

THE LAWS ON PROSTITUTION

The English Collective of Prostitutes was formed in 1976 and we asked the Wages for Housework Campaign to be our spokeswomen. We knew we could trust them first of all because they were also fighting for money for women. They didn't want to be poor and dependent either. We as prostitutes have plenty to tell other women about our fight for money, and how the law makes it very hard for us women to get any. We want to make it clear that if there were no poor women, there would not be one woman on the game, not one. Yet the immorality which we hear about is selling our bodies, not the poverty which makes us do it.

We also want to make it clear that we are not ashamed of how we make our living. We don't live off anybody else. But we think those who keep women poor and persecute us, that they should be ashamed to go in public.

There are many things we'd like to say tonight, but we'll talk only about the laws against us. There isn't just one law, but a number of laws that affect us, and they're in legal language, which most of us don't understand. But we understand these laws better than anyone - in some ways better than lawyers, because we know how they operate - how they hurt and who they hurt. The real experts on the laws against us can only be us, putting our experience together. Our organisations have been doing just that as part of our work: collecting working girls' experiences with the law at different levels of prostitution and in different countries.

The key law is on soliciting. In Britain it is not illegal to exchange sex for money. Prostitution itself is not against the law. The men who are one party of the business transaction, the clients, are not affected by the law: it is quite all right, according to lawmakers, to buy sex. Having said that prostitution is not illegal and that clients are not illegal, let us now see how the law only attacks the seller, the prostitute woman herself, and makes her a criminal.

It is impossible by law for a prostitute woman to get in touch with a client. It's illegal to solicit, by standing in the street waiting for clients, it is illegal to advertise sexual services through the media or in shop windows or anywhere else. That only leaves one means of communication: telepathy, which at this stage of experimentation is impractical.

The punishment for soliciting you can measure are jail or fines or both.

If anyone but the government were taking the fine money, they could be done for living off immoral earnings - pimping - which is what the French prostitutes accused their government of doing. "The State," they said, "is the biggest pimp". As Baroness Vickers said in the House of Lords, June 1977; "the imposition of fines forces women to go on the streets again to get the money to pay the fines."

One of us went out on the street a few weeks after having her second child and was stopped almost immediately by a police car. She explained to the police that she had no rent money and no food in the home, and they could arrest her, but she would have to be back out immediately after. The policemen said, "we haven't seen you," and drove on. In order to be human beings the police have to turn their backs on the soliciting laws, and they don't do that often.

Because we are forced to operate underground, pimps are often the only way for us to get in touch with clients. They find clients for us, give us some protection from the police and provide, sometimes, the only social life we can get. When we work for madams, agencies, clubs or massage parlours, the risks of arrest, rape, robbery and murder are less because these establishments provide a facade of legality and security, in exchange for a big cut of our money. We still have to be careful though. These places are regularly closed down by the police, leaving us without a place to work from and without protection. If the law is meant to keep prostitute women off the street and discourage pimps and organised crime, in fact it only succeeds in making a place for them.

Once we are convicted, we are labelled as "common prostitutes" for life, and this means the loss of the civil rights which are presumed for others. In court we will be described as a "common prostitute", in other words we are declared guilty before our case is considered, probably the only case in which a person is legally declared guilty before being tried. So we start a case with offers of deals - if we plead guilty on one charge, a theft we didn't commit, for example, the police might not press another, and we won't go to jail this time. There's so much bargaining it's like the January sales.

If we are victims of crime we can't report it. We would be the ones to be persecuted and prosecuted. As the label "common prostitute" is always brought up in court, landlords charge us double rent, hotel staff ask us to tip for not evicting us, a fiver is passed to a police officer or free sexual services given in exchange for not being arrested. They are all sure that prostitute women can't afford to complain.

Most of us are mothers and the greatest risk we all face is that of the loss of custody of our children. They can call us "unfit mothers" at any time and put our children in homes and foster care. The local government will pay up to £130 a week to keep them, but they won't give this money to the mother so that she doesn't have to go on the game in the first place.

