

*On the game and on the move.*



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by Margaret Valentino  
and Mavis Johnson  
of the English Collective of Prostitutes

## Women step out

Looking back at the seventies we can see that, though it looked quiet, it was then that people who hadn't spoken before took their chance. Women everywhere demanded recognition of our contribution to society. Women's daily fight for bread was by no means new, but its visibility was new. There was an international explosion of women for financial independence, refusing to depend on men for money.

The ball started to roll back in the sixties in the U.S.A. with the Welfare Movement, led by Black women – when millions of single mothers won cash payment for the work of raising their kids. Since then, the number of women who won't be forced into marriage just to support their children and themselves has skyrocketed, not in one country but everywhere.

Money was again a key issue in the movement for control of our bodies. Women organised massive campaigns for free abortion on demand. At the same time, Third World women, Black and immigrant women, in fact all poor women, fought against sterilisation and for the money to be able to afford the children we wanted.

'Behind every great man there's a woman.' Well, in the seventies the housewives behind stepped forward and asked for their share! Britt Ekland, Michelle Triola Marvin and Bianca Jagger were only the three most famous among millions of women who put a price tag in court on the wife's *and also the mistress's* precious services.

The seventies were also the years of the explosion of the equal pay movement, with women breaking out of the traditional job ghettos. In Iceland in 1975, all women took 'A Day Off', demonstrating in twenty-four hours women's productivity in and out of the home: without it, the entire economy ground to a halt.

In every way there was a movement for sexual choices. A massive lesbian movement and a massive movement against rape surfaced together, underlining every woman's right to do what she wants with her body.



aren't all prostitutes survivors of childhood sexual abuse?  
some are, yes, but that doesn't mean they cannot make their own choices and find self-empowerment. lots of non-prostitutes aren't survivors and they have very miserable and pathetic lives. there's no connection; it's about time to debunk that myth.

don't prostitutes spread diseases?  
studies show that they are more educated about disease prevention than non-prostitutes. considering that their health depends on it, this kind of makes sense, don't you think?

why do you care about prostitutes anyway?  
why don't you? they are living breathing feeling beings, like any other.

are you on crack?  
no, but jen and tyler drink.

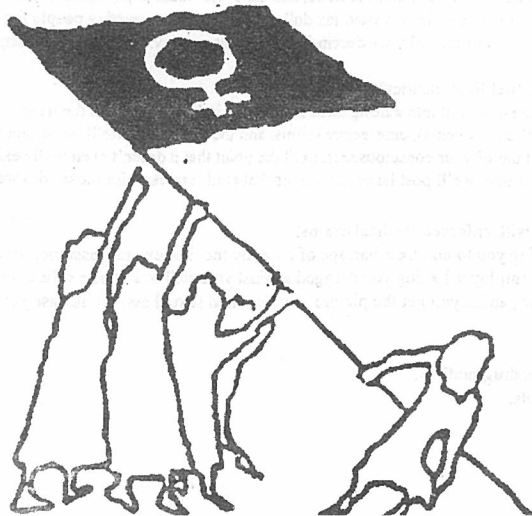
what about child prostitution?  
children belong in schools, not in factories. sound familiar? it was a slogan that was popular with the labour movement in canada and in what is now the 1/3 world throughout the late 1800s and the early 1900s. it is still used today in many parts of the world (the places where your clothes and your children's toys were made in). children used to be - and still are - exploited in every industry. when unions campaigned for better wages and social programs, the higher incomes that the children's parents won helped the family provide for itself while also ensuring the children enjoyed their youth. we propose much the same thing - if the federal government puts back the money they stole from the EI fund, if prostitutes had better wages, if our social programs were better funded - children could be kids, not prostitutes. and let's not forget about other social factors that throw kids into street life - like addictions, parental neglect, physical and sexual abuse, and homophobia. there are lots of reasons why kids end up hooking, but none of which are their fault. cracking down on kids, throwing them in jail, and forcing them into group homes might alleviate your white middleclass guilt. but it's not going to help those kids.

so what exactly is your goal?  
well, once the sex workers have been fed, clothed, sheltered, educated, and organized, we will decriminalize the trade. following this, we plan to eradicate capitalism, racism, and sexism. once these systems of oppression have been abolished, we will form co-operative collective communities and live in peace and solidarity with the earth and each other. by our estimation, this should all be accomplished by november 2005.

are you working in co-operation with the police or any other government agency?  
hell, no. we've organized ourselves and are only accountable to ourselves and the sex trade workers of saskatoon.

so what do you want from us?  
money, stupid. or food, coffee, kids' clothes, thermoses, and free photocopying. or how about compassion and solidarity. we realize that might be alot, but you never know unless you ask.

what would jesus do?  
(forgetting for a second that the bible was a work of fiction) what *would* jesus do? as we recall, he hung with a hooker named mary magdalene.



Financial independence, sexual choices, control of our bodies, equal pay, painting out the line between the rights of the wife and the rights of the mistress - these were what hookers had always fought for. But the first item on our bill of rights was cash. One way women had always found to get financial independence, or any finances at all, was prostitution. By the seventies, many more women had decided that they couldn't afford their 'virtue' any more, especially the virtue of being poor and sacrificing for a lifetime. With women at every level of society stepping out of their place, challenging every convention, it was much harder to divide us into 'good ones' and 'bad ones'. The more we felt able to challenge the laws that persecute us, the more of us there were who didn't feel ashamed.

