



The Family Union

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*This is the full text of a speech delivered on 1 July 2013 in London to the Annual General Meeting of the campaigning group Parity by the author of *No More Sex War: The Failures of Feminism* (1992), the world's first egalitarian, progressive critique of feminism. Central to that book was the argument that men's and women's interests are not in opposition but are usually identical and always harmonious. Here the author argues that feminism is a faith impermeable to reason, evidence or justice. In order to release society from the grip of that ideological orthodoxy, it will be necessary to form a body that represents the interests of men and women equally in the family, *The Family Union*.*

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Let me begin by sucking up to you and say that I honour and admire Parity for its pioneering work; for being resolutely at the forefront of equality between men and women for decades; and for the robust individuality with which Parity has pursued the unfashionable cause of truth and justice on this vital topic.

That's enough of the sucking-up, however. I am hoping today that I might introduce you to a conclusion that you possibly may not have thought about or considered - despite your greatly honoured vanguard position.

As a lifelong, unswerving believer in the cause of parity between men and women, between girls and boys, I am going to argue that, in order to succeed in these adverse times, what that cause most needs is a union like a nationwide trade union to represent the interests of families and everybody who belongs to a family. You could call it The Family Union.

By that I mean a fully established union with branches and a national headquarters that will represent everybody in their place of work and at home, in schools and colleges, in the courts and in Parliament and also act as a pressure group on the political/media establishment and on government at all levels. It could, for a start, be a federation or umbrella group for all the groups and societies that have interests in the field of family life - from the WI to Fathers 4 Justice, from the Mothers' Union to the Grandparents Association.

This pipe-dream (for that is what it is, of course, and most likely to remain) would be the first mass union to be formed since the labour movement rose in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

But instead of representing the interests of one class against others - as did the craft unions - The Family Union would represent the interests of all individuals in families against the interests of government and of capital (those juggernauts which, at present, trundle largely unopposed over the lives of families and are free to stamp upon individuals any demands that suit them).

Over many decades of thinking about gender relations, God help me, I have come to believe that only a body which is constitutionally established to represent the interests of everybody in families - which means about 95% of us - and to represent all those interests equally, can release our age, our society, our culture from the stultifying, calcifying grip of the Marxist-inspired gender ideology and faith that has broadly dominated all interpretation of these issues for the last 150 years and has monopolised it in the last 50 years.

Before we can reach that point, however, we are going to have to trundle ourselves over some familiar ground. We need to fix a point of departure from where we are now in order to reach that desirable -if mirage-like - oasis of arrival.

To that end, I want to begin by asking you to cast your minds back and try to think when did you last hear or read it stated as a matter of fact that one woman in four suffers domestic abuse at the hands of the man she lives with?

Was it this morning on Radio 4's Today programme, while you were eating your breakfast? Or was it in your daily newspaper yesterday? Was it on Coronation St last Tuesday or on the Archers the week before last?

In my own case, this did, in fact, happen just the other day on the Today programme when Sandra Horley, the chief executive of Refuge, was being given the freedom of the airwaves (I don't think the word "interview" should be besmirched in this context) and she came out with that figure yet again – as she has perhaps ten thousand times in the last 30 years – and was not asked, as she never has been in my hearing, "where did you get this figure? what's the evidence? how do we know it's true? What about the gigantic body of reputable research which tells a completely different story?" We'll come back to that sore and sorry story in a minute but let me take another step and ask you, again, to try to remember when you last read, heard or saw an item of information (whether in the news, an advertisement or a scene in a tv soap) which stated as a matter of fact that, in some way or another, women are routinely paid less than men for the same work?

My most recent brush with this particular canard was last week on Twitter when my feed from the office of the most powerful man on earth told me that, in the USA, women are paid 70c for every dollar paid to men.

(My reply, by the way, was to ask President Obama if this appalling, indefensible injustice applied to every woman police officer, every female member of the armed forces, every woman teacher or doctor, every female government worker whose pay comes from federal, state or local government budgets? If so, I suggested, all those women should get themselves up a class action and sue the President of the United States from here to kingdom come.

I also asked, incidentally, if profit-minded businesses like Dell, IBM and HP can get away with paying women less than men, why don't they employ only women? Have they overlooked the fact that, if they followed that course of action, they would reduce their labour costs and make more profit?

