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'You're a dinosaur'

Last week's Afghanistan column touched a nerve, but I am right

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Last Updated: 25th April 2009, 4:28am

A journalist always knows when a column has been a success. Partly it's the hundreds of e-mails of support, but equally it's the almost as numerous letters that try, in appalling English, to insult you.

This is meat and drink to those who think and write outside of the comfort zone of standard Canadian media.

Last week I said that an intensely inexperienced 21-year-woman should not have had to give her life in the pointless war in Afghanistan. The responses were fascinating.

Most of the critical ones seemed obsessed with the fact that the poor girl indeed should have been able to die. A rather perverse way to support her and her family.

The vast majority of these were the usual nonsense. "Everyone is equal," "you're a dinosaur," "I hate you." Then all sorts of delightful and failed attempts to spell the word "misogynist."

OK, let's go a step further. Anyone who claims the war in Afghanistan is about gender equality is either supremely naive or extraordinarily dishonest. We said hardly a word about women's rights in that country until the United States was attacked on 9/11. So, apparently, women were treated well before the Twin Towers outrage but badly afterwards.

More than this, while the Soviet Union was a repugnant regime, the Afghan government begged for Russian help when it was attacked by the Taliban and one of the policies Moscow advocated was women's rights.

ARMING THE MADMEN

The response of the West, including Canada, was to arm and support the very Islamic madmen we are now fighting because, ostensibly, they treat women so badly.

We sacrifice our soldiers, including young women who ought not to be there in the first place, to the guns of the very people we said were the good guys when they were fighting our enemies at the time. Then we pretend this is a noble war and that it's all about freedom, gender and social justice.

In this war we and our allies sometimes bomb innocent people and destroy villages where mothers and children live. But it's all in the name of some great struggle to make sure that young women can waste their lives for a soon-to-be-reversed policy decision -- one that obliges us to fight the Taliban while simultaneously giving special trade favours to regimes that have exactly the same human rights records.

Something similar has happened in Iraq, where untold suffering has been caused by western aggression because of the supposed need to remove a tyrant who was our friend for years and who, by the way, was a secular leader who actually supported female equality. In that war the western powers allied themselves with various states, such as Saudi Arabia, that treat women appallingly.

Most of this will be far too deep and challenging for the cliché-laden blowhards who want me to be, according to their e-mails, fired, killed or castrated. They seem to glory in innocent death and hypocritical foreign policy and seem to care not a bit for smashed children if they are brown, Muslim and poor.

It's all like some gigantic television reality show where foolish people live vicariously through the lives of others and fail to realize that behind the curtain of banality is a genuinely real world that demands more than facile and smug responses.

So sad yet so predictable.

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