

Amelia Womack speech to Spring Conference



Green Party

4 March 2018

Hello Conference!

Well, we made it. From the Arctic blizzards we battled through to get here, to what looks like the Costa Del Bournemouth today, it's great to be with you all.

When I shared my experience of domestic violence for the first time last year, I never imagined I'd be part of what quickly became such a defining and extraordinary moment in the story of women.

The months since I last addressed Green Party conference have been incredible.

Since my last speech, misogyny has been dragged into the open like never before. More and more women are speaking up about their own experiences of abuse, harassment and discrimination.

From #MeToo to #TimesUp, it feels like we're hitting a tipping point that none of us saw coming this time last year. Least of all the men that have been getting away with their various crimes for far too long.

Open secrets have been exposed.

Silences have been shattered.

From the sweeping red walkways of Hollywood premieres, to the corridors of the House of Commons, the carpets things have been swept under are now well and truly being shaken out.

I'm so proud to have played a small part in giving other women the confidence to come forward and speak out about their experiences of misogyny.

This has been an inspirational moment for women. Now it's up to us to turn this into a transformational one.

It's not enough to just speak out. We need to create real and lasting change.

This Government claims to care about women – yet it's placing their lives in danger with plans to remove refuges from the welfare system.

Removing women's final safety net when they are in their hour of greatest need.

Friends, this is a matter of life and death.

The Government must prove it is serious about women's safety and ring-fence funding for refuges.

It's time for real change.

Since we last met, I've been calling for misogyny to be treated as a hate crime. And it's been amazing to have thousands of extraordinary women around the country join my call.

I was inspired by women's groups in Nottingham, who successfully lobbied their local police commissioner to treat acts like street harassment and upskirting as a hate crime.

And it has really made a difference to women's lives. 94% of women asked said they were reassured after dealing with the police, and 82% said they were satisfied by the action the police took.

It shows that when women speak out, organise, and fight back, we can take real action against the misogyny which permeates our society.

And so today, I'm making a promise to women of the Green Party.

This campaign started at the grassroots, and we can win at the grassroots.

So if you want to campaign to make misogyny a hate crime, I'll be by your side.

If you want to bring together women's groups in your community to make it happen, I'll be right there with you.

If you can get a meeting with your local police commissioner, I'll join you to help make the case.

Together, we'll make misogyny a hate crime in your community.

And as more and more places across Britain take this step, the harder it will be for Amber Rudd to look the other way.

I gave Amber Rudd a petition signed by thousands of people from across the country. She shut us out. I wrote her a letter, signed by an array of amazing women, including MPs from a range of political parties. She still shut us out.

But she can't ignore us forever.

The demand for change is growing along with a rising tide of women's voices.

Misogyny is a hate crime and we demand the law recognises it as such.

A year ago, this would have been unthinkable. But today, we are unstoppable.

Speaking out is only the beginning. Together, we'll create lasting, structural change.

Change which makes this a safer and fairer country for all women.

Change which pushes misogyny to the margins of our society.

Change which is long, long overdue. But change which is coming.

And let me make one thing clear. When I talk about women – I am talking about all women.

Cis Women, trans women, women of all genders and none.

We are women, we are powerful. We are fierce and together we are dangerous. We have been fighting for far too long and we know one thing for sure – the patriarchy is going to fall.

But this isn't just about changing laws which help women here at home.

No campaign for women's equality can ignore the fact that globally [60 percent of chronically hungry people are women and girls](#).

That in no country have women achieved economic equality with men.

Or that women are still [more likely than men to live in poverty](#).

When we live in the 6th biggest economy in the world we have a moral duty to tackle global inequality.

A duty that's all the stronger because our colonial exploitation of people and resources has created a legacy which wreaks ongoing damage.

We must not reinforce the wrongs in which we continue to be complicit.

So in the face of recent revelations about the aid sector, we say that aid and development agencies must unequivocally uphold the rights of those they work with and the communities in which they are based.

And when aid workers fail in their moral duties, we must hold them to account.

But we also say this: aid organisations do incredibly important work. We must protect – and increase – the UK's aid budget. These revelations can not be used as a justification for throwing our duties to the global South on a bonfire.

As Greens, we will not let this happen. And as Greens, we want to go further still.

It's time to throw out the old centralised "we know best" charity-based models of aid.

It's time to show we understand that people know what they need best.

It's time to show we understand what empowerment really looks like.

Friends, we must move away from the colonial construct of givers and takers. We can truly start to end the power imbalance between even the most well-intentioned Western aid workers and those they are trying to help.

That's why we want to see more aid money given directly to people with the knowledge, the skills and the connections to drive real change.

Friends, those people are women.