Other consequences of having the label "common prostitute" is that we are not allowed to be served in pubs or other public places. We can be refused rented accommodation. We have no right to cross borders. We face deportation if we are immigrant women, or else our visas are not renewed.

The stigma of "common prostitute" also makes it hard for us to leave the game, to find a new job or a new home. If we do get off the game, we

have to work hard to hide our past and our record to keep the new job, the new life. But to those who know and to police and courts, we'll always be "common prostitutes" even when we're granmothers.

But while these laws against us are passed and enforced, the same lawmaker is demanding that we go on the game. According to the Cohabitation Ruling of the Supplementary Benefits Commission, women on SB who are suspected of living with a man or even having sexual relations with a man are cut off. They assume that if a man sleeps with a woman, the woman must insist that the man pay. The DHSS assumes that it has a right to coerce a woman with no money into selling sexual services; to force us to choose between prostitution and starvation. Sex seems to get political either when we ask the government for money or when we use some free enterprise and shame them for the amounts they expect us to live on.

This is the public morality which these laws preserve, the morality of leaving us in poverty, single mothers on SS of £22 a week, low paid workers, mainly women, on £30 to £40 a week, full-time housewives with no pay at all, and them punishing us when we try to escape from this.

The laws on prostitution are laws against all women. Any woman can be accused at any time on the word of a single police officer. Charges of loitering with intent - the notorious suss charge - are used against us, and convictions follow without evidence from civilians at all. It gives too much authority to individual police officers. It is used to further harass the Black and immigrant community, which we may be part of, or our children may. It is a trespass on the rights of prostitutes and the rights of all women and all other citizens too. It is used against prostitute women campaigning for our rights: women have been arrested leaving a campaign meeting.

Trade union laws allow workers to organise and form associations for this purpose. But for the workers of the oldest profession the law makes a special case: the law makes it criminal for each of us to associate with each other and for anyone else to associate with us. They assume guilt by association and treat friendship as conspiracy. If a prostitute shares a flat with another woman, they can both be charged with running a brothel, whether the woman is a pro, a babysitter, a relative or a lover. A woman who associates herself socially with a pro can be charged with "controlling the movement of prostitutes".

If we live or associate socially with a man, he can be charged with "living off immoral earnings" whether or not we give him money: he may be the father of our children or a son. What it comes down to is:

1. that we cannot decide whom to live with,
2. that the law wants prostitute women to be divided from the rest of the community, by socially isolating us,
3. that anybody who associates with us will be punished.

These are the laws that make it illegal for us to organise to improve our working conditions and lives. These are the laws that make it impossible for most of us to speak for ourselves in public.

For this reason it is essential that our campaign for the abolition of the prostitution laws be made up of pros and non-pros: they'll have a hard time telling us apart! And they will know that a law which divides women is a law which all women will break. We need the help also of men, beginning with those who help make laws in this House.

We want to say why we are succeeding in gathering support from such different quarters, from lawyers to housewives, from probation officers to women who are strippers, from social workers to civil rights people, from women's organisations to police officers, from nurses to secretaries to journalists to trade unionists to MPs: because we are the same people, we are to be found in every sector of society. From France to Mozambique, from Britain to New Zealand, from the US to Mexico, we are refusing the legalisation of prostitution: as the women who went on national strike in France said, we don't want prostitution nationalised, we refuse an assembly line of sex. We want the total abolition of the laws on prostitution. Those of us who are working on the street, face the greatest attacks. Those of us who have managed to work in saunas, clubs, brothels or agencies are persecuted less, but live with exactly the same threats. None of us is immune from the law, even the woman who sleeps with a minister or a prince.

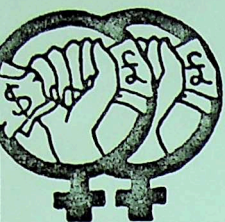
It is estimated that there are two million women on the game in Britain. That includes part-timers and full-timers, women who do it before Christmas, or once a month for the rent. We seek an end to the persecution of two million people, our children, families and friends. We appeal to all Members of Parliament to stop this backward and sadistic witchhunt. There are no bad women, only bad laws.