### Whores invent a strike

As you can see from what Claude Jaget reports, what precipitated the national strike of prostitutes in France was a situation similar to those in England with the Yorkshire Ripper and in the U.S. with the multiple murders of prostitutes in Los Angeles. A number of women had been murdered in Lyons. The police were not offering women adequate protection and they weren't solving the murders either. On top of that, police harassment had increased with higher daily and even hourly fines, and more frequent imprisonments. Prostitute women in Lyons were spending a lot of time, energy and money having to ward off the police and courts, and they weren't getting very far with it. They saw it would be more economical for each woman to join her efforts and to pool her resources.

A group had been meeting for some months, discussing the problems that they were all facing, getting in touch with other hookers, writing letters to the press, trying to arrange to meet with representatives of the police, with the Home Office minister and the Minister of Labour, without much satisfaction. The women were aware that, being prostitutes, they had a limited number of choices of what to do next. They aimed to get the attention of the government and the public in a dramatic but not shocking way: they wanted to keep their dignity at any

price, because it was their dignity as women and mothers that they wanted recognised. Finally, a woman proposed occupying a church and they all agreed. Nothing could be against finding asylum in a church. So women who could, made babysitting arrangements immediately.

Now if a trade union had been asked beforehand what they thought of a strike by illegal workers, 'just women', 'just prostitutes', we can imagine the response: 'Impossible' or 'Completely crazy. Who? Women? Prostitutes? A STRIKE! National?!?!? Out of the question. Nothing can be done. This a permanent recorded message.'

So the women invented a prostitutes' strike by themselves as they went along. The strike spread from town to town until it was everywhere.

Some things they knew, some things they didn't know they knew. A lot had been happening throughout the sixties in France and elsewhere. The people who created the hookers' strike had then perhaps been workers sitting in, or students in school occupations. They might already have been on the game and were financially supporting relatives on strike. Some of their clients must have been students or employees; or they were employers or shop stewards of factory workers on strike. Some people must have been cleaners or baby sitters or full-time housewives, not demonstrating, not striking, just 'observing' and taking up the slack for everybody. Others must have been in jail and met other kinds of 'troublemakers' there. But wherever they were, they were part of a society which was changing drastically. It had been a time when nothing was still, nothing was given; yet it hadn't been possible in the sixties to come out as women and as prostitutes.

Now was their chance to use what they had learnt as participants or as participating observers, but this time in their own name.

### The mute's chance to speak

The decision to occupy the churches was obvious – once they had made it. First of all, many of the women were already due to go to prison, and in church you are supposed to find sanctuary even from the police. Second, the church is con-

## ARE YOU ON CRACK?!?!? and other frequently asked questions

isn't this illegal?

yes. remember that organizing any workplace was illegal just a short time ago.

isn't this completely unrealistic?

that's what people said about the 8 hour work day, universal health care, and women getting the vote. with a little solidarity, positivity and hard work anything is possible.

isn't prostitution morally wrong?

you know what? people sleep with each other for a lot of reasons, most of which are pretty bad. when it comes right down to it, sleeping with someone to pay the rent and put food on the table is one of the better reasons i've heard in a while. just because a few find it a bit distasteful, it does not mean that the lives of all should be regulated. it's remarkably simple: if you don't like hooking, then don't do it and leave it to those are good at it.

doesn't prostitution exploit women?

sure prostitution - as it exists today - is sometimes exploitative. but we must remember that there was a time not too long ago that children worked in mines for 14 hours a day - in fact, in many parts of the world, children still do. in the 1/3 world workers unionized themselves and fought for better working conditions. prostitutes are workers: they have every right to safe and healthy working conditions, they have the right to refuse unsafe work, they have the right to a fair wage, they have the right of free association, and they have the right to form their own organization to collectively bargain, advocate, and agitate (if necessary) for their best interests. these rights have been taken away from them by the state. laws against prostitution create dangerous working conditions for prostitutes and must be repealed. there is, however, nothing inherently exploitative in the simple act of exchanging hard cash for good sex.

what? you want to decriminalize prostitution?

yeah. the government has no right to tell people what to do with their own bodies. there is nothing wrong with two consenting adults having sex, regardless of their reasons. decriminalizing sex work would make the trade safer for those who choose to be in it and easier for those who choose to get out to do so.

isn't that the same as legalizing it?

definitely not. when sex work is legalized, it is regulated and run by the state. this means that what, with whom, and for how much would be decisions made by the government, not the workers, themselves. in fact, the state would be a pimp - and not a very kind one either. in places where sex work has already been legalized, prostitutes are forced to work and live in state run brothels, work 12 hour days, receive lousy pay with few benefits, are often left to be assaulted if the tip for the manager is large enough, and are subjected to enforced medical testing. jail cells sound friendlier to me.

why do you keep saying prostitution is a job like any other?

when we go to work we all sell our labour, our time, our bodies - whether it be our hands, our backs, our head. besides, having sex with smelly old men and pretending that you like it is really hard work.

shouldn't we just arrest them?

if we give all sex workers a criminal record, they will never be able to get work in any other profession if they choose to pursue another career. our jails would be too full. lots of children would lose their mothers (and sometimes, fathers). upon release they would be forced back into the trade, and the cycle would begin again. if you can't see the absurdity in all of this, then think about your precious wasted tax dollars. furthermore, arresting people for making decisions about their own bodies is wrong - isn't that why we decriminalized adult sodomy? let's apply the same logic to this.

couldn't we just set up a 'red-light' district?

absolutely. we'll push the trade out into a designated zone in the industrial area, on the fringes of the city, far from their homes and children, traffic (ie. clients), emergency rooms, and the public eye. we'll be certain to run the industry even further underground and out of your consciousness, until the point that it doesn't even really exist, leaving the workers isolated and unsafe. after that, we'll post large neon signs that read 'sarcasm' for those who wouldn't recognize it if it bit them in the ass.

so what's the problem with enforced medical exams?

imagine your boss asking you to endure a barrage of monthly medical exams. assume, for argument's sake, that you say no. now imagine your employer having you dragged against your will to a sterile office where you are strapped down to a table, legs forced apart, and... you get the picture. that's called sexual assault, in case you didn't realize, and is never okay. never.

aren't lots of prostitutes drug-addicts?

so are lots of accountants.