Turning back reluctantly from the White House after our too-brief sojourn in the Oval Office, can I ask you now to try to remember the last time you heard it declared as a certainty that girls are in a position of general disadvantage and need to be supported - "empowered" is the word favoured by Michelle Obama, Hillary Clinton and other similarly disadvantaged ladies - to make the most of themselves in a hostile and unsympathetic world?

I came across that line yesterday. Truly. I wasn't looking for it. I didn't make a note of it. I only remembered it when I was writing this speech and it popped back into my mind.

It came up in an interview in the Financial Times with a young woman who runs a business marketing beauty products. She and her husband have just overseen a launch of their company on the stock exchange so you might guess they are doing all right. She seems to be a well-known person - though I had never heard of her and can't remember her name - so, again, you might imagine she hasn't got quite so much to complain about as, say, a 17 year-old mother of two living in a council flat in Grimsby. But when she was asked to list her enthusiasms, she answered that she was "pas-

sionate about empowering girls and young women."

I have frequently replied on Twitter to Michelle Obama and Hillary Clinton when they come out with this complacent, sisterly guff asking why they seem to care only about girls? I would like to ask the same question of this young woman in the FT. Why do people who ostensibly care so much about equality never notice the position of young males, especially poor young males, especially poor young males who happen to be black?

Surprise, surprise, no answer has ever been forthcoming from those Olympian heights. I keep getting up in the middle of the night to check my Twitter timeline but, so far, not a peep, still less a tweet.

Yet, if there is one single social group in the western world whose members are spectacularly, undeniably in positions of disadvantage - if there is one class of people who are hopelessly and permanently crushed by inequality in education, employment opportunities, wealth, health and prospects - it is black males of any age but especially those between the ages of 15-25.

It is impossible to be sentient in the modern world and not be aware of this fact - yet not only does it never get mentioned by the most powerful and influential women in the world: I have never even heard it mentioned by the most powerful man in the world, who happens to be a black man. The only times I have ever heard Barack Obama talk about men have been when he was berating men for being feckless, negligent or absent fathers - that old Uncle Tom jive.

I imagine we can all agree that these statements are the routine stuff of our daily lives, almost as common as the weather forecast or the stock market reports.

We are subjected to them so constantly that we may not even notice their frequency, still less might we bridle at their dubiety, their illogicality or their sheer nasty gormlessness.

As a society, as an age, as a culture we have learned to accept these declarations as articles of an incontestable faith. They must be true because everybody believes them.

In this company, I imagine it will not be necessary to go painstakingly over the fallacies, the contradictions and the implausibilities in these articles of faith.

I imagine that everybody here will, at some point, have asked themselves "If one in four women suffers domestic violence, why do I know so few women (or possibly not even one) of whom this is true?"

Everybody here will probably have wondered why, if the incidence of violent crime is falling in all categories in almost every developed country in the world, the figure for women who suffer domestic violence should have remained unaltered ever since Sandra Horley and her ilk first began to bruit it abroad (they call themselves "the domestic violence sector", by the way, as if they occupy a subdivision of the economy, like retailing). I imagine that most people here will be aware that, while the figure of two women a week murdered by their male partners (a figure which gets retailed every time the subject of domestic violence comes up) - while that figure has, in fact, been falling slightly over the last 10 years, the figure for men murdered by the women they live with has risen

slightly over the same period so that, today, more than one man a week is murdered.

Both figures are reassuringly minute. You are much more likely to die riding a bicycle than at the hands of your spouse or domestic partner but, as I am going to discuss, the true figures have no bearing on the public mind. Even Iain Duncan Smith comes out with the one-in-four figure and the bugaboo about two women murder victims a week. (At this point you may feel that I may rest my case; but I shall continue.)

You will probably all have asked yourself why, if women are, truly, paid less than men for the same work in our society, why doesn't anybody ever initiate legal proceedings under the provisions of the Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act? Those acts have been statute law in this country for 43 and 38 years respectively. They specifically outlaw paying people of different sexes different rates for the same work. If this outrageous and indefensible discrimination is still happening in the 21st century, you have to ask what successive Directors of Public Prosecutions have been doing with their time.

Similarly, we must ask ourselves why, if girls are so uniquely in a position of disadvantage in our culture, why do they so spectacularly out-perform boys at all levels of our education system?

Parity, I know, has devoted considerable thought and research to these questions and I am sure there is no need here to labour over the evidence which demolishes that heap of fallacies.

