

The proposed A-Level Politics

Government demotes feminism and relegates women thinkers

Perhaps it is time that the Department *for* Education substituted the word *against* for the word *for*. I keep thinking that battles have been won only to discover that prejudice and ignorance remain a powerful combination. For me politics is about the inclusive and consensual arrival at public values: a process that precedes policy-making. Now it has been exclusively decided that the voices, perspectives, power to critique, values, knowledge, experiences, insights and concerns of women are to be drastically diminished and devalued as we learn to participate in politics. Feminism is a battle that should long ago have been over: a footnote to history: a non-issue. But it is not. Government points out that its proposals are out for *consultation*. Oh yeah!

Two issues present themselves. The first is the issue of the role that women have, do and shall partake in our public life. Is it to be subsidiary? The second issue is about who has the power to decide the official definition of politics as a subject of study.

The 1970 Equal Pay Act was thought important. It prompted something I wrote for the Childwall Project (anyone remember that or Mode 3 CSE?). Forty-five years ago we could imagine ourselves embarking on an adventure of equality: not simply to promote the rights of women but also to fulfil the humanism of men. It was a delusion.

Thirty or so years ago GCSE arrived. For a few years it was possible, under Mode 3 rules, to design your own. I worked with a group of women in Liverpool to design a GCSE in Women's Studies. It would, I believe, have been a hugely enlightening learning experience for both students and teachers regardless of gender. This, however, was the time of Kenneth Baker. His National Curriculum was sweeping the nation: 'Women's Studies'? We were told that it was not a subject worthy of study. We already had a well-embedded Men's Studies on the school timetable: it was called 'History'.

So far official response to complaints suggests that feminism might find a place as a theme under the section for pressure groups. This is insulting, as is having only one woman among the list of 'political thinkers' (not Margaret Thatcher). It is also foolish to think that the subject of politics must be studied through a male prism. Education itself is diminished when it is narrowed.

The specification has been drawn up mostly as a series of lists. Doing that the exercise becomes a jostling for attention as items are inserted shoving others out of the way. It is a very old fashioned way of designing a programme of learning and it looks like no one jostled for feminism or for women thinkers. Below are the links for the consultation plus an article from The Independent.

Cliff Jones, former chief moderator, chief examiner and chair of examiners for Government and Politics CSE, 16 Plus and GCSE, 21st. November 2015.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/feminism-to-be-dropped-from-a-level-politics-syllabus-under-department-for-education-plans-a6740881.html>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcse-and-a-level-reform-geology-and-politics-pe-short-course>

p.s. This piece has been submitted for publication elsewhere but I regard the issue to be of such importance that it ought not to wait.