

Keith Paton

## Crisis and Renewal

1) I want to undress a little because it seems to me that we are all too afraid of showing our vulnerability, our 'shameful' sides. I also want to give evidence for the belief that *we've all got nothing to fear from letting ourselves go*. Although things will get pretty scary at times, the way of liberation is a way of severe crisis in each one of us. I'm only saying some of the things which happened to me. Obviously, everybody is different, their patch is unique, and the expression of crisis will be different as it unfolds for everyone, sometimes under the surface, sometimes on top. So I'm definitely not trying to specify things that have got to happen to everyone. But I do very strongly feel that *some* kind of crisis - and renewal - lies ahead for most of us, because THE 'HEALTHY MALE EGO' IS OPPRESSIVE AND SICK. Below are some of the chartings from my particular fever.

2) *The Fascist Imagination*. One of the strangest things was the way I found my fantasies going. Fantasies of informal revolutionary generalship. A fantasy in which I faced down a cabinet meeting during a general strike. Or was it making a deal? Fantasies of megalomania and omniscience. Of smoking dope with Jonathan Guinness, Chairman of the Monday Club. Fantasy that I was a devil. Getting a thing about the need to destroy a canvas when I got to see the Exhibition of Feminist Art in April. What all this boils down to, I think, is the belief that white revolutionary males are not to be trusted, especially those of us from elite backgrounds. Some libertarians are trying to start a heavy network of activists as a sort of precursor to a Lotta Continua in this country. Well, I don't trust them because, if they are anything like me, they are far, far too easily preoccupied with questions of *power*, too easily bought off by the rulers or else too liable to degenerate into party men. Instead I feel libertarian men should look to the women's movement and G.L.F. and take our lead from here. Part of this involves not dodging the crises we have got coming to us by creating a 'libertarian' Party.

If we look at the ideologues of fascism in the twentieth century and their precursors in the nineteenth, we can see an immense dynamic in their writings stemming from a reactive misogyny as the first wave of feminism was upsetting roles and identities. Filippo Marinetti's 'Futurist Manifesto' of 1909 nicely captures the fanatical belligerence of it all:

*We are out to glorify war: The only health-giver of the World! Militarism! Patriotism! The destructive Arm of the Anarchist! Ideas that kill! Contempt for women!*

(It should require little psychological insight to see such hairy chested bravado for what it is: the full and hideous flowering of the politics of masculine dominance finally become more candidly proclaimed than ever before in history'. (Theodore Roszak, *The Hard and the Soft: the Force of Feminism in Modern Times*, in *Masculine/Feminine*, eds. Roszak and Roszak).

Up till now Fascism in Britain has lacked a big enough misogynist intelligensia to creatively develop a modern ideology for it. Most intellectuals are social democratic, liberal or left wing in the Marxist tradition. These still oppress women and patronise the women's liberation movement, but behind a veil of hypocrisy about taking it

seriously. As the women's liberation movement grows and challenges more and more domestic set-ups, a men's liberation counterpoint has to be set up to ease the transition to disarming - or else we could see Fascist ideology getting a new lease of life. I felt the choices starkly in my own soul, I felt hatred and despondency when I saw Tessa cry; I'm not being alarmist.

3) *Getting Physical*. When I was in Ghana as a teacher on VSO, I once gripped a boy's throat for not *doing what he was told!* I agreed with beating too, though two years earlier in school I'd refused to become a prefect on the grounds of the corporal punishment prefects administered. If I'd had an analysis of neo-colonialism, deschooling, etc and a group to discuss things with - I could have flowed the other way: blaming the system, not my role-inferior.

In the present crisis I shook Tessa hard at one point. She screamed and screamed and our Pakistani neighbour came running round in a touching sisterly solidarity. I also provoked Tessa to hit me, then after two or three blows, I'd sock her back. Once at the peak of the crisis, when I was driving Tessa round the bend, she gripped me through my coat so hard I felt her nails for days. She would also beat me till her hands were sore. That was achieving a kind of insight into non-violence, accepting the pain to break the vicious circle of reprisals. Soul-force. But it didn't go very deep and the same night we had a session tearing up each other's writings. I tore up fifteen copies of an article Tessa had done on non-exclusive relationships (believing, falsely, that she didn't mean it.) She tore up about fifty copies of my article on psychology and a friend's painting that meant a lot to her, but even more to me. Cups kept getting broken, thrown across the room, and one was smashed on my head.

