

Doris Anderson's Columns in the *Toronto Star*

JUDY STEED

Poring over hundreds of columns Doris Anderson wrote for the *Toronto Star* during the 1980s and early 1990s, I kept doing a double-take. She must have written this yesterday, I'd think, reading her analysis of issues ranging from:

- why men won't share power with women;
- why men do most of the talking on TV;
- the prevalence of sex stereotyping and violence in the media;
- the search for Mr. Right;
- poor people being taken advantage of by "discounters;"
- the joys of holidaying in Prince Edward Island;
- animals being injected with hormones to speed up meat production;
- the "proliferation of throw-aways" and plastics that don't degrade;
- corporate ethics—she wrote "A Letter to Conrad Black" on the subject in 1987;
- prostitution and politicians: "Randy men always seem to be performing for each other, not because they like women."
- why women struggle the world over to get elected; why Proportional Representation will help;
- U.S. policy toward Canada:

"The U.S. doesn't want free trade with us. They want to go on doing what they've always done—buy us out completely and go on protecting their own products when it suits them."

- raising children; her love for her three sons;
- the Charter of Rights and its repercussions; how she resigned as head of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women when Lloyd Axworthy cancelled her conference on Women and the Constitution, which became the catalyst for Canadian feminists to fight for—and win—equality rights;
- How the Charter of Rights is being used against women: "Laws passed to protect young women have been used to protect men accused of rape."
- men's superior spatial ability, which turns out to be based on conditioning, growing up with building blocks;
- how the NDP could succeed with a strong pro-environment platform. "Crack down on polluters. Sending them to jail seems to work."
- discrimination against women in the work force, which continues under the guise of "the mommy track, which isn't the track to the corner office."
- pornography: writing about

Susan Cole's book, *Pornography and the Sex Crisis*, she supported the idea that women should have the right to sue for the harm caused by pornography;

- the need for outreach programs like *Sistering II* that connect isolated, older women; for support for public broadcasting; for Canadian content on our airwaves, for women in positions of power; for economic policies maintaining control of key sectors and resources; for rational minds in the Middle East;
- "All the loose talk about containing Saddam Hussein as a potential Hitler is a sham," she wrote. "The war in the Persian Gulf ... is about who controls the biggest oil well in the world." That was in 1990. Most of the above items were published in the 1980s.

Not only did Doris Anderson think and write about everything under the sun, she saw society clearly, extracted the most relevant information, trends and attitudes, and pointed the way to solutions. She was an opinion leader for more than 40 years. There was no topic she didn't touch. To the young women eager—hopefully—to emulate her impact, know that you are standing on strong shoulders.

R.E.A.L. Women Don't Really Speak for Women

Doris Anderson
Toronto Star, October 7, 1985

"Write to your MP requesting that the Secretary of State, Women's Program, be disbanded and this funding be completely stopped," says a bulletin widely circulated by R.E.A.L. (Realistic, Equal, Active, for Life) Women last month....

R.E.A.L. Women is for very little except "the family," it turns out. It is against, above all, abortion under any circumstances, against day care, against the equality clauses women fought so hard for in the Charter of Rights, against equal pay for women, against affirmative action, and against Family Law Reform.

...It is determined to wipe out the whole Women's Program. This would mean the loss of all government support to more than 600 women's groups that work in women's centres, rape crisis centres, battered women's groups, farm women's groups, etc., etc.

Since its formation in 1981, R.E.A.L. Women is much smaller than many other mainstream women's organizations.... At most, it represents 15,000 women. The National Action Committee on the Status of Women now represents 400 women's organizations, mostly mainstream, from all over Canada ... 3 1/2 million women.

...R.E.A.L. Women members claim they are pro male, but only in the sense they want men to take care of them – while they enjoy the gains other women have fought for.

But where are they right now? While they are advocating abolishing the Women's Program, other women are mobilizing to stop the government from de-indexing Family Allowances. And where was R.E.A.L. when other women's groups were working to get pensions for homemakers, or helping Native women get back their rights, or establishing homes for battered women, or getting better legislation passed on rape and day care?

...This present campaign to try to wipe out funding for other women's groups is destructive to all women. Even now, the funding of the Women's Program at \$13 million is a piddling sum, considering it is supposed to help more than half the population....

To wipe this program out, through the spite of one small, very vocal group, would set back all women in Canada 13 years.

Women's Political Progress

Doris Anderson
Toronto Star, March 21, 1987

Last week three Canadians – federal Minister of Communications Flora MacDonald, former Liberal cabinet minister Judy Erola, and I – went to San Francisco. Along with 60 women from 42 countries we met to try to change the way the political world runs. Our burning question: Why is it that women make up more than 50 per cent of the world's population, yet ten men for every woman make all the political decisions?

...After two days it was clearly easier to identify the problems women have getting elected than in coming up with any shortcut solutions. Sixty years after most women won the vote, our biggest hurdle in getting elected, the world over, is the idea that politics is really a man's game. Woman after woman talked about her difficulty winning the nomination and raising money in the face of opposition from the party "gatekeepers," the back room boys....

In countries where there is a system of proportional representation, women do a lot better.... In Norway 40 per cent of each party's list has to be women. The system pays off. Norway has the highest number of women, 40 per cent in the Stortinget, the Norwegian parliament, and seven women out of 18 in the cabinet, as well as a woman prime minister. Yet 20 years ago Norway had as bad a record as Canada.

Rude Tory MPs Boost Women's Movement

Doris Anderson

Toronto Star, April 25, 1987

I'm always being asked by someone – usually a man – if the women's movement is dead, or dormant, or discredited, or co-opted, or relegated to history as a passing fad.