## the Sex Worker Solidarity Collective.

to:

- redistribute basic resources, ie. food, daily supplies, information
- organize, educate, and, if they should choose to have us, agitate alongside the sex workers of saskatoon
- provide opposition to conservative community groups
- provide the support networks necessary so that, should they choose, the workers can organize and/or unionize according to their needs - working prostitutes should be empowered to control their own working conditions

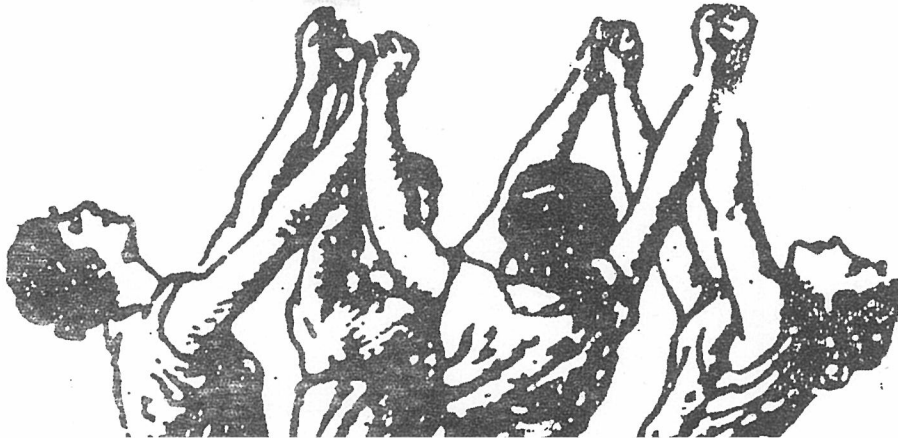
\* the actions of this collective stem from the recognition that prostitution, in its current form, is often unsafe and exploitative. sex workers, as any other worker, have a right to safe working conditions, equitable wages, and the freedom to unionize - none of which are feasible under current legislation. we oppose any law that criminalizes sex work and support complete decriminalization of the industry. in the meantime, through the redistribution of resources and information, the daily challenges faced by these workers will be lessened, thus granting them increased physical and emotional resources to dedicate to other pursuits - family, education, arts, leisure, etc.

we do not perceive the eradication of prostitution as our goal. instead we are working toward creating a community in which sex work will become a legitimate and respected choice, in which women (and men) are free to express themselves sexually in any manner that suits them without fear of retribution. today many women, in particular, find themselves forced into the sex industry by conditions of abject poverty. their working conditions are not only worsened by the oppression of capitalism, racism, and sexism, but by repressive legislation that criminalizes them and forces the industry underground, rendering it invisible. by forcing prostitution away from the public sphere, politicians create abhorrent working conditions and legislate unnecessary relationships between the sex industry, organized crime and narcotics trafficking. therefore, we will continue to confront not just the systems of exploitation, but the capitalists who control them.

we vehemently oppose current knee-jerk reactionary legislation predicated upon punitive measures against johns - ie. fines and 'educational' programming. such initiatives do absolutely nothing to address the actual causes of poverty and exploitation. moreover, the concept of deterring johns is inherently flawed in that individuals who are coerced into the sex trade by severe poverty require the income provided to them by the johns: no johns = no money = no food. this legislation is also founded upon paternalistic, sexist perceptions of women - that they require the benevolent judgement of the state to make healthy, intelligent decisions on their behalf, and that women ought not express themselves in a self-determinate sexual nature. we strongly object to such blatant condescending patriarchal bullshit.

we will provide:

- food: bagels, spreads, fruit (fresh and dried) and veggies, vegetarian soup, fair trade coffee and/or hot chocolate
- birth control, including condoms
- legal information
- health information
- local support and crisis agency information
- food not bombs pamphlets
- prostitutes' organizations and unionizing information
- daily supplies: reusable menstrual supplies, first aid supplies, infant and children's clothing, winter clothing



considered the moral centre of the community. By occupying churches, the women were demanding that all those who chatter about morality take a position against the government's robbery with violence of prostitute women.

As they had planned, they got the spotlight of the national and international media, immediately and massively. The law had prevented prostitutes from speaking for a long time. Now it was the mute's chance to speak. They introduced themselves as mothers: 'We are mothers talking to you,' they wrote in the first 'Letter to the Population'. They were to keep the public's attention for a period of over two months. Because the public was interested, the media had to be also. Through the media, the women carried out a massive educational campaign on prostitution; despite distortions, plenty of the truth came through. It clarified people's minds and it was convincing as no amount of sociological, psychological, medical, sexological, or pseudo-historical studies had ever been. They knew that other mothers would be interested in what they were saying, and so would everybody else, because all mothers want to feed their children, and because we all have a mother. Some of the dirt about what the government had been doing to prostitute women began to come out from under the carpet, and people were scandalised.

