

# Fed up with Feminism?

TWO RESPONSES TO AN ARTICLE BY MARK MATTHEWS (Vol.6 No.4)

In 1978 Mark Matthews wrote an article called 'Fed up with Feminism' which has provoked a certain strong response from readers. This issue seemed a useful place to air them. Here are some of the things that Mark says:

*. . . historically the roles have invariably been polarized. Men were masculine and dominant. While in terms of civil liberties the women were definitely in a weak position, I do not know if they were less happy. In any event they invariably avoided having to go to war. Equally there had been a number of female rulers who were not noticed to be different in style from male rulers. . .*

*. . . in recent times it would seem that there are as many women kept at home as there are men sent out to earn money. While it is true that men held virtually all top jobs, they nearly all have wives who spent the money. It is likely that for every battered wife there is a man driven to despair. Though I am ashamed of rape and apologetic for leers and indecent exposure, I cannot help wondering why the men are so frustrated or bitter. There must surely be something wrong with the women they have known.*

*My essential criticism is that the arguments put are often trivial and one-sided. The tone is always one of them and us and to deny the point is almost certain to get branded as an MCP. The fact that females are chauvinist cows who make the attack is never raised.*

*. . . I am also disturbed to notice that male persons are invariably gentler and warmer than the females. \*\* This point was also made by John Rowan in this magazine in January 1978.*

*. . . There is undoubtedly much prejudice against women's abilities but this will not be changed by feminists pursuing trivial and disruptive aims. Nonetheless it is probable that many women will be influenced and may, therefore, disrupt what was a stable and happy relationship. . . most people do not realize that it may be better to be happily subservient than a miserable free person.*

*My suggestions are simple. Firstly feminism should develop a sense of humour . . . Secondly women should be encouraged to appreciate gentle men. Once men see that women are sincere in this, then the changes will be rapid. Equally, to enforce this message, the emphasis on success and money must be changed.*

*. . . life is an art form and we have to create the present and the future. The relationship between man and woman is deep and complex, capable of tremendous variety. It is not something to be risked from ideal nor even material progress. Men do cry, but not often in public.*

**John Rowan**

## **FED UP WITH FEMINISM?**

Mark Matthews' splenetic outburst against women (in the April issue) mentioned an article of mine several times, as if I agreed with what he was saying in it. I've now had a chance to check his version of what I said with what I actually said, and it turns out that I was saying the opposite of what he said I said.

His basic failing is that he thinks that the relationship between men and women is symmetrical. Both are oppressors, both are victims, and the details even out somehow. The whole point is that it is not symmetrical. The role system of patriarchy devalues women, consistently and pervasively. It puts them into service roles, and then thinks little of such roles. And it is no use Mark saying that - "Most people do not realize that it may be better to be happily subservient than a miserable free person." This is what men have been telling women for thousands of years - "Stay down and I'll treat you quite well." Well, there are other things in life other than happiness: as John Stuart Mill was fond of saying - "Would you rather be a pig happy or Socrates unhappy?"

But it is unbecoming for a man to prescribe what women should or should not do. It is perhaps more use to concentrate on what men should or should not do. And it's important to know what patriarchy is. It's a system where special emphasis is laid on male supremacy; that means that men own and control women, by legitimate right. And so when patriarchy is challenged, men feel threatened: our support system is no longer so certain. And when women actually get angry about it, men call them "fanatics/ (Mark Matthews) and "female chauvinist cows" (Mark Matthews). But in reality men should be well pleased.

Because patriarchy is hard on men too, in a different way. It robs us of important qualities and characteristics which we need in order to be whole people; and it subjects us to competition and violence which are just as harmful to us as they are to women - though often share in the harm done to men as well as experiencing their own suffering. It is the social relation of domination which is most consistently boosted by the patriarchal culture. Wealth gives the power to dominate; status gives the power to dominate; masculinity gives the power to dominate. So wealth, status and masculinity are all highly approved - but also heavily competed against, at an individual level. Under patriarchy, men have to stay cool and get ahead. And if they don't, they get punished by the system in its own way. It's a rotten system, which produces a hundred losers for every winner. It's a win-lose system, not a win-win system.