The latest media catch phrase is that we're in a period of "post-feminism." This conjured up images of Yuppie executive women eating power lunches and marching off to boardrooms clutching alligator briefcases while they loudly declare that, since they'd made it to the top, there's no more need for a women's movement.

I wish anyone harbouring such frankly silly ideas had been in Halifax and St. John's, Nfld., last week. Five Progressive Conservative male backbenchers who had started out like panting terriers hot on the trail to hunt out and eradicate the women's movement, found themselves confronting a full grown female grizzly bear.

Besides the five Tory men, Margaret Mitchell from the NDP and a rotation of Liberals also sat on the committee. The committee was to look into how the Women's Program of Secretary of State, which funds most women's groups in Canada, operated. Their report is due at the end of June....

For some of the men, in spite of the fact they have spent more than 20 years in the House of Commons, the statistics on wife-beating, rape, incest, female poverty, etc., in Canada were as novel as if they had just arrived from the far side of Jupiter.

Jim Jepson, a Conservative member from London East, couldn't believe the women appearing before him were not part of a conspiracy of man-hating Communists organized by that "well-oiled lobby machine, the National Action Committee."

...Margaret Mitchell then remarked that in all of her six years in the House of Commons she had never travelled with a group of more obnoxious people, and that on many occasions she had been so offended by their behavior she wanted to leave.

What kind of report these Neanderthals will turn in come June doesn't really matter. By their partisan and boorish actions they've proved, once again, how strong the Canadian women's movement is and how incredibly out of touch they are. They also probably turned all kinds of middle-of-the-road women from voting for them in the next election....

Far from being in a "post-feminist" stage, the women's movement has, besides its on-going perennial projects like day care, pensions for homemakers, employment, etc., plenty of other daunting tasks, should it find time hanging heavily on its hands. The next set of problems to take us through the 1990s will be working with anti-poverty and visible minorities groups, and sorting out the ethics of surrogate motherhood, etc.

Far from being a passing fad, the women's movement is alive and flourishing. It's a continuing 300-year-old revolution. It has had some highs and dips. It's a movement struggling to make changes in society that will affect us all.

**Joe Clark,
House of Commons, Ottawa**

Doris Anderson

Toronto Star, October 7, 1991

Dear Joe,

The jury is still out on the question of whether your constitutional package will keep this country together. At least people are still at the table talking – that is the usual people who get to the table, the premiers, the bureaucrats, and business types. Women and minorities aren't at the table, of course. So what else is new? But we do our best. We get together at our own tables and we have a few comments to make.

It was nice that in a 59-page document women are mentioned a total of six times – and two of those refer to the fact that we have the vote. Thanks a lot. But my friend Janet, a single mother with two kids, is anxious to know how your proposals are going to affect her. Is medicare going to be okay? Is she ever going to get that day care you promised before the last election?

My lawyer friend, Sylvia, has another worry – an old one. It's the same question that bothered us about Meech Lake. It still isn't clear this time around whether recognizing Quebec as a distinct society is going to weaken the Charter of Rights. The Charter has been pretty useful in winning some important cases in the courts. Sylvia thinks women are going to lose more cases in the future under these proposals....

Sylvia and Janet are also worried about that property rights clause. What does it mean anyway? Can anyone owning property do whatever he or she wants, like pollute? Or opt out of pay equity laws?

My friend, Mary, who is a member of the Squamish tribe, wonders why she has to wait another ten years for self-government. And why in Quebec are Natives going to be relegated to second-class citizens....

Ever since 1984 you and Brian have done things like bringing in free trade and the GST without ever telling voters what you're going to do before elections. Right now, you're getting out of funding medicare – and I don't remember you asking Canadians about that. In another five years we'll probably have a patchwork of medicare schemes across the country. Rich provinces will get good care and poor provinces will get lousy care.

Sylvia and Janet and Mary and I want the Constitution to be made more open and responsive so that we know what we're voting for before elections and are able to get rid of governments that act like dictatorships between elections. Is that too much to ask in a democracy, Joe? And I wouldn't advise you to try that old line, "trust me," on women. After what your government has done to family allowances, women's programs, etc., it wouldn't be a good idea.

These are just a few questions Janet and Sylvia and Mary and I had while sitting around a kitchen table, Joe. We'll probably have a few more when we really get down to the fine print. Be seeing you.

Do it Like Doris!

Tune and lyrics by Linda Palmer Nye

Twenty-six years and here we all are,
More political battles, more political scars.
We did what we've done and we've done
what we could,
And isn't it amazing—we all look this good!

Hey. Hey. Whaddaya say?
We do it like Doris. And we do it today.
Hey now. Sing it out loud –
I am a feminist and I'm damn proud.
I am a feminist and I'm damn proud.

Red, black, yellow, brown. Skins are different,
it's true.
But our hearts are all red and I'm a woman
like you.
So let's put skin colour where it belongs –
Makin' a rainbow of women and makin'
us strong.
Makin' a rainbow of women and makin'
us strong.

Hey. Hey. Whaddaya say?
We do it like Doris. And we do it today.
Hey now. Sing it out loud –
I am a feminist and I'm damn proud.
I am a feminist and I'm damn proud.

In 20 more years, where will we be?
Still working together for our equality.
We will do what we can and we will do
what we should.
And it will be amazing – we'll still look
this good!

Hey. Hey. Whaddaya say?
We do it like Doris. And we do it today.
Hey now. Sing it out loud –
I am a feminist and I'm damn proud.
We are all feminists and we're damn proud!

Linda Palmer Nye is a feminist, based in Toronto, who writes feminist songs to encourage our sense of humour—and feed the fire in our bellies—because both are essential ingredients for a successful revolution.