The behaviour of the public was highly disappointing to the government. Instead of dissociating themselves, 'good' women and men went to help and even to identify with hookers. A lot of people hadn't realised that prostitutes are mothers; once they did, they understood that prostitutes are just women, not so exotic, not so different, not so bad!

The hookers spoke about the alternatives society offers to women, few and bad. They explained how the law persecutes prostitute women in every area of our lives. They described what it's like to be illegal and find yourself an easy target for any crime, unable to call on police protection for fear of being persecuted instead. The climate the law creates for organised crime is perfect; open season on prostitute women. For the first time, when the public knew what was going on they realised

that there was an apartheid between women, that some women are treated as outcasts just because of their job. And they were appalled.

The dialogue was on. Women, men and children were going in their thousands to public meetings that were held in cinemas, theatres, halls and in the churches themselves in Paris and elsewhere. The meetings were organised by the Collective of Prostitutes (later known outside of France as the French Collective of Prostitutes). It was a good name. Thousands of other women's groups which were part of the women's movement had come together as 'collectives' all over the world.

In coming out, the women had not counted on the sympathy of the vast public. Although they felt in their hearts that, if the public really knew the truth, they would not allow such injustice to happen to prostitutes, when they actually got the support it was something of a surprise.

#### Do hookers degrade all women?

Of course the public was not unanimous. Claude Jaget outlines how the political parties of the Right and the Left almost to a man either did not support or actually attacked the women in the churches. More disappointing was the fact that on various occasions the prostitutes were told by other women that they degraded all women and reinforced 'sex role stereotyping' by allowing themselves to be sex objects. The hookers replied that every woman had to sell herself in one way or another, in factories, offices, at home, wherever she was. They knew; they were women, and they had not always been on the game. But that wasn't the end of trying to convince some so-called feminists to join with other women. In 1975 and since, especially within the movement against rape, there have been allegations that whores and other workers in the sex industry encourage rape. We've faced the same charges or variations of it: it's prostitutes who are responsible for rape and not strippers, or it's strippers and not prostitutes who cause rape, or it's every woman who trades on her body. But what about fashion models – did Twiggy cause sex role stereotyping? What about movie stars – did Marilyn Monroe cause rape? What about waitresses? We could go on . . .



are told by government and the media every day that the problem is what people are going to do with their leisure time, because there won't be any work, the machines will produce all the wealth we need. This time we believe them. Right now there can be enough for poverty to end. And the end of women's poverty is the end of prostitution.

When no woman has to depend on men financially, by 'giving' or selling, then men can be sure that we love them for themselves and not for their money. It's true for rich men and it's true for poor men, too. When none of us women have to prostitute ourselves, we'll finally be able to find out what relationships between people can be. Too often when you are poor, you have less choice about keeping love, friendship and sex separate from money. As it is now, love is a complicated network of emotion, financial need and violence. Whatever situation we're in, women or men, there's a lot of lying we have to do just to get by, at work, in our social life, in the family; and that can't be good for love. As prostitutes, it is the law itself that forces us to lie to the people around us. We want to be able not to lie. We want to be able to afford love and to discover love. We want to do it now, and we don't want the law in our way.

Margaret Valentino  
and Mavis Johnson  
15 January 1980

Claiming to attack the sex industry and the way women are degraded, our critics have attacked instead the workers in that industry. They have carelessly confused prostitutes with prostitution, much as people confuse housewives with housework. These critics have not learnt the lesson the women's movement taught from its birth: women are not responsible for the situation we are forced into. We are not our work.

There is something basically wrong with a code of morals that draws lines between 'respectable' women and 'bad' women, that blames prostitutes and other workers in the sex industry for sex attacks, that sides with the police and the courts against women trying to make a living.

This was not the only ground for hostility. Jaget describes how in some quarters sympathy generated for 'poor things' degenerated when those 'poor things' became 'rebels' in the church occupations. Again, we have met the same thing in another form: pity for street walkers and condemnation for call girls. 'Poor things' who earn £3 per pauper become immoral and greedy sluts if we get to earn £300 per prince. But we are convinced that good money doesn't make women bad. We get what we can, and we expect support against persecution, whatever we earn. Even the woman who works for top clients — even for a government minister — is marked and vulnerable, using another name, maybe hiding a previous conviction from when she began on the street, keeping her children out of view, lying to her mother and her neighbours, and leered at behind her back. That's the price, whether you are working to supplement your welfare cheque, or are able to refuse being on welfare and are dining at Regine's in mink. And after all, don't girls have as much right to money as their clients?

The church occupations were an enormous victory. First, the murders stopped.

Second, prostitute women had gained a tremendous amount of confidence and experience by working with other prostitutes and with women who were not prostitutes. Just that one fact — working with other women — was a change that can't be minimised. Finally to be with other women again, to be

recognised as part of the community again. It was like parole from a life sentence of isolation. And that didn't end with the strike. From then on, every time the police wanted to attack prostitutes, they had to consider that other people were watching and concerned. The defeat in 1979 in France of a government proposal for State brothels which prostitutes had opposed is proof of that concern.