So when women object to this system, they are fighting our battle too. When they object to their rigid roles, they are making it easier for us to object

to our rigid roles. And this is something which the growth movement is very much in tune with. Such a lot of what we do in groups is all about fixed roles and how to question them, open them up, see through them to the real person underneath. The women's movement is doing on the social level just what growth movement people are doing on the individual level. Counselling and therapy works by loosening up the rigid patterns of the internal structures; what the women's movement is trying to do is to loosen up the rigid patterns of the external structures. And in both cases there is resistance; in both cases there is pain to be gone through.

And when we as men get confronted by women for helping to keep them in their roles, not letting them have space to be who they are, it is painful. Some of the worst times in my life have been when my wife showed me that something which I thought was petty and trivial was not petty and trivial at all - and I really saw and felt how much suffering had to go into keeping me fresh and smiling. It's not nice to feel that my freedom relies on someone else's subservience - that I get up by putting someone else down. But that's the way patriarchy works. And if we want to change the system, we have to go through the pain of seeing how we as men help to contribute to maintaining it.

What makes it even more painful is that it is not only the external structures which have to be changed - men are good at changing external structures - it is also the internal structures which have to be changed. John Southgate talks about the Patripsych (**pay**-tri-syke), some of the TA people talk about the Inner Pig - whatever you call it, it is the psychological representation of the patriarchal structure. And so when we struggle against patriarchy, we are also struggling against part of ourselves. And it is a part of ourselves which is continually getting praised and rewarded by the main pattern of what is going on in society. So when we struggle against patriarchal conditioning it feels as if we are going against our own ego. This is particularly confusing for men, because the whole system is set up for women to massage and protect our egos, and it just **feels all wrong** to go any other way.

So it is understandable when Mark Matthews doesn't like what he calls the "men are pigs" approach. But it is really important to see the **truth** in it before doing anything else with it. If men don't take it to heart, they are going to be reinforcing the system whether they like or not, and whether they know it or not.

All this was brought to mind particularly because I went in April to a conference of men who are trying to question patriarchy. About 150 of us spent a weekend at the Community Health Centre in Old Street, with sessions on such things as Publishing, Sexuality, Child Care, Men's Centres, Fascism, the Gay Movement, Monogamy and Health. I convened a non-verbal workshop, which was very good for the seven men who turned up to it.

As a result of the conference, several new men's groups were set up, new premises for a men's centre were being looked at, and most people felt very

good about the level of solidarity and spontaneity which was evident during the weekend. There was an excellent creche, manned by women. There was a new pamphlet available, got out by the men who did the creche at the big women's conference last year. And there was a new magazine all about men's politics, called **Achilles Heel** (Men's Free Press, 7 St Marks Rise, London E8 2NJ), with articles on Fascism and Masculinity, Men's Health, Sexism and Male Sexuality, Shaw's **Candida**, Creating a Men's Politics, and so on. All this shows, I think, that patriarchy is an issue for men just as much as it is an issue for women; we are on the same side as the feminists, even though they may find it hard to see us in that way at times.

So come on in, Mark Matthews. It's all new and scary, but it's the only way to get anywhere different.

### **Further reading**

**Red Therapy** - A big pamphlet about a five-year leaderless group working in the area of sexual politics and group work. Full of cartoons and drawings as well as analysis, history, hints, etc. (70p from 28 Redbourne Avenue, London N3 2BS).

**Alternative Socialism Newsletter** - Has interesting articles on Chauvinism, Sexism and Patriarchy; Conferences and Child Care; Patriarchy and Men; Revolution and Therapy; Patriarchy Notes; Women and Patriarchy; and Political Strategy. (30p from 15 Rosslyn Hill, London NW3 5UJ).

**Peace News** - The issue of 20 May 1977 has a good article by Bruce Kokopeli and George Lacey on Masculinity and Violence. (20p from Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1).