We want gender targeted cash transfers, distributed with the help of local women's organisations; underpinned by business skills training; support networks of business women, and mentoring – to name but a few.

Enabling women to take part fully in their economies.

This is the best tool for aid. And we'd be putting it in the hands of those best equipped to use it.

Because across the world, women living their daily lives are already acting as agents of transformational change through the decisions they make.

[Evidence shows](#) that when women are empowered and given more control of household resources, they spend it on food for their families, on their homes, their children, and on education.

And as they do this, whole communities are transformed.

Women are experts in their own lives, and are the backbones of their communities.

So let's transform our aid budget, so that it directly empowers women and girls around the world.

Let's put the future of development in their hands.

Hands to create an equal economy.

Hands to build an equal society.

Of course, as well as looking to the future, this is a moment to remember the women who have come before us.

This year is the centenary of partial suffrage for women.

One hundred years since the first women in the UK could vote.

Was that a right easily won? Like hell it was.

It took two groups of people to bring about this change.

The suffragists, the law-abiding citizens who wanted votes for women.

But was it enough?

The suffragettes on the other hand, were the radicals who turned the heat up on the movement.

Women across the UK took their protest to the streets, the churches, the railway stations and the post offices.

They weren't afraid to break the law. They weren't afraid to take direct action. They weren't afraid to put their bodies on the line.

I sometimes think about myself and which path I would choose.

What women in the Green Party would choose.

Of course, we're committed to nonviolent direct action, but I know too that we're ready to say when the law is wrong.

In the Green Party it's women who are on the front line.

Women like Alison Teal in Sheffield, standing up for the thousands of trees the Labour council are chopping down. 5,000 trees already lost.

Women like Cleo Lake who campaigned to change the name of Colston Hall – which was originally named after a slave-trader.

Women like Aimee Challenor who successfully took on TfL over the gender messaging of their announcements.

Environmental activism is led by women globally, and today I want to take a minute for us to think about Berta Casaires.

Berta was an award winning human rights and environmental activist in Honduras. She led the protest against the construction of a hydroelectric dam which if built would have destroyed huge swathes of pristine rainforest.

Two years ago yesterday, she was assassinated. Assassinated for protecting what she valued most, her people and the land in which they lived.

Here in the UK today, it's hard to imagine activism as a question of life or death. But make no mistake, our right to protest is being chipped away.

From the injunctions issued against HS2 protestors by the Secretary of State himself, to police spying on environmental activists, to the frackers taking campaigners to court – our right to resist is being attacked on all fronts.

Now is the time to stand up for our right to protest. Now is the time to fight for the rights of the local communities who are under threat from HS2,

from fracking, from climate change.

It's said that well behaved women seldom make history. And this is true. But when I think about Tina and Cleo and Aimee and Sarah and Alison, I think there should be a second part of that phrase:

Well behaved women seldom define the future.

And I'm so glad to be in a party of women taking direct action for the world they want to win.

I am constantly inspired by movements that have come before me, from the Chartists and the Suffragettes, to the campaigners at Greenham Common to the Ford sewing machinists.

And those still campaigning today from steelworkers in Port Talbot, to the UCU lecturers.

And the 120 women on hunger strike in Yarl's Wood detention centre – striking and campaigning to ensure their rights are met.

Our solidarity is with them as they fight for their futures despite the threat of intimidation and deportation.

Women making change every day – in their work places, in their communities and on the streets.

We need women like this in our council chambers too. And that's why I now want to bring it back to the local elections which are just two months away.

I travel the country and constantly see the difference Greens make when they get elected. And let's be clear about something. When we get elected, it's not because we are parachute into safe seats or get washed in on a wave of populism.

We get elected through hard work and by representing our communities.

This is my 8th Conference speech, and I appreciate that nearly every time I have talked about the power of our councillors and canvassing. But I do it because every vote really does count.

The number of councillors I've met who have won or lost seats by a handful of votes means that every person we talk to could be the difference that wins us a seat.

If your local party doesn't canvass, then go to a regional action day and learn the techniques. Bring them back to your community. Talk to people.

One of my favourite parts of my job is listening to people on the doorsteps across England and Wales. So many people feel like they've been ignored for decades.

We show people that politics can be done differently. We help people see that

the Green Party has consistently led the way. And we transform people's lives, especially the lives of women.

Today the March4Women took place and I celebrate with my sisters in spirit.

Women who came before us, and fought for rights we now take for granted.

Women who brick by brick are slowly but surely dismantling the patriarchy.

And women of generations to come. The backbones of communities around the world. The farmers, the teachers, the mothers, the peacemakers and the wealth creators.

Sisters and friends, women have the future in their hands. And that future begins now.

Thank you.

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