

Emily Benn Profile

Most young people dream of becoming footballers, singers or even models, but for Emily Benn, at the mere age of 19, she has already made her name in British politics. Should she be elected at the next general election she will become the youngest Member of Parliament since the parliamentary Reform Act of 1832. Despite her busy double-life as a politician and an Oxford University undergraduate, she took the time to reveal all to Headliners.

A still-adolescent Emily has politics in her blood, being the granddaughter of the well known left-wing politician Tony Benn. To begin we put forward the obvious first question of how heavily her family's involvement within politics had influenced her.

"My experiences have formed the way I think about stuff ... As soon as I got to 10, 11, I started to think differently. I joined Young Labour." She continued: "My parents, my family had nothing to do with Young Labour."

As we progressed, it was clear to see that Emily's political views had been shaped by her experiences as a young person and these experiences have influenced her as a politician. "I know too many people my age that left school at 15 and have not done anything. Whereas I carried on to do A' Levels, and some of my friends went to college to do courses and things. I know too many people that literally have done nothing for two years."



It was clear that Emily held strong views on young people leading productive lives. She was angered that not enough had been done to encourage young people to persevere with education.

"I would love to find a way of making young people stay involved in something. I'm not saying they have to do A' Levels because that's not for everyone... but there must be something like training for a job or apprenticeship. They've literally lost two years of their life and that depresses me... This is the one thing I care most about because it's just a waste of people's lives. If you get them interested and involved in something they're far less likely to cause problems that, let's face it, we all know they do. I've got friends in Crystal Palace where I live that some people in the community are scared of and they don't have any reason to be. (The young people) don't help themselves in the way they act and I know that they're really good people. Their health would improve as well because they wouldn't want to smoke all day and do drugs."

Society often holds a similar dim view of young people, seeing them as a threat to their communities. Emily takes this to heart which she expresses through her strong opinions on the issue and other issues surrounding the portrayal of young people in society:

"I hope in one way that I can show there are more to young people as a whole. Negative stereotypes are wholly unfair. The sad thing is when I started (politics) a lot of people said: 'you can't do this; you're too young, young people aren't capable'. You just have to get over that ... you can do it if you want to and there are opportunities."

As young people ourselves, it was comforting to know that Emily felt the same about how many young people have been targeted by the media and other powerful institutions. To have been thought of negatively herself, she is adamant to prove that young people like her are capable of doing things like what she is doing at the moment, proving to be a positive young person in a society where young people are either regarded as good for nothings or kids on the street who kill each other.

Another political issue that concerns Emily is poverty in developing countries: "I'm part Indian, when I go to India I see poverty which makes me feel so sick and really guilty that most people in England have a good life compared to them. [I'd like to find] ways of trying to help them build up their own economy because it's not just a question of giving them stuff; it's a question of making them build their own infrastructure."

We all know that with the Iraq war, many people, particularly young people, didn't agree with Britain's choice to join America in the invasion, this in turn caused many problems between the public and the government. Interestingly enough though, Emily's political stance on Iraq is actually in line with her party's viewpoint; that the war is in fact a just one.

"I find it really hard to justify it (opposition to the war) because I'm pro-democracy. I don't think it's this big western thing forcing our views on other people, I think it's allowing them to have their own say. Iraq had their first election for how many years and 30 million people came out and voted. Democracy was so important to them; it made me cry just watching these people. It must be that at some point people cross a line and say: 'enough is enough'".

At just 19 years old, huge prospects lay ahead of Emily Benn. She is very much an independent thinker and young politician, who's views differ from that of her grandfather's, her peers, and even her generation's ideology. Fearless to deviate from the pressures of a typical young adult's stance on major political issues, and life as a whole, Emily leaves us with the closing poignant statement: "I'm quite happy to be against what is the stereotypical view of my generation because I have to go with what I think."

About this article

This article was written by Orrel Lawrence, 20, Pamwan Osemwenhkae, 20, Tajha Myer-Ferreira, 17 and Chika Ekemezie, 18.

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