4) *Failure to Accept*. This Easter I had a profound experience when we were staying with our friends in North Staffs. It's impossible to talk about. The feeling that came out of it led to me talking in riddles that Tessa couldn't understand, and felt deeply hurt by. I tried to say that she shouldn't worry, just let herself flip, etc. Later on I realised the need for total acceptance. But a few days later I'd be off again, breaking every promise made, revising every formula arrived at for living together putting her through the mill for the tenth time. (I still strongly identify with the main emphasis/experience of that Easter, and the feeling 'It's O.K. - only then it was all tied up with a load of shit.)

5) *Exhaustion: Attribution: Lack of Escapes*. While going through this long term crisis, I'd generally be pretty 'cool' in the Men's group. And no one knew enough about where Tessa was at to challenge my version of events. Though people got increasingly sceptical which was good. I can't tell you how totally depressed and exhausted we were for ages and ages. I'd see a couple kissing in the street and I'd think, just you wait, you phoney you'll regret it, etc. Or I'd write a few letters to friends to keep some self-identity going, and reduplicate *'The Coming Crisis of Social Psychology'* but that would be all for months and months. How people are politically apathetic no longer seems a mystery to me: no wonder if they've just had a row with the wife and the adrenalin and bad vibes linger on and on, for years in some marriages. *'The Coming Crisis of Social Psychology'* was written early in my crisis - it wasn't till the Men Against Sexism conference that I suddenly realised that even though I was escaping into a world of ideas when writing it, it was really about MY OWN coming crisis. The Experimenter in the white coat deceiving and manipulating the experimental subject - was ME in control of *my* nuclear family. Tessa was right to tear it up. How much of men's culture and 'revolutionary' theory is created in a similar way. One good thing

was that I never had the energy to get my study together, with its imposing array of books to gaze at, and its trip corner and my hidden address list - it never happened. It remained as a big unsorted out heap of carpets and books and papers and trunks. Every so often I'd need a book and root around for a frustrating half an hour to find it. The external chaos reflected and permitted the chaos within. I didn't have a strong identity 'Hedge'. Even after a row we'd just sit and stew in the same room.

6) *Illusions*. During the period I kept getting 'things' about other women, including strong sexual hang-ups. Often I'd hardly know them. Do anything but turn and face Tessa. When you have been lonely for a long time you are remarkably vulnerable to 'falling in love' - and remarkably dangerous to any person you do get involved with. At times I felt like a crazy machine - out of control down a narrow road, mowing down pedestrians. By the time I recognised this the worst was passed - the point is that I was like that even when I would have denied it vehemently I also felt violent man-hating at times - I'd look at a guy in the company of women and I'd suddenly SEE what total shits men are, their gestures, their narcissistic smiles, their scowls at their suffering wife while trying to interest another woman, their perpetual bad faith and emotional ignorance. Either that or I was projecting my own fucked-up head at them. A bit of both I think. I almost bopped one bloke. That would have been a very male thing to have done - but all part and parcel of a big Sir Galahad fantasy I was in thrall to at the time.

7) *Getting into my body*. Odd things have been happening physically. I'd feel strange strains in different parts of my body. During the breakthrough it was useful to 'Gestalt' them, see what would untie them physically and in untying them realise their

origins in acts of repression. After the chief breakthrough I managed to free a whole lot of shoulder muscles in a park, swinging my arms around like a madman - I was a madman. But the swinging was part of an effort to deal with things. I also experienced sexual impotence briefly. From talking with others, I imagine that this is one of the commonest of experiences along the way. Disengaging sexuality and power. I also got pretty into my cock, especially on acid when Aladin's genius would be working overtime - wow. I realise how inhibited and self-denying most masturbation is. I thought I knew its limits before, but what I had previously experienced was nothing, I realised, as I'd even lick the sperm, really DIGGING MYSELF totally. This seems to be close to what David Cooper said about how you can't love yourself until you have masturbated at least once, with joy. But masturbation has lots of meanings for different people, or at different times. When I was on my own on the two occasions Tessa left me for several days, I wasn't into masturbating, just blocking everything off.