English Collective of Prostitutes

5th March 1979
Grand Committee Room, House of Commons

This speech was read by Selma James, founder of the International Wages for Housework Campaign, on behalf of the English Collective of Prostitutes.

English Collective of Prostitutes
P.O. Box 287, London N.W.6. SQU, Britain.



wages due lesbians

P.O. BOX 287, KILBURN NW6 5QU, LONDON

01- 624 6364

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Speech given from the floor at the Public Debate on Prostitution organised by Baroness Vickers, November 1978, Central Hall, Westminster.

I'm from Wages Due Lesbians, and we absolutely support the demand for the decriminalisation of, and the abolition of, all laws on prostitution - firstly because as lesbian women we have always had to fight to defend our right to be lesbian - in the same way that prostitute women are defending their rights to be on the game and not be penalised for it. In asserting our right to be lesbian we are insisting on the inalienable right of every woman - to decide what we want to do with our bodies. We have the right to choose whether to sell our bodies to men for cash, to give them to men in marriage, to bear children or to be childless, and to be lesbian if we want to be. Although we ourselves may not choose the same words, the sentiments of Coyote, one of the world's largest organisations of prostitutes, in its motto "My ass is my own, I can do what I like with it", express our feelings exactly!

In many ways society has tried to cut us women off from each other - by saying, well, you're a 'mother,' you're a 'wife', you're a 'lesbian', you're a 'prostitute' and we are all supposed to be in our own little 'box' - each having no connection with the other. What is becoming clearer is that we cannot be divided from each other in this way because we are often the same woman - the mother may be lesbian, the wife may be a prostitute and the prostitute may be lesbian. There is no doubt that many women go on the game in order to have the money to live independently from men - and to be lesbian. Without financial independence, lesbianism is a luxury few women can afford. Surviving solely on women's low wages, or on Social Security, with no access to a man's wage is definitely "financial battering". Every woman knows that there is a price we pay in wanting independence from men, and it's a price we pay in cash as well as in other ways. If two prostitutes live together, for example, they can be charged with running a brothel.

As mothers, prostitute or lesbian, or both, we are constantly faced with having our children taken away from us in custody cases. The threat of this happening is used to keep us in line - to try to keep us silent and invisible. We would really like to know what, or who, is a 'fit' mother. Does selling our bodies to men for cash make us 'unfit'? Does refusing to sleep with men at all make us 'unfit'?

(2)

Nearly always the main criterion is whether we are financially 'fit.' How can any woman be financially 'fit' for anything on women's wages? And if we go on the game in order to be 'financially fit' to support our kids, that's not right either.

We are all organising so that we can be 'financially fit' - for anything and everything! The government cannot have it's cake and eat it too. Until they give us the money, the wages for all our work - at home and outside, that we are all entitled to - then we will be forced to find whatever ways we can to get what we need to have better lives for ourselves and our children.

We refuse to be poor, and we refuse to be punished for refusing to be poor.

Anne Neale.

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Report on the public meeting of November the 27th 1978 in Central Hall, Westminster, "Prostitution: what of the future?"

If any gathering can be called a cross section of society, then it was that of november 27th. Packing out the Central Methodist Hall, Westminster, over 200 people turned out that freezing night to listen, to debate, and to vote on "The future of prostitution".

The Debate Was called and chaired by Baroness Vickers, a life peeress who had spoken in the House of Lords for the abolition of all the laws on prostituition, in June 1977. On the platform with her were David Offenbach, a prominent Civil Rights lawyer and spokeswomen for two prostitutes organizations, Helen Buckingham for P.L.A.N. Prostitution Laws Are Nonsense, and Selma James founder of the International Wages for Housework Campaign, for the English Collective of Prostitutes.

