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A Brave New Work: Fair New World

One of the lawyers in my firm received a letter recently which made us all shake our heads in amazement.

It was from a woman lawyer employed by a government department. Her beef was that a letter from my colleague had opened with the salutation "Dear Sirs." This offended her on the basis of "gender discrimination" and stood a 50 percent chance of offending the other lawyers in her office, she said, since half of them were women. She claimed the salutation was in breach of the Rules of Professional Conduct (she even cited chapter and verse), and threatened that she would lay a complaint with the Law Society if it ever happened again.

It looks as though there is still at least one government office where the employees have too much time on their hands. I am not making this incident up. Believe me, I wish I were.

When I was a kid, there was a little jingle we would recite: "Sticks and stones will break my bones but names will never hurt me."

The kid who had annoyed you would generally reply: "It's a free country," and that would be the end of it.

Times have changed. It's not a free country any more, and everybody knows it. It's now a country where simply being offended allows you to command the services of powerful bureaucratic machines like the Human Rights Commission and the Law Society. There's power and money in being offended these days. No wonder it's happening so often.

It's now a country where a single word, or perhaps even a missing word, can put someone's whole career in jeopardy. Maybe the discipline committee of the Law Society would laugh this complaint out the door, as they should; but then again, maybe the committee is full of people like our correspondent, and would happily disbar anyone who doesn't share their hypersensitivity to salutations in letters.

What can a citizen do when he lives in a country like this? One citizen's solution was to satirize it. Philosophy professor Louis Marinoff, writing under the pen name Lou Tafler, has published a novel called *Fair New World*. It's the most politically incorrect work of art I have ever seen. It's also hilariously funny and scathingly insightful.

Most of the action in Fair New World takes place in a country called Feminania, where the Radical Femininny Party holds power. Taking offense at a "Dear Sirs" letter would be considered the act of a middle-of-the-road, or maybe even a conservative, citizen, there.

Language in Feminania has been "fairorized" in an effort not only to eliminate gender bias but to redress centuries of male oppression. Thus, not only has the suffix -man disappeared from words like chairman, but history has become herstory and garrison has become garridaugther. The initials VIP stand for Victim in Past.

Males constitute no more than 10 percent of the Feminanian population. Those that are allowed to be born are expected to strive to be as "caring and sharing" as women. If they fail they might be accused of "gendhercrime." The consequences can be severe; the penalty for kissing one's spouse on the mouth without proper written consent is to become "gonadotropically challenged."

The Supreme Court has been replaced by the Supreme Support Group, and the accused are confronted by a new choice of pleas: guilty, or guilty with explanatory feelings.

The policy on employment equity at the Univhersity of Ovaria, contained in subsections 15(1) and 15(2) of its Regulations, is suspiciously reminiscent of a certain similarly numbered and self-contradictory section of Canada's Charter of Rights. Likewise, its method of implementation is one which is becoming all too familiar to contemporary Canadians. When the university needs to hire a writer to help fairorize textbooks, its advertisement especially encourages applications from alpha-nummerically challenged VIPs.

It's not surprising that this is a rather sore spot with Professor Marinoff. Formerly a lecturer at the University of British Columbia, he left Canada for a tenure-track position in the U.S. after the Canadian Philosophical Association adopted a female-biassed policy that makes it almost impossible for men to obtain such jobs in the philosophy departments of Canadian universities.

For example, one Ontario university received 163 applications for a tenure-track position. It short-listed all 13 of the female applicants, but not a single one of the 150 males. A woman got the job.

Nevertheless, Marinoff cannot be accused of blinding himself to the imperfections of men. The action in Fair New World shifts now and then to the country of Bruteland, where only men can be citizens. Women are chattels, to be owned or rented by the day, month or year. Here Marinoff heaps a fair share of ridicule on the macho attitudes that caused the once-justified, but now corrupted, feminist revolution to take place.

Fair New World is published privately, so you probably won't find it at your favourite bookstore. If you want a copy, send \$19.99 to Backlash Books, Box 18178, 2225 West 41st Avenue, Vancouver, B.C. V6M 4L3. Phone (604) 473-6300.

Whatever else you might do, just don't leave a copy of this book anywhere where the Radical Femininnies in your office can see it. They'd probably complain to the Law Society.