Third, the strike settled once and for all the question of whether women who work on the street and call girls can get together. Just because we are all prostitutes doesn't mean that there can be sisterly love at first sight between women making £3 per trick and those making £300. As usual with wage differentials, the division between street walkers and call girls tends also to be a racial division. On an international level, most call girls are white and most street walkers are Black. In the U.S., though white women are also the majority of street walkers (as in Britain), prostitutes in prison are in the great majority Black. There is bound to be suspicion at first sight, and anger. To think that you can come together in the name of some abstract sisterhood is absurd. Those of us at the bottom have to take the lead to guarantee our interests. The strike in France was a street walkers' strike, organised and led by street walkers, the great majority and the people under the greatest pressure. Other women in the higher brackets were drawn to it as to a magnet.

So were women in other countries. Perhaps the greatest victory of the French strike was the birth of prostitutes' organisations all over the world, and the strengthening of those already in existence.

### Abolition versus legalisation

For organisations of whores that since then have been coming out all over, it was now easy to decide that abolition of the prostitution laws<sup>1</sup> was what we wanted. If laws are persecuting you, you want the end of those laws; and if there are plenty of

<sup>1</sup>In Europe generally we and others use the term 'abolition', the U.S. term is usually 'decriminalisation'. They mean the same thing: the abolition of the laws which criminalise prostitution in any way.

We are certainly determined that the British government should continue what it began on 6 March 1979. Time is up for the apartheid between prostitutes and the rest of the community, as it is up for apartheid in South Africa.

### Love, money and the law

Prostitution is a matter of survival. Until governments provide women with decent financial alternatives, no amount of police harassment and brutality can prevent us from feeding our families. No Vice Squad or Special Branch can stop mothers loving and caring for their children and wanting a better life for them. Generation after generation, we've made sure that the younger ones got a better deal. That's history. And as long as we supply a sexual service that society demands, why shouldn't we be full citizens?

But we agree with those who say they want to abolish prostitution. That's not what we have in mind for ourselves and our daughters, that's not what our children and relatives have in mind for us. That's not what most women who have done it or who've never done it want to do.

As well as pointing out that 'most wives don't have a penny they can call their own', Liberty Life Assurance Company, on 14 February 1978, estimated that a housewife is worth £114 a week. We could begin with that, and we assure you, that's a step in the right direction for those who really want to clean up prostitution. And please, Ms. or Mr. Politician, don't tell us the government has no money. You have no trouble finding money for police to arrest us, for courts to sentence us, for jails to keep us and for Social Services to keep our children in 'care'. Prostitutes will be the last you will convince that there isn't any money around: enough of us have worked for members of governments and directors of multi-national corporations to know better. We have seen the money you say doesn't exist!

Before the new technology of the computer and the micro-processor, some people might have believed there weren't enough goods for everybody to live comfortably. But now we



*the House of Commons for us. A few weeks later, Maureen got our ten minutes. Whatever the result of the vote, it was already an enormous victory for our cause to be raised in Parliament. And it was a victory to plan the meeting and the Bill over lunch with Maureen at the House of Commons: many of our colleagues had been in the dining room already – but doing business, not preparing legislation.*

*On 6 March, Parliament passed the first reading of Maureen Colquhoun's Protection of Prostitutes Bill, 130-50. This would abolish jail and fines for soliciting and the term 'common prostitute' which keeps us labelled and on the game for life.*

*The night before the vote, we organised a meeting in the House of Commons, where a packed hall saw Hard Work, a film about Margo St. James of Coyote. Speakers from the ECP, PROS (Programme for the Reform of the Laws on Soliciting) and Helen Buckingham of PLAN (Prostitution Laws Are Nonsense) were on the platform with Wilmette Brown of Black Women for Wages for Housework (USA) speaking for Coyote and the New York Prostitutes Collective.*

*It's a long way from standing on street corners to feed your children, to a Bill in the House of Commons; from being harassed by police to being interviewed by TV, radio and the press of the world.*

*The 'cleanups', arrests, closedown of massage parlours and escort agencies continue in an attempt to turn back the clock, to attack all women's right to refuse poverty. But it's too late now that women who are pros and women who aren't are joining together.*

*After all, who are prostitutes but housewives who go out to an evening job?*

*Maureen Colquhoun's Bill and its success showed where public opinion had reached and influenced other people in high places. And as the French Collective said in their message read at the meeting the night before the Bill came up, 'Other governments will follow your government's decision. If not, we'll make them!'*

you who are organised, and you have the French occupations behind you, you say so. Not only Margo St. James's Coyote, but the New York Prostitutes Collective, Puma (Prostitutes Union of Massachusetts), Dolphin, Kansas City Kittys, Ocelot, Asp (Association of Seattle Prostitutes) and others in the U.S.; Cash (Campaign against Street Harassment) in Canada; and Plan (Prostitution Laws are Nonsense) in England have all rallied round abolition. In Spain, Italy, Mexico, Australia, Mozambique, Peru, Ireland, prostitutes have taken action against the laws.

The French women never stopped repeating that they were against the legalisation of prostitution, that is, the State taking charge of the sex industry, either by nationalising it or by contracting it out.

It's important to be clear about the distinction between the abolition of the laws and legalisation because many people who agree with our campaign to abolish the laws assume that abolition is the same as legalisation. And we can see why. Legality is the opposite of illegality. But in our case legalisation would make us as legal as prisoners. Let us explain.

There are two basic systems under which governments deal with prostitution.

One is prohibition, where the laws either directly prohibit prostitution or have a similar effect by making soliciting and 'living off immoral earnings' illegal. The women, their families, friends and any agents they can use can be severely punished. Under prohibition, the management of the prostitution business is left to private (illegal) enterprise, but the government gets a big share of the cake through fines and taxes.