Their proposal was simple: the abolition of all the laws concerning prostitution. This same demand had been the cry of the French prostitutes who in 1975 went on national strike and occupied churches all over the country. In Britain it was for the first time being put in a prominent place on the national agenda as the invitation to the debate sent out by the English Collective of Prostitutes stated: "The Open Debate is the first in this country as far as we know. It is the first chance to hear publicly the facts of our case as we ourselves want them stated. We urge you to attend and to speak out with us."

Baroness Vickers was the first to make the case, explaining how the 1959 Street Offences Act makes it illegal not prostitution itself but anymeans of acquiring a client. Far from protecting the women from gangland exploitation the laws actually expose prostitute women to danger, driving women to depend on pimps and ponces because it is illegal to advertise. They cannot protect each other because if they share a flat it is called a brothel. Convictions are rising while suspended sentences are down. Fines force women back onto the streets. How else can they find the money to pay them. At any time there are twenty to twenty-five prostitutes in Holloway Prison alone. The term "common prostitute" ought to be annihilated.

Helen Buckingham, pointing at the millions of pounds collected in taxes and fines, accused the State of being "the biggest ponce". She said women worked on the streets when they had no alternative. If the laws were abolished it would leave a woman free to work as she chose. "We want to be able to work from flats or through agencies and to be able to advertise. Prostitutes are the only people capable of organising prostitution on a non-criminal basis...if women cannot handle the oldest profession what hope is there for them in the newer ones?"

David Offenbach agreed "the Act has utterly failed in that there are more prostitutes on the streets now than in 1959 when the Act was passed." On the one hand through the cohabitation ruling, the state cuts off a woman's benefit if she sleeps with a man, and tells her she must get the money from him. On the other hand it turns innocent women and mothers into criminals for doing just that...demanding money for sexual services.

Finally Selma James spoke. "I want to make it clear that there would be no prostitution if there were no poor women", she said. Housewife and mother of two grown up sons, she said that women are unquestionably the poorer sex. Because women have no money of our own, we are forced to sell ourselves in order to have the money to top up the Social Secutity money if we are single mothers, to be financially independent from men and to escape situations of rape, in order to avoid having to exopt the lowest wages if we are Black or immigrant women. "Prostitute women are only putting a price tag on services which all women are expexted to provide for love". This is the 'crime' prostitute women are punished for".

She pointed out that at any time any woman can be accused of being a p prostitute : " As long as prostitute women are under attack, all women are under attack".

A vast range of people had answered the call to the meeting. Women and men in their teens and their eighties, prostitutes and clerics, lesbians and homosexual men. The Salvation Army and politicians. Professional, office and factory workers. Women workers, black and white, immigrant and English.

Right from the beginning a man in the audience spoke up for legalization and the creation of licenced brothels. But it was clear what the prostitutes wanted. Decriminalization, the abolition of all laws on prostitution, they said, would constitute a free enterprise situation for the prostitute, while legalization would bring about "an assembly line of sex", a State controlled and State exploited sex factory.

In West Germany, where such a system had been introduced, only 12% of the prostitutes had registered to use it. And a working prostitute from the audience pointed out that even here there was already a division between those who were forced to work the streets (the most dangerous place) and those one step up who could work in night clubs which she said were already like legalized brothels.

From those who favoured repudiating the game there were frequent references to the degrading nature of the job, and how it ought to be put an end to. But what eventually emerged was that however they felt about prostitution, people were prepared to take sides with the women who did it. In the words of a woman from the Salvation Army: "we hate the sin but we love the sinner". No one after all could dislike prostitution more than the prostitutes present.

The discussion made it clear that the laws were against all women. Baroness Vickers had spoken about how women's civil rights are denied them both through the Social Security system and the prostitution laws; for instance when women are refused access to hotels and restaurants at night. She herself as an unescorted woman had been asked to leave a London hotel. A woman in the audience emphasized that any woman can be suspected of loitering with intent though she may be outside a laundrette waiting for her laundry. An ex-prostitute and mother of four children said that once you've been labelled a 'common prostitute' the police could harass you any time. They were still after her years later.

