

Fight for women's rights this Friday and every day ^[1]

Author: Mallick, Heather

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EXCERPTS

As Friday's International Women's Day 2019 approaches, women are still skiing uphill, i.e., placing their skis in awkward V formation and walking bowlegged up the mountain while the men sail above them on the ski lift.

'Twas ever thus. But the fight for women's rights — with good men joining in — was never going to be easy. Until recently, it was never going to be.

Successes are localized. Oxfam Canada's yearly scorecard says the federal government under a feminist prime minister has done well, creating a Department for Women and Gender Equity and doubling federal funding for women's rights movements.

Ottawa is using gender analysis in the budget process, and last year's Pay Equity Act took aim at the wage gap in federally regulated sectors, a huge achievement. Canada's Feminist International Assistance is spending money on reproductive rights in poorer countries, even as U.S. President Donald Trump does his best to remove such rights.

Populist nations — the U.S., the Philippines, Brazil, Hungary — are slashing women's rights. But populism is provincial too.

Ontario Conservative Premier Doug Ford is taking aim at the previous Liberal government's pay transparency law that public job postings must include a salary range, bosses can't ask about past salary, and large employers must track pay gaps between men and women. (Among full-year, full-time Canadian workers, men earn 22.6 percent more.)

Ford will ask business how transparently onerous this will be. How much money and time will be wasted? Will it bankrupt you? Give you carpal tunnel syndrome? Make you pack up the factory overnight and move to Mingo County, West Virginia?

Whatever the answer, I imagine the law will be repealed.

Abortion rights are improving in Canada but less so in smaller provinces. Every woman should be able to buy the morning-after pill and the abortion pill at a pharmacy everywhere in Canada, but many can't afford it. Religionist — or simply very bad — doctors are refusing to refer patients for abortions while charging medicare a fee for the refusal.

And the anti-choice crowd still hauls teenagers out of Catholic schools to spend the day displaying the abstract art of scarlet fetal renderings on the street. Why don't teenage boys just hold up "My sperm is sacred" signs? It's a building block of misogyny.

In Argentina, a pregnant 11-year-old girl raped by her grandmother's boyfriend begged doctors for an abortion. "I want you to remove what the old man put inside me." They did not, performing a caesarean section because her little body was too small to give birth.

The U.S. may well turn into an Argentina. It's almost there. One is reduced to hoping that Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, alarmed by public chasms, will vote with liberal justices and retain abortion rights. If there is a violent uprising in the U.S., it will be fought over racism, guns and abortion.

On the bright side, more women are entering traditionally male sectors, like law, medicine, politics, architecture, engineering, the trades and the military. They are unwelcome, but their suffering at the hands of men in the #MeToo era will perhaps create a safer path for their daughters.

The Nobel Prize is trying to root out the sexism, corruption and sexual brutality of past decades. Two Nobels in literature will be awarded this year, presumably both to females. No?

Women's bodies are different from men's bodies. But data is male. Medicine is tested on and designed for male bodies, and many women die as a result. American critic Rebecca Traister wrote *Good and Mad: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Anger*, a horrifying and energizing read in case you're not angry enough already, which is unlikely.

The great British feminist Caroline Criado Perez — her campaign to keep a woman on banknotes has placed Jane Austen on the £10 — has written an electrifying book, *Invisible Women*, about the world being designed, literally, for male bodies. From office design to the size of

smartphones to drug trials, women are not male and therefore not the standard. We do not fit in.

“Women’s rights are human rights,” says Canada’s famously feminist Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland. Day by day, we women hope to become full members of the human race.

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