Not least of the reasons why there is no need is that there is no point. The evidence - plainly - has no bearing at all on the beliefs. It doesn't make the slightest difference. The creed which underpins these articles of faith is not susceptible or pervious to reason, proof or the rules of evidence. It is not a matter of argument. As it was put to me by the woman with whom I was living in 1970 - and who was an ardent early-adopter of the modern feminism that was emerging at that time - "this is an argument you cannot win".

To enlarge and support that civilised observation (whatever happened to the Age of Reason? whatever happened to the rules of evidence?), take a look online at an interview on Israeli tv with Professor Murray Strauss of the University of New Hampshire - one of the world's leading authorities on the subject of domestic violence. Professor Strauss says that more than 230 impartial, peer-reviewed scholarly studies now exist to prove that, where domestic violence occurs, women assault their partners with the same frequency as men.

When asked about the reaction he encountered to this information, he replied "Generally, people simply refuse to believe it. They say it simply can't be true." That response - surely we must all know and agree - is what we are up against. People refuse to believe the evidence that contradicts the established feminist faith of our age. They will not countenance it. They simply will not have it.

This is not just an argument you cannot win. It's an argument you are not even allowed to start.

Take votes for women. It is such an unquestionable item of faith in our age that the extension

of the franchise to women in 1919 resulted from the efforts and the sacrifices of the Suffragettes that it is actually a form of delinquent heresy to question or to doubt that truth. You are allowed - encouraged - to doubt the existence of God; you can question the utility of the monarchy; you can air doubts about the even-handedness and the probity of the police. But you question the role of the Suffragettes at your peril.

It is a truth so universally acknowledged that the Suffragettes won women the vote that you won't find one person in 100,000 who questions it. At my little daughters' primary school, children are indoctrinated in that belief before they have even been introduced to the cardinal articles of faith of the world's leading religions.

So, if you ask people how many men were enfranchised by the 1919 Act, they will look completely bewildered, baffled and reply "none, of course". Do try this at home. I have never known it to fail. If you tell somebody that more men than women got the vote in 1919 and that most of the men who died in the First World War were not entitled to vote, the person you are talking to is likely to look as if the world has slipped violently under their feet. If you ask them what was the majority in the House of Commons in favour of this reform (answer: 10 to one) and ask how many women were sitting on the benches of the House of Commons at that moment, you will witness a whole world of certainty disappearing down the plughole.

The reason for this dismay is obvious.

If it is true that opposition to votes for women was a fringe position by 1919 and if it is true that the extension of the franchise to women had been, throughout the previous decade, the most widely supported reform movement of the last 200 years (and both of those positions are thoroughly tenable), then the whole idea of a system organized by men for the benefit of men and designed to inflict repression and disadvantage on women - that entire notion of patriarchy which dates from Rousseau and Engels and which has underpinned all our thinking on gender issues for the last 50 year - goes for a burton. It's dead in the water.

That's why you can't get this argument started. Because it ends in the ruin of the feminist orthodoxy. That edifice of intolerance and of sexist spite, built on a marsh of shifting half-truths and a miasma of misperceptions, comes crashing down as soon as you rest a finger of scepticism or impartial inquiry upon it.

How can it be a patriarchy when it includes disadvantages for men - or are we going to say that getting a second-rate education, being passed over for employment and being deprived of your own children by legal process is some kind of advantage? How can it be a patriarchy when every major change and reform in the lives of women in the last 150 years has been initiated, supported and encouraged by men - from John Stuart Mill to David Steele? If you look at the record of change for women, it is self-evident, transparent, incontestable that this long history of change has taken place with the active agreement and consent of men who have, on the whole, adapted remarkably easily to the new order that has come into being.

So - our society can only be called a patriarchy through an act of wilful denial of reality. But

too many people in our time now owe their positions - their status, their income, their honours. their self-respect - to the feminist orthodoxy to allow it to be demolished. I'm not just talking about Jenni Murray of Woman's Hour or Polly Toynbee of The Guardian. I'm talking about pretty much everybody in the media/political Establishment of the western world - politicians, journalists, editors, current affairs presenters on tv and radio, university teachers, lawyers and judges. doctors and social workers - all are required to bend the knee to this orthodoxy and all do so with uncritical promptitude. From the Huffington Post to Le Monde, from the Old Bailey to our girls' primary school to the pulpit in your local church - all public officials and representatives of public opinion have surrendered to this body of belief and pump it out at the turn of a tap.