A spokeswoman for Women Against Rape said that because the police were so busy arresting prostitutes they were never around to take action against rapists. It is more difficult to prove rape of prostitute women, too.

Vicky Menninger from Black Women for Wages for Housework spoke on the theme "Money for prostitutes is money for Black women, Black women being at the bottom of the socio-economic heap. By not attacking the causes which forced women onto the game, the legislation in fact turned out to hurt not only prostitutes but all women.

A number of women spoke up as lesbians, and Anne Neale from Wages Due Lesbians said all women have a right to choose what they do with their own bodies, with men or with women, for love or for money.

Other women defended prostitutes for getting paid for what "we are all expected to do for free", or said how their low paid work, low paid in factories, offices, and hospitals, or unpaid at home and ending up exhausted at the end of the day, was also a kind of prostitution. "You sell your whole body". A man pointed out that this applied also to his job, and said he too identified with the prostitute cause.

It was this question of women's poverty on which the issue and the meeting finally focused. Selma James had said: "Women go on the game to refuse poverty, or, having never been desperately poor, to avoid poverty. Both reasons are valid".

It was abundantly clear from the discussion that not only prostitution but all the options open to a woman involve their own form of degradation and in general for very little money or none at all. The audience added to the platform's criticisms of the Social Security, its subsistence rates of pay and the associated low wage ghetto reserved for women, in particular black and immigrant women. A single mother on Security Benefit accused the Ministry for

Social Security of making women suffer for having children with the disallowance of the Cohabitation Ruling and all earnings over £6. How could the law presume in this context to deprive us of what little choice we had? It was clear that women are sick of having to say "no" to their children and are going on the game to raise their standard of living, or to give them opportunities that would otherwise be impossible. The vast majority of prostitutes are mothers, and very often single mothers. Far from the law showing any mercy to the prostitute because she is a mother, she is persecuted on this score as well. The allegation of being an unfit mother may deprive the prostitute of custody of the children she went on the game to provide for.

As the debate concluded, messages of support were read to the meeting from C.O.Y.O.T.E., B.E.A.V.E.R., P.U.M.A. and N.Y.P.C. prostitute organisations in the United States and Canada fighting for the same abolition of all the laws on prostitution.

Reporters and interviewers from every major paper, radio and television prepared to give a massive and serious and generally sympathetic coverage to the event.

Maureen Colquhoun M.P. pledged her support in getting a Ten-Minute Bill through Parliament "even if it meant staying up all night to do so".

A brief had been prepared by the English Collective of Prostitutes and P.L.A.N. demanding the total abolition of all laws concerning prostitution and stating in detail how the laws work against prostitutes and against all women. The meeting voted that this brief be forwarded for the urgent consideration of the Home Secretary. There were only four votes against it.

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Debate on the game

BARONESS Joan Vickers, a former Tory MP and an outspoken critic of the prostitution laws, will chair a major public debate on the subject tomorrow at Central Hall, Westminster.

Among the 200 relevant people invited to join in are magistrates, social workers, Home Office officials, lawyers, members of Women's groups and — for the first time in such an august arena—working prostitutes themselves will come forward.

Last week, the Baroness, as erect and distinguished as ever in her famous pearl chokers, held a preliminary meeting at her Belgravia home. Helen Buckingham, a prostitute and founder of PLAN (Prostitution Laws Are Nonsense), Selma James and Margaret Valentino of ECP (English Collective of Prostitutes) were there and heard, over tea, how Lady Vickers herself had not escaped the kind of harassment that prostitutes complain of.

'I myself have been asked to leave a leading London hotel when ordering a cup of coffee with a woman friend late at night. This would not happen to two men,' she announced. If this kind of thing happens to a Dame of the British Empire, what hope is there for the rest of us?

Selma James, who is also the founder of the Wages for Housework Campaign, pointed out that, although she herself was not a prostitute, all prostitutes were housewives. Helen Buckingham finds the laws, as enforced by the Home Office, deeply hypocritical. This was because, she said, the Foreign Office has no scruples about calling on prostitutes when there are important foreign visitors to entertain.

