

Amelia Womack speech to Autumn Conference 2022



Green Party

2 October 2022

Hello, conference. It's wonderful to be here with you in Harrogate – and a warm welcome, to all those joining us online too.

How much has changed since we were last here, in 2017.

Back then, Theresa May had just lost her majority.

The government was in the middle of negotiating a Brexit deal.

We had no idea what was to come: a global pandemic, war in Ukraine, and unprecedented shifts to our society and our politics.

I've been doing a lot of reflecting lately, as my time as Deputy Leader comes to an end. I was elected eight years ago, at the age of 29. I was the youngest person in a political leadership role in the UK.

In that time, I've witnessed a lot.

Four prime ministers. Three general elections. Two referendums.

Not to mention the immense change that has taken place within our party.

In just a few years, we have gone from a small party with a few thousand members to a mass movement of tens of thousands. From being ignored by the establishment to becoming a voice of authority not just on climate change but on social justice too. To almost quadrupling our councillors to the powerful team of 558 councillors representing their communities across the country.

The press reported the Green wave as if it was going to crash. What they didn't see was that we were flooding communities with volunteers and activists determined to transform the places they care about, and demand action for people left behind by complacent politicians.

The unstoppable power of our Green wave won't end until we have control of councils, Green MP's and Greens in Government.

It was actually here in Harrogate that I launched one of the campaigns I am most proud of – to make misogyny a hate crime. Being here today made me think about how much has changed since that. A few days later the Me Too movement dominated the news. We still need to win the rights we so desperately need to end the oppression of all women and understand the intersectional issues faced by women of colour, disabled women, LGBTIQ women, trans women, young women, older women and, working class women, there has been a definite shift in women's representation.

I keep thinking about an experience I had in the 2015 general election, I was representing the party on a panel chaired by Jon Snow. One question from the audience was a really good one – 'why aren't there more women and young people in politics?'

There I am sat there. The only woman on the panel, the youngest person on the panel by at least a decade – I assumed Jon would go straight to me to answer that. Instead, he went first to Hillary Benn from Labour to hear what his knowledge was about women and young people in politics, then to the man from the Conservatives, next the man Liberal Democrats, then to a man from Ukip. I thought my moment had come,, but instead he said "That's all we've got time for tonight, tune in next week..."

As the credits roll you can see me talking to Hilary Benn about why moments like that are exactly why young people and women feel excluded from politics.

I realised afterwards that I had missed an important opportunity. In reaction to this I should have said "When it comes to women and young people in politics, you know nothing Jon Snow". That's one for all you Game of Thrones fans.

That kind of moment feels unthinkable now. And I'm so proud to be part of the movement championing young women in politics, and fighting for the rights of all women.

But there is so much more to do. Making misogyny a hate crime. Standing up for survivors of domestic abuse. Fighting against sexist policing. I've fought for our rights as deputy leader, and I won't stop until we have won.

I began my leadership just weeks before the Scottish Independence Referendum. One of the defining memories of my leadership is the night of the referendum, marching to Holyrood with thousands of other independence supporters.

It was a huge moment, not just for Scotland but for the whole of the UK. It made us ask what we could achieve if we had the courage to go against the status quo. As I marched that night I was moved by what I felt from the crowd, something that is so rare in politics – hope.

And although we didn't win that night, that hope has endured.

Hope defined the Green Party the following year, as we were heading into the 2015 general election, and I don't think any of us saw coming the impact that campaign had.

Our bold anti-austerity message resonated deeply with the public, and it caused a seismic shift in politics.

Over a quarter of a million people signed a petition calling on the BBC to include us in the leaders debates. Polling put us ahead of the Liberal Democrats. On the night of the election, we won our highest ever vote share.

But that wasn't all. We had successfully changed the narrative in politics, giving a voice to the millions of people who wanted to say no to cuts and yes to investing in our public services.

A voice to all those who knew that our broken economic order wasn't working for them and that another way was possible.

A voice to everyone who wanted a fairer future.

Since then, that is what we have continued to do. Spoken up for those who are marginalised. Brought dissenting views into the mainstream.

Take our EU referendum campaign. We held on to our principles, and campaigned unapologetically for freedom of movement, migrants' rights, and international solidarity.

When COVID hit, we called for an approach that would support everyone – with statutory sick pay for people isolating, a ban on evictions, and increased benefits.

And when we began to emerge from the pandemic, we called for a green recovery. With business as usual clearly redundant, we were ready with the policies the moment demanded – from a universal basic income to a green new deal.

I can't pretend that we have won every battle in my time as Deputy Leader. It's been a challenging eight years, with the far right ramping up attacks on minorities, and those in power stripping away our public services in order to hand more wealth to the rich.

Never has the struggle we face been more stark than with last week's shocking budget announcement: tax cuts for the ultra-rich, while across the country extreme poverty is tearing apart the fabric of our communities.

Because there is an alternative, and it's needed now more than ever.

The Green Party – and our bold voice – has never been more needed.

The Labour party are spineless. The Liberal Democrats are invisible. And don't get me started on the Conservatives.

We alone have the courage and principles to offer a different vision for the future.

This country is crying out for the kind of policies we offer.

A majority of voters support nationalisation – including Conservative voters.

People are sick of paying rip-off energy prices for their money to land in the pockets of wealthy shareholders.

They want action on inequality, on the climate, on our neglected NHS.

In the Green Party, our strength has always been that we don't shy away from offering bold solutions.

We say what the other parties are too timid to say.

We stick to our principles when others chase public opinion. And voters know that.

But as we well know, the victory of our ideas cannot be taken for granted.

We have to be brave. We have to be loud. And we have to build from the grassroots up.

In my role as Deputy Leader, one of the things I've become perhaps most well known for is my ever-growing stack of train tickets.

I've spent my time in the leadership travelling across the country, visiting local parties to see the amazing work that you're doing and support you to grow even further.

It's down to the hard and often unsung work of local party members that we recently hit the incredible milestone of electing over five hundred and fifty local councillors across England and Wales.

It's local party members who spend cold winter evenings knocking on doors, speaking to voters, and getting the Green message out there.

And it's only through investing in our local parties that we will achieve the breakthroughs we need at the next General Election.

As it's my final speech to conference, I want to leave you with a few words of advice:

- Never shy away from being radical yet rational in the policies we offer
- Hope is contagious. Never forget what gives you hope, and make sure you pass that on
- Remember your own power to make change happen. That's about action on doorsteps, on the streets, and in Parliament.

As I step down after eight years as deputy leader, I am absolutely thrilled to be passing the torch to my good friend Zack Polanski.

An inspiring campaigner, a tireless activist, and above all, a dedicated Green.

But most of all, conference, I want to hand over to you.

This is the moment to get the Green message out there.

To make our voices heard on the doorsteps, at rallies, in council chambers and in the media.

Your passion and your work has got us this far. But I know there's so much more we can achieve.

It's been a pleasure and a privilege to do this work alongside you.

Now – over to you.

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