8) *Our 'Commune'*. I've talked about the more spectacular later stages of the crisis. It is one in some ways I had been going through since first meeting Tessa, the first woman I went out with, in my second term at university. After living together and getting married four years ago, we lived in a terraced house in Stoke for a year - pretty quietly, then moved to a nearby student ghetto/mining village where we bought a house that was really two terraced houses side by side. This gradually got transformed into a commune as people joined us. The point I'm making here is that I was the Big Chief who dictated who came, and more or less conned Tessa into a 'commune', whereas she felt 'they' were simply living in 'our' house. Every force creates a counterforce. My manipulating Tessa, and her sense of having been deceived, were two of the reasons for the 'commune' only lasting a few months and causing all of us a lot of pain. Other reasons were to do with the two central 'couples' exporting their

problems to the member of the opposite sex on the other side (the architecture, two of everything, didn't help). My sexism and general domination and insensitivity had a lot to do with the commune's failure. Communes are an important idea, but don't create them out of deficiency needs, or they will backfire on everybody.

9) *The Snow Queen*. There are a million benefits to be gained from being with kids that one can't be aware of until one does it - things like feeling part of a sort of (previously hidden) Community of child care of the streets and on the buses. It's these kinds of benefits we should be talking about with men: kids are a humanising experience, kids are co-trippers, not just a drag that we must (guilt, guilt) share with women to relieve them of the burden. (Of course, to *only* look after kids in a *private* context, *every* day, makes you and them a burden to each other. But if we share the 'burdens', hey presto, they are people again). Anyway, one of the things I've got is from the stories I've looked through with Kathryn, who is 2½.

One concerns a wicked magician who makes a mirror which enlarges all the horrible things when you look in it. It breaks and scatters all over the world. A bit gets in the eye of a boy, Kay, who was previously into a childhood romance scene with Gerda. Kay starts rejecting Gerda and messing about in the town centre, hitching his sleigh to the horses and sleighs as they go past. One driver goes so fast she carries him off into the cold snowy woods - she's the Snow Queen. Kay sleeps with her and is captured. Gerda meanwhile looks all over for him, and in the spring is led by a raven and a reindeer to an icy cavern where Kay is playing with some pieces of ice, trying to make them spell 'Eternity'. Gerda rushes up to him, but is repulsed, Kay's eye has still got splinters in it. Gerda cries hot tears which wash the splinters out, and suddenly the bits of ice fall right! Kay can *see* her. (Incidentally, or not at all incidentally, she says I'm always seeing people as symbols, as general types, and rejects *any* talk about 'struggling sister'. She sees everything in very unique terms, which is perhaps why she feels joining a women's liberation group would infringe her uniqueness. I'm not sure, I think that seeing the general features of someone's life, shared with others, doesn't have to mean not seeing them as individuals. But I'm sure, also, that I must have projected a lot of stuff onto her).

At times I wanted to leave Tessa completely for her. Other times I spoke glibly of creating 'non-exclusive' relationships, threesomes even. But the snow-queen always could see the structural imbalance, how she was the one in the cold and most likely to remain in the cold. My relationship still hasn't ended, but it has in any ongoing special sense. She put an end to it when she realised that I couldn't ultimately support her in the crises she was going through; that there was no way of cashing my assurances that didn't screw Tessa up, because of the (realistic) accumulated anxiety on Tessa's part. Moreover Tessa and her both felt they were incompatible with each other, that life-style differences were too great, etc. And I couldn't see the reasonableness of this, accusing them both of jealousy, because when I pulled the strings they wouldn't flop like wooden puppets into each other's arms. A lot of people talk about non-exclusive relationships in a glib way, without realising the difficulties involved at this stage of our evolution of a culture of love. Like with communes, nothing can go right if it is founded on sexist oppression. Another thing to get straight is how crappy the Myth of Romantic Love is - it's generally a reaction to holes in yourself you seek to fill by swallowing the other. Good relationships still involve seeing the other as too much - but without a one in a million ideology which could justify a 'grass is greener' neurosis if the images projected from our earlier family onto each other, wear off, and the relationship runs into trouble. You didn't find the *right* Girl in a Million that's all. This is just a rationalisation to avoid commitment.

10) *Breakthrough*. One weekend Tessa and I stayed in and around bed in a sort of marathon encounter smoke-in with Kathryn. On Monday we'd had very little sleep. Eventually with a sort of mounting excitement I found myself sitting opposite her over the table downstairs. I felt a pressure of something coming up. Yet another joint. I felt the only way to get rid of the pressure and tensions in my body was to do certain gestures with my throat and nose and chest. I still felt distanced from the real me as I began to (in fact) cry. Then me cried more and more, and it all started to come up in big sobs. The distancing collapsed. I was so LONELY! SO FUCKING LONELY (Howls) I LOST FAITH, I LOST FAITH IN YOU.