The main irritant is still the Street Offences Act. Lady Vickers is deeply ashamed of the Act, which made soliciting (though not prostitution itself) illegal. It was brought in by her own party in 1959.

'It is absurd,' she said, 'to fine a woman for soliciting. Most likely, she went on the streets because she had no money, and how will she pay the fine except by doing it again? If she goes to prison, she will learn more tricks of



JANE BOWN

Baroness Vickers : Asked to leave.

the trade, and may lose custody of the children she has been trying to protect.'

The worst aspect of the law is that it has driven the girls underground. 'They have to depend on pimps and ponces because it is illegal to advertise. They cannot protect each other because, if they share a flat, it is called a brothel,' said Baroness Vickers.

'Prostitutes could perfectly well be prosecuted when necessary for public nuisance, but those they offended should be asked to give evidence in court.'

The Baroness is distressed that convictions are rising, while suspended sentences are down. At any time, there are 20-25 prostitutes in Holloway prison alone. 'Many of these are young girls, and, since Britain joined the Common Market, there are even au pairs from EEC countries in our prisons. The phrase "common prostitute" should be annihilated.'

The prostitutes' organisations — PROS in Birmingham (Programme for Reform of laws on Soliciting), PLAN and ECP have more points to make. In an area open to abuse, should the uncorroborated evidence of one police officer be enough to convict a woman of soliciting, running a brothel, or loitering with intent? They accuse the Government of

double standards. Prostitutes are liable to tax, while anyone else taking money from a prostitute is considered to be living off immoral earnings. 'The State,' they say, 'is the biggest ponce.'

Enforcement of the cohabitation ruling is, declare ECP/Wages for Housework, legalised prostitution. 'A man is not expected to support a woman if she cooks for him, for example. But, if she has sexual relations, then the State will withdraw her social security.'

David Offenbach, a leading civil rights lawyer, who has been in on the groundwork of the debate, believes that prohibition of prostitution has been no more successful than prohibition of alcohol was. 'Prostitution will continue to exist, whatever you do, and it can be said that prostitutes provide a valuable service,' he told me. 'Brushing it under the carpet has introduced criminal elements and mobsterism, and has made effective policing almost impossible.'

'Most prostitutes come from the most defenceless areas of society. They are single mothers and housewives, black and immigrant women, confused teenagers and the desperately poor, and as such, should have the same civil rights as other women.'

Caroline Foley

THE TIMES

BRITAIN

THE TIMES TUESDAY NOVEMBER 28 1978

Campaigners seek end to prostitution laws

By Robert Parker

Abolition of laws on prostitution was demanded last night at a meeting in Central Hall Westminster, organized by a committee, chaired by Lady Vickers, a former Conservative MP and campaigner for women's rights.

The meeting, at which several interests, including the Collective of English Prostitutes, were represented, voted to send a document listing demands to the Home Secretary. An "explosive and expanding campaign" in support of the demands was promised.

The meeting called for the abolition of laws which can label a woman a common prostitute, which make two prostitutes living together liable to a charge of running a brothel, and which prohibit "kerb crawling".

The document complains of police harassment of prostitutes, of big increases in fines, and of the way the law makes prostitutes dependent on pimps and ponces.

It states: "Once a woman is known to be a 'common prostitute' she has no protection from the law against rape, theft, battery, and defamation."

Lady Vickers and Miss Helen Buckingham, a founding member of Prostitution Laws are Nonsense (Plan), argued that poverty forced many women into prostitution.

The document says: "Prostitute women come from all walks of life, from married women supplementing their husband's university grant, to single mothers who find it impossible to feed and clothe

their children on supplementary benefit.

"Prostitute women are women working to escape poverty, financial dependence on individual men, and the low wage ghetto reserved for women, in particular black and immigrant women.