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## **MIKE GOLDSBURY**

### **Fed up with Feminism?**

What is so extreme about objecting to and attempting to ban the use of sexist language in 'Self and Society'? I would have thought that in a journal such as this, committed to personal growth and human potential, it would be perfectly natural to avoid language which is felt by some to be limiting and de-meaning in its implications. Words like 'woperson' are used by many women, notably in the States, to establish their autonomy, and their objection to women, the male derivative. Some women that I have spoken to have, quite rightly, to my mind, pointed out that there is no word for them as separate, autonomous beings. Nearly all the words there are derived from male - defined words e.g. lady, human, person, etc. I think that women's struggle to define themselves is to be supported and I dislike the lightness and jokiness with which you view criticism from women. Perhaps you have some hidden feelings towards women which show through in your writings. I also sense an 'all male gang against women's stance.

On your historical analysis, I suggest that you look up some books that women have written on anthropology and ancient history, notably *The Paradise Papers*' by Merlin Stone, Virago Press and *'Women's Evolution'* by Evelyn Reed, and check out some descriptions and facts about ancient women cultures that preceeded the patriarchal take-over. I want you to check out some history as analysed by women. It seems that you are saying that it isn't just women who suffer, that men do too; agreed, but women are actively organising against their oppression, whilst most men stand on the sidelines and simply renounce any knowledge of or active participation in helping to change as if oppressive privilege will just disappear: - it won't.

The reason that men are so "fucked up and bitter" is probably because they are so fucked up by the expectations and roles forced on them in our glorious patriarchal world. The point I want to make is that this is our responsibility, not solely women's. I feel that in your article you were deciding what is trivial and not trivial in another person's life and denouncing women's criticisms just because they were being made by a woman. I imagine that your response to criticism from a man would probably be different, it would perhaps 'mean' more, you would probably think it was more 'important' perhaps.

You say "The tone (of feminist criticism) is always one of them and us and to deny the point is almost certainly to get branded as an MCP" have you **really** imagined what it must be like being female? Have you **really** listened to what women say to you about their lives, their feelings? I think to play 'them and us' it takes at least two; responsibility in polarised situations is 50/50. You say denial equals being labelled a male chauvinist pig, well, if you are prepared to accept that role (and you seem to be), and not **seriously struggle further** with women (and with yourself, with other men), then I'm not at all surprised at your views being as they are. Nor am I surprised at the gulf you must experience between yourself and feminist oriented people.

You say "I am also disturbed to notice that the male persons are invariably gentler and warmer than the female. It is almost role reversal. This is OK by me but it is not likely to encourage much support for the development of softer qualities in men".

What I want to know is, what is so "disturbing" about men being warm and gentle? Are these qualities athreat? You feel "disturbed" by men who question and don't conform to the rules and roles associated with 'normal', 'socially approved' manliness? Does 'softness' threaten your 'manly-in-controlness'? Are you afraid of gayness, in others, in yourself? As a gay man, I feel really happy about being more in touch with my so-called 'soft' side, my natural warmth and gentleness towards a lot of the women I know, and some of the men. Much happier than when I tried to play the role of what I thought a 'real man' was expected to be. Much happier now that I realize I don't have to play my part in the game of being a cool, condescending, unemotional 'truly masculine' man when with other people. I don't want to live out any of those sexist scripts anymore thanks: they do nothing but inhibit, frustrate and block my free-flowing friendship and spontaneous feelings towards other people, especially men.

Labelling women as "fanatics", it's not surprising that you see them as malevolently manipulative (which I suspect is more a projection of your own guilt). I personally have not met a woman who presumes to speak for all women, an action you attribute to the "fanatics". Though I have often met women who speak of their oppression, and that of their sisters. I think it is you who imagines that some women ("fanatics") speak for all women, perhaps because this is a convenient way for you to ignore a particular woman's personal struggles?

Your "feminist spokespeople (isn't it silly)" is just so indicative of the way you have of putting down and slighting any mention of women's innovations and initiatives, which you do in other parts of your article. The thing about guilt, as I see it, is that men must **go through** their guilt because guilt buttresses men's oppression. (Claude Steiner - "Letter to a brother: reflections on men's liberation").

Blame, quite rightly in most cases, has been thrown into men's laps by women, and it's up to men together to resolve themselves over this, not to react defensively which only serves to perpetuate the polarisation caused by men not taking seriously women's thoughts, feelings and actions, on an equal to equal basis.

