

Finn MacKay, Reclaim the Night 2009

Congratulations RTN 2009. You have taken back the night in solidarity with women who have also marched tonight in Grenoble in France, in Rome in Italy and in Newquay in Cornwall. And they have sent their greetings to our march here in London.

Thanks are due to all the women who worked to organize the march this year. In particular to Jess, Chitra, Jennifer, Gemma, Julia, Katie and Becca. Thanks to our signer Kate. To the fantastic drummers, all the way from Glasgow, Sheboom. To all the women who stewarded this year. To the men who helped by setting up this venue and in particular to Adrian. Thank you to our Trade Union sponsors the NASUWT and Unison, to the NUS, BECTU, NUT and all our TU comrades. And thank you to all of you, over 2000 marchers from all over the UK closing down London to say no to violence against women in a great show of strength for our UK Women's Liberation Movement. There is a resurgence of feminism in our country and beyond. Towns and cities everywhere are setting up their own Feminist Networks and organizing their own RTN's. Change is afoot in our country. The women's movement is on the march once again!

Why is this happening now? Because we are stirring up a backlash against the backlash. And what is that term, the backlash is a pre-emptive strike against women's success before it was won, a reaction from patriarchy to the wins of feminism, a kickback against the threat to the status quo that our movement continues to pose.

In this environment there are many lies told about our movement, many myths about what it stands for, and what it was when last at its height in our country in the 1970's and 80's. And those who have only heard these lies, can be resistant to even the word 'Feminism'. They will say we should think of a new one to replace it because it puts people off. But those who understand the potential offered by Feminism at that time, who recognize the achievements of the 70's and what it means for us now – say in return, that yes we are Feminists and we are proud to be so. That there was nothing wrong with it then, there's nothing wrong with it now and all we have to do is finish the job.

And in this great movement that we have inherited we continue to move forward and like our sisters who went before us we continue to make wins of our own. And for many years to come women will look back on what we achieved this year with our historic win on clause 13 in the Policing & Crime Bill. For the first time the eyes of the law will be turned on those who fuel the demand for women and children in prostitution. This shows that laws can be changed, that history can be made, that the future can be re-written for the better.

Not surprisingly, this has not been the story in our media, as they are more obsessed with the recent outing of 'Belle Du Jour'.

So – Dr. Brooke Magnanti, aka 'Belle Du Jour' we are sorry you had to fund your education through prostitution. We are sorry that it is prostitution that has made you famous, rather than your studies in science and medicine. And we invite you to join

us – in campaigns for the return of the student grant, for free education and for a world where all women are worth more than what some man is willing to pay for them.

Tonight you have marched for all women. For the right to live free from fear. You have marched to demand justice for all those that have survived the crimes of rape, of sexual abuse and assault, of forced marriage, of domestic violence. And you have marched for the many, who did not survive. And so for all those women who didn't make it, we cannot lose heart. For all those women who lost hope long ago, we must carry it for them.

We must ensure that every woman knows of the existence of our movement, knows that it grows bigger every day. Regardless of her views or opinions on feminism. Because of all the many great things that feminism is, at its most fundamental, at its most relevant to all those women who have survived the crimes of male violence or been touched by them, at even its very least, feminism still stands as a worldwide movement of billions of women that says we believe you. It is not your fault. No woman is ever to blame for men's violence.

And in many ways we are all survivors. We are all of us survivors of a system that has beaten us down with words, that has assaulted us with images, that has failed us with lack of expectation, with poorer schooling, with lower pay. We call it patriarchy.

And because of it there are all too many women out there who do not believe in them selves, let alone in a movement of women. And it is our job to change their minds.

We don't need to know how to look good naked. We need the right to be equal with our clothes on. We need to build a society that values us as more than just our bodies.

The New Year will of course bring many new challenges. Here we are on the brink of an election, with the fascist BNP canvassing for your vote. Our world leaders about to agree to indecision in Copenhagen, while climate change and the destruction of our environment continues unabated. And as feminists these are our issues because there can be no freedom while our sisters continue to pay the price for the profits of patriarchy. Around the world it is women and children who are the first to die in wars, the greatest number of refugees, the most who starve in need of clean water and food while governments, including ours, invest in killing and tools of killing. We must educate ourselves on these issues and work in solidarity with those active on them. Because Feminism is for everyone. Ours is a revolutionary movement, self critical, self reflective and progressive. We have made the links between racism and sexism, between militarism and masculinity, between homophobia and misogyny and we are all the better for it. And together we must continue to learn and grow because this is the strength of our movement. This is why we will win.

Do not flinch in your idealism. Never give up. Know that you are part of a proud movement with a great history and an even greater future.

Why Feminism? Because you're worth it!