"It is impossible to estimate how many families are surviving only because a woman, mother, daughter, wife, is 'on the game'. It is impossible to estimate how many women are and have been on the game. But every indication is that the number is massive, though hidden. To trespass on the rights of women on the game is therefore a massive trespass on the rights of many women."

Mr David Offenbach, a lawyer on the committee, said that the laws relating to prostitution were largely responsible for the world of "favours and bribes" in which prostitutes live.

Miss Buckingham criticized the "hypocrisy" of public attitudes towards prostitutes, maintaining that rabbis, priests, judges, lawyers, and many other so-called respectable groups used their services.

She said after the meeting that the committee was prepared to disclose the identity of any client in a position of power who opposed their demands.

Those attending the meeting included members of the Salvation Army, priests, probation officers, social workers and prostitutes. Mrs Maureen Colquhoun, Labour MP for Northampton, North, said she would attempt to introduce a 10-minute Bill in the Commons to back the demands of the committee.

Mary Stott hit on a fundamental feminist issue when she discussed the campaign to scrap the prostitution laws: "It is an absolute wrong to base society on the assumption that women are here to serve the needs of men," she wrote. "Prostitution is the worst form of economic slavery. I would rather clean stinking lavatories seven days a week than let strangers violate my body."

OPEN SPACE

For prostitutes, against prostitution

THE PUBLIC DEBATE. Prostitution: what of the future, organised by Baroness Vickers, received for the most part serious and sympathetic coverage by the media. This was due first to the debate itself and the support we got from single mothers on SS, lesbian women, married women, Women against Rape, The Wages for Housework Campaign, and people from the Salvation Army and the National Association of Probation Officers.

The vote at the end overwhelmingly supported the resolution which called for an end to the Street Offences Act and to the law which insists that two or more women who share premises constitutes a brothel.

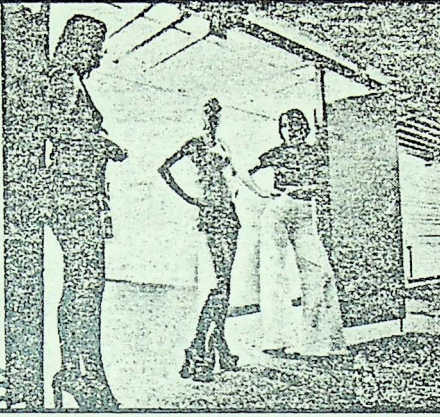
Yet the first time that we spoke publicly in this way, Mary Stott unlike most of her colleagues, took up her pen to attack us (December 6). She seems unaware that times have changed and that we, along with millions of other women have made these changes. We have never recommended that she or any woman go on the game. But no one can be blind to the fact that our numbers are massive though hidden, and are increasing.

Vast numbers of families — children, old people, and even student husbands depend on our income, and would not survive without it. Prostitution is the welfare the State does not provide, which is why so many single mothers are forced to go on the game. Prostitution is the way that some women refuse to be on social security at all, and refuse also the low paying job ghetto reserved for our sex and in refusing poverty, prostitutes are by no means alone.

Nor are we alone as objects of sex. What about the models hired to pose for photographs to the left of Mary Stott's column? What about secretaries, waitresses, receptionists, shop assistants, TV news readers who are hired for their proportions and their charms or who have to submit to sexual pressures to keep their jobs? What about the casting couch which is of course famous in show business? Is this choice or economic necessity?

We are campaigning for the laws against prostitutes to be abolished. These laws prevent women from living together if even one of us is on the game. These laws prevent women from coming off the game by branding us "common prostitute." These laws allow police to choose who is to be branded. They parallel the cohabitation ruling which we explain in our brief.

"While one wing of the Government passes laws against prostitutes, another wing passes laws encouraging and even demanding it of women. According to the Cohabitation ruling women on social security who are suspected of living with a man are cut off. The assumption is that if a man has sex with a woman, the woman must insist that the man pay.



