

THE PROBLEM OF MEN IN BIG FLAME

I've thought about writing something like this for several months but always shyed away from it because I know how much scorn women rightly put on men who claim to 'understand' feminism - which I suppose is how we men often react to the challenge of women ie we try to understand it, intellectualise about it, theorise etc instead of changing the ways we act. Anyway I've decided that saying nothing is a cop out and better to spout forth and get criticised if I'm wrong.

Responding to feminism is not about adding on a new list of demands to anything transitional or otherwise. Rather:-

Its about changing the whole way we relate to women, men, children, the world, politics. (as somebody rightly said in the mens meeting at the conference - heavily sexist men are usually pretty shitty in the way they treat other men as well)

Its about taking our share of responsibility in childcare, and that applies to single men as well as parents though obviously in a different way.

Its about doing our share of housework and not leaving it to the person who is most pissed off with the mess around them (who is usually a woman)

Its about in nearly all situations not using either physical or verbal heaviness to women, or men. And thinking hard about situations where violence is necessary eg in opposing fascism.

Its about taking equal responsibility for contraception.

Its about questioning whether how you behave in bed meets the needs of the woman or man that you're with, or yourself for that matter.

Its about showing your feelings and emotions more, and being prepared to ask for support from more people than the woman who is your lover - and men as well as woman.

Its about being supportative of other people, being sensitive to their needs, listening to others instead of just yourself

Its about recognising that 'militants' are also people with personal anxieties, fears, hopes like everybody else. In fact because of the isolation that can come from being a socialist/feminist militant they may well need a lot more support.

Its about talking less often and for shorter periods in meetings - continually asking yourself whether what you have to say is really necessary, have other people spoken yet etc.

Its about trying to understand and be honest about how your own needs and desires interrelate with your political involvement. (there's a classic quote in some important IS pamphlet on Party & Class where Duncan Hallas says that IS members are 'serious' socialists who are capable of putting the needs of the class before their own needs - it would be laughable if it wasn't used as an excuse by the male leaderships of left groups through the decades for their own nastiness and empire building)

Its about stopping using militaristic language all the time like 'mobilising our forces' - we of course being the generals.

Its about an approach to politics that tries to build warmth, solidarity and maximum participation of everybody - as the womens movement has often been able to do.

Its about seeing the development of shared understandings and consensus as a potentially superior way of taking decisions, even though voting will at times be necessary

Oh yes, and what about the "serious politics" - read on.

- Its about rethinking the way we see traditional political issues
- Its about Armagh as well as H.Block
- Its about seeing that the main brunt of the cuts is being born by women who are losing their full/part time jobs as cleaners, cooks etc and having to do even more of their traditional servicing/caring/coping role in the home - unpaid of course.
- Its about seeing the sexism within immigration acts and nationality bills
- Its about recognising the sexual dimension within fascist "Master Race" theories
- Its about organising the unemployed in a way that recognises that they are not just all 25 year old men but contain many specific sub groups with different needs/demands - like married woman or young girls (and young lads, and black youth, and elderly men)
- Its about writing leaflets for male workers that recognise that they are MEN as well as workers who (to give a very crude example) take decisions about whether to strike or not very much in relation to their role as breadwinner, the needs of their wife and kids (even if they never spend much time with them or beat them up) - we need to do a hell of a lot more thinking about the way the economic and ideological crisis is affecting men as men - the latest Achilles Heel and the ARAF commission pamphlets are looking in this direction.

AND WHAT ABOUT MORE TRADITIONAL "WOMENS ISSUES" -like NAC, rape, womens aid

- Its about playing a support role when asked
- Its about going on mixed demonstrations or raising issues at work/in the union branch
- Its about helping with creches, and not just helping but taking responsibility for organising them, and not just the token one but doing it again and again - because they keep on occurring.
- Its about maybe taking out kids from the Womens Aid refuge (if that is acceptable to the particular refuge).
- Its about doing what none of us have yet taken seriously - that is opposing the sexism of other men - arguing in everyday conversation, tearing down sexist posters, maybe organising pickets/leafletting of films.
- Its about lots more which I haven't had the insight to think off so I'll shut up

Ray Wilson.