To demolish that orthodox faith - that pernicious, poisonous, parasitic creed - now by frontal assault would require an upheaval equal to the Protestant revolution. That simply isn't going to happen - or, as was once famously said, I'm a banana. Change isn't going to be achieved by reason. This is an argument you cannot win, after all. It can't be effected by appeals to justice. It can't be achieved through the protests of those afflicted by manifest injustice. See what has been the fate, over decades, of Families Need Fathers or, more recently, Fathers 4 Justice - scorn, derision, neglect, marginalisation, ostracism.

The only way that I can see to make progress beyond this antique ideology - the last surviving remnant of the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century - is to by-pass it, to outflank it, to go around it, to surround it with the active interests, actively expressed of the majority of people and thus to isolate it, to cut it off, starve it of influence and allow it to wither and die.

That's where The Family Union comes in (at last, you may reasonably sigh). A body which represented the interests of all children, all young people, all parents, all grandparents - and which assumed, as a constitutional obligation, that all of those interests were of equal importance - could not only be impervious, indifferent to the odious feminist orthodoxy. It could actually make a difference.

The most encouraging sign I have seen in recent years came in the unlikely setting of a supermarket car-park in Gateshead. A clean and tidy family estate car was being backed out of a parking space by a smartly-dressed old lady and in its rear window I saw the sticker "Justice for fathers in divorce."

It seemed most likely to me that the driver was a mother and grandmother and I guessed that she and her son were being forcibly estranged from their own children and grandchildren through the operations of the family courts. Here, I thought, was a real breakthrough moment.

If grandmothers could get up in arms and start demanding justice in the courts, it might actually come about. If mothers could get together and start insisting on equal treatment for their sons at school - if they started insisting that their boys should not be treated as primitive barbarians, if they started demanding male teachers in equal numbers with female teachers (as is now happening, I believe, in some parts of Germany) - who would resist them? Not David Cameron. Not Michael Gove. Not Ed Miliband. Not even - I bet - Harriet Harman.

The people with the power in our age - as I have argued many times before - are women. In previous ages, the people with power supported the claims of those who were powerless.

Men initiated, encouraged and saw into law the reforms that changed the position of women. White people in the USA dedicated themselves to reforms to make black people better off. The white nations of the world combined to force the apartheid regime of South Africa to abandon its racist rule.

Women ought - I submit - to feel an obligation today to repair the inequalities and the injustices inflicted on boys and men. Western women in the last 50 years since the advent of the Pill changed everything are - surely - the most privileged and the most fortunate human beings ever to have existed on the face of the earth.

The first women to be free to enter education and employment on equal or better terms with men, they are also the first ever to be able to control their fertility infallibly and, if they make a mistake, the first to be able to correct it simply and safely. The first to be legally entitled to divorce on preferential terms, they are also the first to be free to choose their own sexual lives without guilt and the first to be free to wear whatever they want - or nothing - without legal consequence.

Women owe it to boys and men, I would say, to use their influence and their power to make males equal in our own time, in our own world.

However, they won't do it, at present, because everybody in every office of state and every position of influence believes, instinctively, that the interests of women are paramount and that, if anybody is suffering disadvantage by reason of gender, it must be women. They will ask: what's in it for women to make things better for men?

Answer: the benefits of The Family Union.

The only way that I can see that change might be initiated by women to benefit men is if they can see those changes, also, to be in their own benefit.

If women can be persuaded that is actively in their own interests to make fathers equal in family law and life, then surely it must happen?

If women could cast off the eye-patch of feminism and acquire a binocular view, they might see that their own careers are being impaired and their earning potential reduced by having to take time off work when their babies are born and their children are still little, while the fathers are expected to remain at work, then - surely - they would use The Family Union to campaign for men and women to have equal time off work (in my view neither mother nor father should be expected to work full time before a child is three)?

Surely, surely, mothers of sons would feel that they were being better mothers if their Family Union insisted on reforming the practices of our national education system and made boys equal with girls at school? Surely grandmothers would feel that they were doing the right thing by their

grandchildren if, through their membership of The Family Union, they required the courts to treat their own sons - the fathers of their grandchildren - equally in divorce proceedings?.

Those reforms would, decidedly, be in the own interests of those women. Feminists would therefore have nothing to complain about (will any of us ever live to see such a day?). But to achieve those reforms, those equalities, requires a body with power which will act in everybody's interests equally - that is, observing the principles of parity.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you The Family Union.

Shall we get it going? Shall we all sign up? Right now?

Some hopes.



Neil Lyndon, author and journalist, can be followed on Twitter @neillyndon.

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