

Labour Women's Conference: No woman is free until we are all free



My belief has always been that the world would be a better place if women made all the decisions; a belief only strengthened by spending a weekend surrounded by confident and eloquent women at Labour's National Women's Conference in Telford.

This year's conference debated many issues and struggles that women are still facing in the 21st Century world of work and society as a whole. From the struggles of WASPI women fighting historic injustice from being denied pension equality just because they were born after 1951, to the continuing fight for abortion rights for women in Northern Ireland. During these debates, the conference atmosphere resembled the matriarchal utopia that I imagined. There was no conflict, just thoughtful



and gentle consideration of every woman's opinion – and a lot more singing! When women spoke, often speaking on a personal and sensitive subject, you could feel the support and respect in the room.

On Saturday we heard Dawn Butler MP, Labour's Shadow Women's and Equalities Secretary, address Conference, which was truly phenomenal. A strong and charismatic woman, Dawn charmed the whole room with her authenticity and wit. It was amazing to see one woman inspire a whole room.

Dawn spoke for everyone in the room when she said how we need an economy that works for women, not against us. And her speech was met with thunderous applause in the hall when she announced that a Labour Government would give workers the right to flexible working from day one in a new job.

This would be done by requiring employers who are creating new roles to include potential for people to work flexibly in them, including options like job-sharing, working from home, part-time, annualised or compressed hours or flexi-time.

With women making up 68% of those in the country who provide unpaid care for 20 or more hours a week, this legal change would be essential to helping dismantle the barriers that still hold us back in the workplace and wider society.

My favourite part of conference was a session called International Liberation where we heard from three women involved in politics from Ghana, South Africa and Zimbabwe. These three women are perhaps the bravest, funniest and most inspiring women I have ever had the pleasure of listening to. They highlighted the hostile political environment they face and outlined the difficulties of being a woman in politics, as well as the struggle of women and young girls where societal pressures mean they can never truly live for themselves. I am sure every woman in that hall made a pledge in their hearts to consider and fight for the rights and treatment of women and girls across the globe following their moving accounts.

The overarching theme that came out of that session was really the main message we all took home with us from the conference – that no woman is free until we are all free.

This was the vision which powered our GMB delegation throughout the weekend and for me the most enjoyable part of the conference was spending it with ten fantastic GMB women. Being the youngest of the delegation, I was quite nervous but everyone was encouraging and made me feel welcome.

Our delegation was made up of incredible, strong, confident women and I learnt something from every single one of them. Watching Cath Pinder (Yorkshire) and Amanda Grimshaw (Southern) speak on motions was inspiring and filled me with the confidence that one day I may also be able to speak as rousingly as they did.

Being part of the GMB family at Labour Women's Conference has only made me want to get more active politically through my union, to make my voice and those of thousands of other women heard,



and fight together to make the world a better, safer and more just place for women. Because no woman is free until we are all free.

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