote for women.

The number of women on councils in England and Wales is woeful. Only one in three councillors are women. Less than 1 in 5 council leaders are women.

We can do so much better than this.

We need thousands more women to be elected onto councils to close this appalling gender gap.

It's a big problem, but we'll be part of the solution.

Just imagine...

Imagine if Greens were making the decisions about our public transport, tackling air pollution on our high streets and protecting our green spaces.

Too many women have been failed by policies that exclude and marginalise them. Imagine these women taking power up and down the country.

We already have so many wonderful Green Party councillors, consistently making a difference and changing their communities for the better. But we need more.

Councils across England and Wales are failing their communities – no matter if they're run by Labour or Tories.

Lin Patterson, Green Party councillor for Bath and Somerset, stood up to her Tory-run council when they tried to sell off a 700 million pound NHS contract to a private company.

In Bristol, Green councillor Carla Denyer has consistently opposed the Labour administration's proposed cuts to council tax support, which would hit poorest residents the hardest.

In Sheffield, Green councillor Alison Teal has defied the Labour-run council she sits on to protest against a destructive and unnecessary tree-felling programme.

Lives changed and improved because of these Green women.

Let's not forget that the first elected position held by Caroline Lucas was on Oxfordshire County Council in 1993.

It's the first step she took towards becoming the formidable force in Westminster that she is today.

Today I want to announce my support for the next generation of Caroline Lucases – the women who will be standing as candidates in next year's local elections.

From now until May I will be campaigning up and down the country and I will be making a special effort to campaign with local parties that get a full slate of women candidates.

I'm also going to be setting up a mentoring scheme for young women standing for election for the first time.

Together, we can do this. We can lift the shadow of patriarchy from British politics.

One in four women have experienced domestic violence.

That means many in this room, many in politics, and many who are considering entering politics have suffered.

But they stay silent because society does not take misogynist violence seriously.

But our past does not have to determine our future. Our experiences cannot

silence our voices but should inform us about what needs to change.

With collective will and vision, historic barriers can be removed and new paths created.

Diversity should be celebrated.

And it's time to make politics look more like the people it claims to represent.

In parliament and in the town hall.

On every level. For every class, for every sexuality, for every ethnicity, for every gender and for every ability.

When I opened this conference on Saturday, I said the Green Party has democracy at its heart and we're proud to give everyone a voice.

It's members like you who make the decisions that become the bold policies we champion in the press, on the doorstep and in parliament.

Since Saturday, we've discussed, debated and decided policy.

We've caught up with old friends and met new ones.

And above all, we've reinforced the need for a dynamic, bold Green Party that challenges the status quo and pushes for a fair future for all.

We need Greens at all levels of politics, speaking truth to power, and building a better and more equal world.

As you leave this hall today, I ask you to think about your role in making that happen.

Would you make a great Green councillor?

Do you know someone who would?

Can you get more Green voices front and centre?

Can you go canvassing, or run a campaign in your community?

As we face more political turmoil in an increasingly insecure world, it's never been more important to stand united, campaign for progress and get more Greens elected.

Between now and May next year we have the opportunity to campaign, debate, persuade, and influence, more than ever before.

Let's make 2018 a year of progress, a year for women and yes, a year for Greens.

Thank you.

ENDS.

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