You say "There is undoubtedly much prejudice against women's abilities but this will not be changed by feminists pursuing **trivial** and **disruptive** aims" (My emphasis). Again the putdowns! Is violence against women trivial? Is rape trivial? Is trying to do something about these things disruptive? What I hear you saying is, women doing anything at all outside of their socially prescribed roles, is rocking the patriarchal status quo (which they are - hooray) which you as a man, whether you like it or not, and you seem to, have a vested interest in opposing in order to hang on to the power and privilege you've got.

You, Mark, in your article personify the prejudice against women's abilities, and you blithely throw the responsibility for that out, as if it is other people who are doing it, not you oh no. **You** are undermining the efforts of the WLM too.

You seem to be rejecting your responsibility as a man again when you say "it is much easier to blame than resolve". It's like you are saying wake me up when it's all blown over, thus falling into the trap of positing blame through non-ownership of your part in a conflict; and you accuse other people of this?

I find it very hard to take you seriously when you say "My deepest hope is that the emphasis in future will focus on achieving more respect for what have been traditionally female qualities" having read the rest of your piece. You then move on to say:

"This cannot be done by feminists adopting traditionally male qualities". I think that it is men who see women's greater strength and power of expression as women being 'male'. I'm sure that's the way a lot of feminists feel about men and so-called 'male' qualities; they would not be going around glorifying them. Who wants sex-role stereotypes anyway? Surely we want the humanization of both roles?

You make no mention of how **you** and other men can learn to appreciate the so-called 'feminine' qualities in themselves, this would give your words more personal meaning rather than talking about abstractions.

I think that your wish for greater co-operation between women and men is really valid - but I think men (yes, you and me and the rest) have got a lot of personal and maybe painful changes to go through before that will be possible in any large-scale way. You seem to be saying it's these feminists who are holding us all up, whereas I would say that it's men like you who are a large part of the obstacle.

You say "This is a crazy situation". I agree. But what are men going to do about themselves in order to make some personal changes, and thus help to change the situation in a directly personal and meaningful way?

Women as sex-objects **are** oppressed, often violently, and more subtly as a commodity - just another body, etc.

Men addicted to the female body (your words), **are not** oppressed. They embody values which in our society are considered OK and often enviable (by some men). Though I agree that both roles are diminishing, you make no mention of what the difference is between these two things in terms of sexual politics, you make no criticism of this 'normal' state of affairs.

Your "My suggestions are simple" is just too true! Why are you telling women what **you** think they should do? I get very angry with men who, in an all too familiar paternalistic way, try to tell women what sort of changes they should make. You seem to be shirking your responsibility for your own personal struggle for change yet again.

I can't understand your "women should be encouraged to appreciate gentle men". As I see it, women have to decide for themselves whom they appreciate.

Nowhere, but **nowhere** in your article is there **any** mention of men changing nor is there any mention of what **you** might be doing in this situation. You constantly put the onus on women to do **all** the changing (as if it is they who are completely in the wrong, and you, naturally, in the right). You don't seem to feel men must change also, even **more** so it seems to me.

A suggestion - I reckon you would probably get a lot out of joining or forming a men's group, or at least talking to any men who are in one.

Finally, I want to comment on your conclusion. You say "Men do cry, but not often in public".

I remember a few words from Joan Baez, something to the effect that when men learn to cry, perhaps we won't have to go to war anymore. Think on

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### *Dream Adaptation*

*Where is the depository  
for unwanted feelings  
is there a goodwill  
for love that doesn't fit  
isn't fitting  
inappropriate  
is there another portable chessboard  
somewhere  
for extra pieces  
with no holes to neatly plug  
in to  
anywhere*

*Is poetry indeed  
trimmed rubbish of life as tyler said  
or a garbage dump for feelings  
that nobody will take  
so i give them to everybody  
here  
casually i toss to you  
brand new tennis balls  
they keep bouncing back  
so i give up the game  
you sitting there on the warm gray  
summer asphalt*

**Christine Pocock**