

International Women's Day: We need a women's rights reawakening ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Thursday is International Women's Day. Women in Canada and the U.S. have not been in this much danger for a generation.

Women have few public defenders right now and it's our fault. As the years passed, we grew overconfident. We took our hard-won rights for granted, we assumed our enemies accepted our triumphs - abortion rights, equal pay, work equality, contraception - as a done deal. We underestimated how much we were hated, and look at us now.

American women are fighting a rearguard action for something as basic as birth control to be included in health-care plans. They are called "sluts" for doing so.

They are also fighting state government-mandated pre-abortion ultrasounds to shame them into cancelling the procedure. "I cannot believe I still have to protest this," one woman demonstrator's sign read in Virginia. The women were hauled away by police on Monday, the same way pregnant women who attempt suicide are arrested for child murder in the southern states.

A U.S. law student named Sandra Fluke recently testified before a federal committee about birth control not being included in university health plans, and was taunted by hate-radio host Rush Limbaugh as a "slut" and a "prostitute."

Limbaugh, the man who once mocked Michael J. Fox's limbs twitching from Parkinson's and ridiculed Bill Clinton's "ugly" daughter, said of Fluke: "She wants to be paid to have sex. She's having so much sex she can't afford the contraception. She wants you and me and the taxpayers to pay her to have sex. What does that make us? We're the pimps." He then told her he wanted to see tapes of the "paid" sex she was having on his dime.

His attack on Fluke was so violent that President Barack Obama telephoned her to thank her for her bravery and told her that her parents should be proud. What a kind, decent thing for Obama, father of two girls, to do.

If you used birth control in the 1920s, even in its primitive form, you were a slut. If you use birth control in 2012 you're still a slut. "Slut" clothing gets you raped, according to the Toronto police officer whose vicious remarks about rape victims sparked wonderful SlutWalk, a Toronto women's rights parade that spread planetwide.

Conservative MP Stephen Woodworth is setting up a small committee of federal MPs to decide when "personhood" begins. He thinks it begins sometime after, or possibly before, the sperm meets the egg but he's willing to let a gaggle of guys decide that. How generous of him!

A male Catholic high school student in Ajax deplores the makeup and revealing clothing of female students, preaching to girls as if he were a regulator of their self-presentation.

Where did this 17-year-old get the idea he could publicly assess female sexuality? Why do girls let him do it? Why does Woodworth think he can enslave all Canadian women with a magic committee to decide their uterine events? From boy to man, males still think they run the show.

I suspect this parade of male bullying marched north from the U.S., a nation that combines the licentious and the puritanical, but with incoherent rage. We Canadians can't allow imported hate.

As things now stand, women are condemned for existing. Whatever we do, we will always be wrong.

Our appearance is dissected as if we were crayfish pinned to a lab table. We wear too much makeup, our clothes are too tight and short, we are too attractive for the workplace but too ugly to be sexually harassed, "sluts" when we get pregnant and "sluts" for not having a husband, bad mothers when we seek child care in order to go back to work, bad wives for working in the first place.

We're too fat for our clothes, too thin to be healthy, we inexplicably outdo males in school, we are unattractively aggressive, we are out of line.

Women simply cannot win. If we don't fight back against this tidal wave, we are in desperate trouble. And a Happy International Women's Day to you too.

-reprinted from the Toronto Star

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