

Laidlaw

by Ann Bogle

There were too many laws but not enough of the kinds she wanted. She wished for the right to go shopping. Then taste rather than disposable income or access to finance could distinguish people. The right to create appealed to her, as did the rights to be paid to work and paid to be. Those rights extended to some but not all married people. There were intelligible people without desirable rights and unintelligible people with desirable rights. Desirable as compared to rote rights were privileges. Laidlaw was a surname and a bus company. As slang it delivered desirable duty. One could press someone to service in an economy where comparable worth carried no legal value. One could press someone to service in the name of status or prestige. Services that carried a fee such as dry cleaning, with its long counter that separated customers from dry cleaning staff, struck people as necessarily costly rather than necessarily free. Proficiency in one's native language seemed free like water or air, though water itself was not free and air was difficult to regulate. Laws she cared little for were Canadian. In Canada, aspirin with codeine in it was available without prescription, yet someone in America, who had drunk one drink over the legal limit twenty years in the past could be barred admittance to Canada as a tourist or worker or visiting relative. A Canadian resident told her that Canadians in small towns drank and drove through the mountains. The resident's husband had been convicted of a felony in a tavern fight. He was permitted to cross either border. Sometimes the law punished someone when something bad might have happened. That was a type of law she didn't understand. In jails were people who had harmed no one but whose chance of hurting someone unintentionally had increased by a given behavior on a given occasion. That someone not there (or there) had not been hurt seemed inadequate reason to jail someone. It seemed cause for relief, for celebration! Onlookers.