The other system is the legalisation of prostitution, as in West Germany, Nevada (U.S.A.) and Denmark, for example. When the government becomes the management of the prostitution business, laws decide how and where we should work, how much we should work and how much we should charge. The most rational way to enforce this is through brothels.

In West Germany, those women who try to work outside the State's Eros Centres or designated streets or neighbourhoods

can be severely punished, together with their children, relatives, friends and agents. Immigrant women, ('guest workers') who are the first to be picked up working outside legalised areas, are the first to be forced into brothels.

With legalisation, governments get a big slice of the pie through systematised taxation of earnings which are based on a piecework wage and speed-up. Governments can also make money through renting premises and other related businesses. And once the government is pimping on that scale, women who want to be independent of the state have the hardest time staying out of the hands of individual pimps and illegal organised pimping.

On 9 June 1975, in the midst of the occupations, the women in Paris made their position clear:

#### WHAT WE DEMAND

1. *Abolition of article 34: incitement to debauchery. No more fines, no more summonses. We propose: non-punitive taxes giving us the right to welfare and pensions, like every French woman who is a mother.*
2. *We affirm that prostitution is a job determined by the sexual needs of one part of society.*
3. *We want to be full citizens.*

#### WE REFUSE FIRMLY

1. *The reopening of brothels, even in their modern and luxurious form of Eros Centres.*
2. *To be civil servants of sex completely without freedom.*
3. *To be nationalised.*
4. *To be municipalised.*

#### OUR IMMEDIATE DEMANDS

1. *The dropping of all jail sentences facing the people in Lyons.*
2. *Abolition of the law concerning jail sentences for repeated offenders.*
3. *To meet a government representative capable of understanding the problems of prostitutes and finding ground for agreement.*
4. *Reopening of the hotels in the neighbourhoods where prostitutes work.*
5. *Enforcement of the laws allowing the reintegration of*

*We spoke about how being illegal affects your life, but we also said what it meant to have more money. As we wrote in our first-ever published letter to the press:*

*'... money makes choices possible, for example, to walk out of an impossible marriage, to raise a child on our own if we want to, without being forced to be dependent on a man because he is the one with the bread.*

*'With money many women can afford to be lesbians. With money you can buy dishwashers, you can take your clothes to the laundry, you can afford to eat out. Money makes possible better relationships with our children: we can say yes to them. Psychologists always accuse mothers of being backward, possessive, oppressive of the child's individuality: but what kind of 'independent relationship' can you have if you can't even afford a babysitter?'*<sup>5</sup>

*In every field, women are divided by the money they make – canteen workers from teachers, cleaners from secretaries. We wanted to break those divisions among women on the game. In the ECP, there are Black and white streetwalkers, hostesses and call girls. Those of us on the street face the worst dangers but we are all threatened, and we all have our contribution to make to abolishing the laws. How can we join with other women if we aren't together as pros?*

*By the summer of 1977, Baroness Joan Vickers in the House of Lords called for all the laws against prostitutes to be abolished. One reason, she said, was that hookers have to go back on the street to pay the fines imposed on us. We call that pimping by the State.*

*In November 1978 in London, she called a 'Public Debate' on the laws. Over 200 people attended, including a former suffragette, and members of the Salvation Army and the National Association of Probation Officers, which is for the laws to be abolished.*

*At that meeting, M.P. Maureen Colquhoun promised to get the parliamentary time to put a 10-Minute Rule Bill<sup>6</sup> before*

<sup>5</sup>Time Out (London), 24-30 June 1977.

<sup>6</sup>A Member of Parliament may be able to get ten minutes to present a proposal for legislation which is not sponsored by her party. There is time also for another member to speak against her, again as an individual. If the presenter gets a majority, she can then immediately present her legislation (the first reading) which, if passed, may be prepared for a second reading and debate at a later date. A Bill becomes law only if it is passed on a third reading.

abolished is gaining ground, we can speak out and say just how many women have lifted themselves out of poverty and into independence our way.

We still face arrest, jail, fines, being called 'unfit mothers' and losing custody of our children. And police make it their business to hound us once we start to organise. But that's how all movements begin.

The ECP was formed in 1976. As an independent organisation of pros and non-pros within the Wages for Housework Campaign, we have had a voice and joint action with other women – the best protection we have.

For example, last year Women Against Rape picketed with us and other pros in front of the Old Bailey,<sup>4</sup> where a woman who'd been raped had her name released because the rapist claimed she was a pro. If you're a pro, the courts assume you can't be raped. They think we're available to sleep with any man, any time. But we do say no, more often than some wives can.

Because the WFH campaign is international, we made contact with groups of pros in other countries, and spread the news of actions pros have taken: the 1975 prostitutes' strike in France, or the Australian pros who refused to service sailors from a nuclear-driven ship for health reasons. Our fights and victories were as hidden as we have been.

We made contact with M.P.s, lawyers, community workers, and found allies. They saw that pros are women from all walks of life, but above all single mothers. Through prostitution we provide the welfare the State won't provide, for us and our children, for student husbands and elderly parents.

Women wanted to know what we had in common with them, and whether going on the game was an option for them – if the money was worth the risk, and what effect being a pro had on our sex lives. We told them that each woman is different, but having money of your own gives any woman more power to decide, when not at work, whom she'll sleep with when and how.

<sup>4</sup> The most famous courthouse in England.