Then we went outside to the park. Talking things over, I got to see how much I'd fucked Tessa and Kathryn over. How sensible Tessa's behaviour had been. I could SEE her again. A sort of raging storm inside me was at last dying down. A peace was mounting *between us* in a funny sort of way. We lay back and dammit it if there wasn't a rainbow in the sky. To go with the olive branches in alive to keep on trying, keep on believing me one last time. Finally, Tessa went into the house to get some food.

I stayed out with Kathryn. The Pakistani kids from next door came up wanting swings as usual. I swung Kathryn and three of them, but the eldest girl of about 9 wouldn't join in. She hovered disapprovingly and anxiously on the outskirts. Suddenly I could see right into the psychodynamics of their group. How the eldest was caught in a foreman's role and how much she and the other three kids were suffering from her separation. She went in to ask her Dad if it was O.K. Probably she just ran into the yard to face her internalised prohibitiveness, but either way she re-emerged saying it was O.K. for all to have swings. So we hugged her and gave her two swings, ever so pleased.

Then I went into the house and phoned my sister - the first *real* communication for over fifteen years. It was a bit mad and raving from my end but she cottoned on to most of it and joined in. I called her 'Helli' for the first time in fifteen years, since her puberty when she'd stopped my brother and I affectionately (I'm pretty sure) calling her Helli-Belli. I also phoned my brother (though he thought I was off my head, but that's O.K.). I wrote a seventeen page letter to my parents subsequently, the first honest letter since I lapsed from Christianity five years ago. Stuff about Calvin burning thirty one witches in one year in Geneva. I've been able to see how I was repeating with Tess an inherited family pattern of sexist middle-class culture. How my father and mother had in turn been determined by their upbringings, and how they innovated and did their bit nevertheless. Soon we'll be going home for a family gathering. I've dug out my notebooks from my time in Ghana six years ago, and the intense religious period that I went through. It all makes a new kind of sense at last, like coming back to an earlier point but up a whole twist in the spiral, standing easy to the verbal formulas and the Jealous GOD-system.

I've been talking a whole lot with Tessa and we've worked through a lot of things together, and want to keep talking everything over with each other, and growing together: a two-adult commune/tendency! But not excluding the possibility of growing together with others into a wider set-up.

That week I threw my job in at Cadbury's (after two nights only!). I'd gone for days with hardly any food and sleep. We travelled around in a yellow van for three weeks, really getting into each other, seeing some friends, including Tessa's old friends we

hadn't kept in touch with, lavishing love on Kathryn who'd been getting pretty screwed-up by 18 months of crisis, digging our bodies and the New Forest country and the warm sun as we lay around naked all day. All sorts of connections have been coming clear to us, or at least clearer. So one feature of the crisis and renewal is a kind of *general*burst of creativity and energy. One more reason for breaking down. Really it is only the loneliness that we have to lose: the incredible unhappy loneliness of the JAILOR role. It's a bad scene preserving the Male Ego in a relationship - not just in *moral* terms is it bad, but as a protracted nightmare *experience*.

Now to horrify some of my libertarian friends who talk about breaking society's norms, but sometimes create equally intolerant ones concerning people's personal styles. Too bad brothers, I'm going to quote the Bible. The night following the breakthrough I was working nights in this surreal monstrosity of a factory packing chocolate novelties, 72 to a box. My head was so buzzing it seemed like one hour, not eleven. When I got back I went straight to dig out a Bible and looked up the book of Hosea, which I seemed to remember was something or other, I didn't know quite what. It turned out to be all about the prophet castigating whoring after strange new religions. God into a big anger trip it seemed. In fact, FURIOUS. But then, suddenly after pages of raging in this vein, comes this passage:

*I will heal their faithlessness; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress, from me comes your fruit. Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them'.*  
(Hosea 14, 4,8,9.)

Like, we are hurting *ourselves*, as well as others. It's not a question of Top Dog/Underdog, Wrathful God, retribution from on high. It's the infinite *sadness* and frustration we cause by our *self-defeating* behaviour. We don't have to buy the Male Monotheism and Monogamy Jealousy ethic that Hosea comes packaged in, it's the *experience* that comes through. Of breakthrough from a bad head trip, to the flow of all the body. I never thought I'd find my way back to making sense (albeit very idiosyncratic sense) of the Bible again. But as I've tried to say, *odd things happen* when our male egos crack up. But they are O.K. It's all O.K. Nor am I trying to push my trip on you. Everybody has got to explore to its limits *and beyond* whatever cultural tradition(s) they have experienced.

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