

Mental Health – a proposal (Rachel E)

More and more people are being open about their mental distress, their symptoms and the effect that their mental ill health can have on their lives and relationships. Increasing numbers of political activists trying to create radical ways of understanding mental health. Mental health service users are being pushed to the brink by a Tory government simultaneously attacking disabled people and making cuts to mental health services, under these circumstances we might expect a layer of mental health activists to be drawn to more anti-capitalist politics.

Being a political activist can have both positive and negative effects on our mental health. On one hand the solidarity, comradeship, being involved in the “outside world” can be very positive for our mental health. On the other hand, the stress of things going badly, taking on too much and being aware of the pain and suffering of others can have a negative impact. In addition to this juggling of political activities alongside other commitments such as work, study, friends, family commitments, childcare and hobbies can have an impact on our mental health.

I am writing this proposal in response to conversations that I had with a number of comrades who have said that they feel they need to “step away” or “take a break” if they are in mental distress. Of course for some people this may be a genuine desire that of course should be supported or respected. For others feeling they need to “take a break” comes from a feeling that people won't understand, that being a political activist is an all or nothing affair, that people will be scared, that mental distress is a sign of weakness. In these cases, someone walking away from political activity can mean walking away from the positive aspects of political activity such as solidarity, comradeship and friendships.

Proposal

I propose that we have a one-day workshop to look at the relationship between political activism and mental health, to explore ways in which we can support one another and others. I don't think this should be seen as group therapy or counselling but rather as a collective discussion to think about how we can support activists going through mental distress. I have facilitated similar workshops for mental health activists that people seemed to find useful.

I have written this as a proposal rather than just getting on with it as there will be resource implications. I am happy to facilitate the event but I will need help to find a room, communicate the event to rs21 members.

[Note: This event did not go ahead in this form. Mental health was a theme in rs21's 2018 conference The Revenge of Everyday Life.]