

A tosser in lads clothing

Solidarity Federation

Autumn 1998

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Marketing directors' dream of connecting with 'youth culture'. Isn't this a dream come true? The new lad has escaped from the pages of the weekend broadsheet style supplements. He has become a reality from a newspaper myth. His creators would claim he is a redefined British male. More likely a repackaged bundle of old sexist prejudices. Yes, the new lad is here, and yes, the new lad is a shallow, inane, rehashed 90's product.

The prime newspaper myth was that there was anything remotely new about being a lad. Self-obsessed, ego mania with anti-aesthetic (i.e., if it contains subtlety, it's crap) is familiar to anyone who has ever been near teenage boys. What the latest mythical incarnation of the *new lad* has done is mix this traditional potion with other ingredients. Namely, with the worst strains of machismo posturing of working class blokes down the pub, and some confused pseudo-irony.

Worse still, the *new lad* proponents have sought to justify it all, and have packaged and sold it to middle class media bores who have taken to coke and designer beer and the smart casual look of the 90's football hooligan. Obviously, if they really wanted to adopt working class culture, they should have gone for angling, and spent hours sitting by the side of a canal in an industrial estate.

wank mags

One bit of irony seemingly lost on the whole laddist milieu is that the main gain of the *new lad* media grope-in has been to generate a series of wank mags for those who were always too hypocritical to take their hands out of their pockets long enough to reach the top shelf. A whole new series of soft pornography has ensued, which objectifies the female form even more than the traditional top shelf mattress bolsters.

It is the alleged 'knowingness', the self proclaimed sense of irony, which really is the worst aspect of this phenomenon...the sense of '*we know it's a bit dodgy, but hey it's only in fun*', and '*we know women are people too, honest*'. This is what allows jokes about men beating up their girlfriends to be met with cheers from a TV audience. Really, it is not ironic, it is not 'knowing'; it is crass misogyny.

sex attached

To really redefine our relationship to sex and fun, and to celebrate both, we need to counter the detachment and exclusion. This cannot be done by glossing over the real but unacceptable view of the heterosexual male as leering moron. The way to redefine masculinity is not through a servile wretch, always apologising for itself. Neither is it remotely fruitful to retreat into puerile jokes and hide behind a bottle of beer. It is to celebrate sex and the human form — and let's not pretend that this is remotely what the current breed of men's magazines are doing. Nor is it what all these 'clever' adverts are doing. We still live in a society where it remains acceptable to use naked women to sell a car (as long as it is with a wink) or a magazine or newspaper (wink optional, dribble more likely) but you can't show an erect penis, even in a serious drama.

What anarcho-syndicalists argue for is free expression, in all its aspects. I am not seeking a new Puritanism, I am seeking out a new celebration of life, of fun and of each other. Eroticism and erotic materials — including stuff generally termed 'pornographic', is part of this fun.

At the same time, to pursue the freedom to enjoy, we have to collectively think up and make a new society. This means, among other things, going to lots of dull meetings and very non-sexy marches in the duller bits of London. In between, we are having fun in clubs and pubs, fancying people, forming and maintaining relationships. We are about living life (well, in between work and writing this for DA..).

New Laddism is all about a retreat from life, to the glossy safe and sanitised reality of the new wank mags. *New Laddism* is where all of life is available in edited highlights and without all the toil, the work, the responsibility, and the need to think. You cannot celebrate life by hiding from it in advertising soft focus wet dreams.

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