*prostitute women into society.*

In 1979 in Britain, Southampton Council debated a proposal for legalised brothels run by the Council. In the same year in Bristol, Labour councillors made the same proposal, adding that the brothels should be 'in an industrial area of the city'.<sup>2</sup> So practical: put all the assembly lines together in one place; then the men can move from one to the other before they go home to be part of 'respectable' residential areas.<sup>3</sup> Both represented municipal brothels as a new and advanced piece of thinking. But, darling councillors, State controlled prostitution is an old song, and we're not going to sing it.

Legalisation is no better than prohibition; in some ways it is worse. The proof is that in West Germany only 12% of hookers have officially registered with the government, and the rest would rather live in illegality than accept the State's working conditions, wages and control. That control begins with registration and identity cards to prove you have registered. Most people are suspicious of the amount of information on the general public that is already in the State's computers. Hookers have even more reasons to be suspicious. In South Africa there are also identity cards; they are called pass books, and the laws are called pass laws because you cannot pass to legality without them.

Brothels and pass laws – how do you like that! That's why we will never accept legalisation.

### **The stigma of the law**

Governments don't legislate about something they don't expect to happen: they all assume that prostitution is here to stay. To legislate for prostitution is to institutionalise women's poverty by punishing us for taking the one well-paid job open to almost all women regardless of race, education or class. To legislate for

<sup>2</sup>Bristol Evening Post, 2 June 1979.

<sup>3</sup>The excuse was that this would keep prostitutes and clients out of the way of other people in residential neighbourhoods. In fact, residents' complaints about other 'nuisances' are usually ignored. And if more councillors were to support abolition, then none of us would have to be on the street. We would much prefer other places to work!

prostitution is to assume that men will be buyers and women sellers, that men will have more money than women forever. To legislate for prostitution is to assume and forecast women's poverty.

And make no mistake: prostitution laws are not only about prostitutes. They keep all women under control. At any time, any woman can be called a whore and treated like one. Each woman has to watch in her own life whether what she's doing is 'good' or 'bad', to censor her movements, behaviour and appearance. Even the wives of company directors can't go to the Hilton Hotel unescorted because they can be taken for prostitutes; and teenage girls are told by their mothers how not to dress or put make-up on because they might 'look like a tart'. The biggest mistake is to think that these attitudes to women are 'natural'. There is nothing natural about them. *It is the law which frames the morality, not the morality which frames the law.*

There is no law which even begins to deal with the prevention of prostitution. If a mother goes on the game to supplement her welfare money because the government won't give her enough for her family to live on, then the government will intervene not by giving her money, but by fining her or sending her to jail. Not only do the laws not prevent prostitution. By stigmatising us as 'common prostitute' in Britain, or as 'Miss Turkey' in Korea, or as a 'known prostitute' in France and elsewhere, they make it very difficult to get off the game. And they make it impossible to have a normal life. Whether we hate ourselves or are openly proud of being whores, there always comes a moment when we feel the stigma of the law. Just as Jewish people were marked under Hitler by the yellow star, the law marks us.

### **On the job**

Governments make proposals about the law without the least effort to find out what the workers in the sex industry want. We've always wanted or dreamed about the end of these laws. Ever since prostitution was invented, minute after minute, day

*Right now in the U.S.A. the repression against prostitute women is being intensified. Even if a Black woman is not a prostitute, when she walks the streets the police often arrest her for prostitution. A week ago the New York State legislature passed an anti-loitering law which seeks to prevent women from walking freely on the streets. The police have raided and closed many massage parlours where prostitute women work, and last Friday they arrested sixty prostitute women in Times Square, New York . . .*

*But the struggle of prostitute women in France has been a great power for all prostitute women in the U.S.A. and for all Black women, because the struggle to be paid for the work we do is the struggle not only of prostitute women but of all women to reappropriate, to take back, our own lives . . .*

We named poverty and women's refusal of poverty as the cause and attraction of prostitution.

Anyone can see the policy of governments to women's poverty in the way they dole out welfare. The money sticks to their hands. Most of us prostitutes are single mothers on welfare, or escaping welfare and on the edge of being driven back. While they degrade us by the amount they give, they have the prostitution laws to degrade us when we try for the money to live decently. Campaigning to keep and increase welfare is one with campaigning to abolish the laws that punish us for demanding more.

This is a brief account of our campaign for abolition as we wrote it in the Wages for Housework Bulletin, Spring 1979.

### **HOOKERS IN THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT**

*'Yes, we have been scrubbing floors, yes we have been nurses, cooks, domestic helps, babysitters, factory workers, farm workers. And we have also worked as prostitutes. We are not ashamed of that, because that's how we have survived for generations.'*

*Our illegality has kept us hidden and divided from other women. Now that our campaign for all the laws against us to be*

industry. They immediately backed us in demanding abolition of the laws against prostitution. That was no accident. Prostitution was one way women had been fighting to get paid for housework – by getting paid for the sexual services all women are always expected to give for free. Those who were not hookers were not ashamed to say that they also had to sell themselves in one way or another.

Wanting financial independence and rejecting unpaid and low-paid women's work have always been givens for prostitute women. In 1975, we became part of the International Wages for Housework Campaign as an independent organisation. We called ourselves the English Collective of Prostitutes after the French Collective, and later the New York Prostitutes Collective was formed. For us, it was the possibility of building an international network with other prostitutes' organisations. And it was also the possibility of joint action with other women without sinking our identity, and not only as prostitutes. The other independent organisations within Wages for Housework are Black Women for Wages for Housework and Wages Due Lesbians, which protect our interests as Black and lesbian women.

We found a spokeswoman, Selma James, who was already a public figure in a number of countries. As founder of the International Wages for Housework Campaign and as a housewife and mother, she was a good candidate to say what we wanted said and what we couldn't say publicly ourselves. By 1979, Anne Neale, a waitress, was also speaking for us in public.

On the first anniversary of the French occupations, in June 1976, we could already carry the international connection to Paris. Wilmette Brown of Black Women for Wages for Housework (U.S.A.) was on the platform with the ECP at the public meeting the French Collective had organised in the Mutualité cinema. She explained why she had come.

*...I am here this evening to support you in the struggle of prostitute women in France, because this struggle is also the struggle of Black women in the U.S.A.*

after day, generation after generation, we have found ways to resist and build a life for ourselves. Prostitute women have never been passive unconscious victims. We are not different from others; we are not a different species. If we sometimes glorify our job, it is to defend ourselves against the charge that we do it because we don't know the 'right' way to live. We are of course encouraged to say how much we hate not only ourselves but our job – as if everyone else loves theirs. But we don't hate prostitution more than other workers hate typing or any other work. You don't go to ask a typist, 'Do you like typing?' But if a hooker prefers her job to other jobs, she's perverted. At the same time, a hooker is expected to love her work because, OK, they say, you want the money, but you really do it for the sex. (Never mind that most men try to sleep with an unending number of women, and that's being a real man, not a pervert.)

Now some aspects of our job can be interesting, as in other jobs where you are in contact with the public: you meet people from all walks of life whom you might not meet otherwise; they talk, you talk (usually less). You get some knowledge about men's sexuality. You make friends with your workmates and compare experiences with them. Some women can't wait to finish a client, other women try to make the best of it, and can sometimes have a good time. Whatever the case, you make an experience. As in typing, it can be exhausting and boring and sometimes interesting. But prostitutes, like typists and workers in other industries, don't want to do the job for life.

What makes our job so different from other jobs is the money. We are told to hate our job in the same way as other workers are told to love theirs, and for the same reason. We are all supposed to hate good wages and love hard work and long hours. But none of us does.

### **There are pimps and pimps**

If every other excuse to persecute us fails, there is always the excuse of pimps. Claiming they want to protect us from pimps, the forces of law and order make criminal any man who associates with us by calling him a pimp. He may be your son,

your husband or a friend, men who are in no way pimps as far as we are concerned. And yet the law gets at us through them. The police harass entire communities and circles of friends under the pretext of catching pimps.

Some of us, if we have the money, prefer and are proud to support friends or lovers, men or women, rather than send them out to a factory or a hospital job and get them back destroyed after a day's work. We consider this *our* business. It is our right, or rather it should be, to decide how to spend our money, and not the business of the law.

That's not to say that there aren't any pimps; but there are pimps and pimps. While many women operate independently, others of us use men who act as agents. They offer us a series of practical services for a price, high or low, services which we need precisely because we are illegal. They find us clients, they give us warning about police arrivals, they protect us from possible violence or robbery; they also protect us from the police, paying individual policemen to leave us in peace, often saving us from giving free sex services.

On the other hand, some police and pimps work very closely together in order to control us and have a cut of our money. In France during and after the strike, the police and some pimps organised together to 'get the situation back to normal', and tried to physically batter the women into submission.

In Britain and other countries, charges that individual policemen, some of them high up, are pimping on an organised basis can never be proved or disproved until we are not gagged by illegality.

The biggest pimps, the people who make big money directly or indirectly from prostitutes, operate with the blessing of the law – owners of chains of nightclubs, massage parlours, the champagne industry, hotel owners, the government through fines and taxes. In fact, the women in France call the State the biggest pimp.

Although in Britain women can't be charged with 'living off immoral earnings', as men are, the laws in effect make it a crime for any woman to associate with us, whoever she is:

girlfriend, daughter, lover, or the woman who babysits for your children. The charges vary from keeping a brothel to controlling the movement of prostitutes, and the penalties are high. A 72-year old woman was imprisoned for six months in 1979 because she was frequently visited by a friend who was a prostitute. The law specifically forbids prostitute women living together (we're charged with keeping a brothel), even though this is often our only protection from crime. The law against brothel-keeping makes young women especially vulnerable, unable to call on advice and experience of older women, older to the game or in age.

The laws try to prevent us from being with family, friends, agents and lovers, and from making contact with clients. But since prostitution itself is not a crime, it is perfectly legal to be with clients. It is not uncommon to become friends with them. Many if not most of them are sympathetic to our demands. They want our services and they don't see why we shouldn't be left in peace. We want clients in high places to know that other clients are not threatened by what we are demanding.

### **Abolition – the last chapter**

Abolishing the laws on prostitution is the last chapter of a long history of fighting to abolish the hypocrisy, poverty and persecution they enforce. But this time we are writing it in our own name. In the past, we have written many pages of history, but the laws have shut us up so we couldn't claim them. Even those prostitutes who have become famous, from Hollywood stars whose careers have made screen history to Evita Peron, have not been able to come out as ex-whores. Now there are too many of us, we have too many allies, and we have publicly accomplished too much, for this to continue.

In England at the end of 1975, some of us, having heard about the French strike, got together. We were determined to do something about our situation. We knew we could do it – the French strike was proof – but it was hard to begin. The real possibility came when we met the Wages for Housework Campaign, who were demanding money from government and