Baroness Vickers (left) and Helen Buckingham (right), "for prostitutes, against prostitution," and the German solution (centre): girls on duty outside one of Hamburg's legal Eros Centres

The DHSS assumes that it has the right to coerce a woman with no money into selling sexual services; that is to coerce a woman into one form of prostitution." Mary Stott says prostitution is degrading because it forces women to put up with men who are "drunk or disgusting or even dangerous." Hundreds of married women have put up with husbands who are all these things but this is never used as an argument against marriage.

By attacking the organisations with whom Baroness Vickers is working, Mary Stott implies criticism of Baroness Vickers which amazes us. She has put her high position, her wide experience and her enviable reputation on the line. She has called for "the total abolition of all laws concerning prostitution" and she has given a platform to those most affected by the laws she opposes.

Selma James spoke for many women when she said we were "for prostitutes and against prostitution." Women in massive numbers are refusing to be poor and refusing to sell themselves in any of the ways society and our families have demanded of us up to now. For this, no price is right.

Margaret Valentino, English Collective of Prostitutes.
Helen Buckingham, Prostitution Laws Are Nonsense.

THANK GOODNESS feminism has such an erudite exponent as Mary Stott.

The cause has, sadly, become a convenient bandwagon for any sensation-seeking group, without any understanding of the issues. Helen Buckingham and Selma James are supporting the attitudes of the most powerful commercial anti-feminist lobby of all.

If the campaign of the English Collective of Prostitutes is a feminist cause, so too must be Beauty Contests and Beauty Queens and the whole Page 3 syndrome.

By all means support Helen Buckingham and Selma James in their campaign for better working con-

ditions for their "collective" but please do not be deluded into thinking that they are feminists. They are precisely the opposite. — Yours truly, Pamela Anderson, (Lately Chairman of the Fawcett Society).

AS THE "brave girls" Ms Stott refers to we'd like to say we have no way of knowing how many members and supporters of Women Against Rape are prostitutes. Because of the law they can't say just how brave they are.

But when in a rape case, a woman was accused of being a prostitute and her name and address released by the judge, WAR, The English Collective of Prostitutes, Prostitution Laws Are Nonsense and other Women's groups picketed the Old Bailey together. Does Ms Stott disapprove of our organising in this way?

We know that many women go on the game to get the financial independence we need in order to leave marriage where we or our children are being raped and battered.

We know too that the laws on prostitution are an attack on all women. In rape cases we are often asked "why were you out at that time of night? Or why were you out alone, without a man?" The implication being that we are pros, in which case it isn't rape.

We know that the police and courts use our money to harass prostitute women. Why don't they use the money instead to catch rapists?

Ms Stott should be rest assured that contrary to being "conned" WAR and the millions of women in this country and abroad who are campaigning against rape and who support prostitute women know exactly what we are doing. We are against rape of all women, whores, and housewives. Supporting prostitute women is supporting ourselves. If one woman is vulnerable before rapists, police and courts, we are all. — Yours faithfully, Judith Kertesz, Women Against Rape, PO Box 287, London NW6.

I THINK I understand, and agree with, most of Mary Stott's article, and I'm sure she is almost entirely right, but at the one point where she sinks to a cheap grin she could hardly be more wrong-headed: "Deaths from sexual starvation must be remarkably few." I have long been contemplating joining the ranks of this "remarkable few." I suffer from this sort of starvation, as a result of chronic diffidence and pathetic social incompetence, and for many years suicide has seemed a perfectly reasonable cure. I have not used it mainly because I don't wish to distress close relatives — a really good opportunity has not yet arisen, forlorn hope persists; etc. I am sure many have used it over the centuries.

There are alternatives no doubt. The prospect of a lifetime of "enforced chastity" and alone-ness I reject as unbearable.

The services of prostitutes I reject for intellectual reasons, many of which are set out in Mary Stott's article, and because I wish to share my sexuality with one cherished, equal, lifetime's partner.

Rape I reject with revulsion. But I can understand the motives of such criminals.

However many or few deaths from this disease, the amount of crime ascribable to it is unquestionably vast. It is true that most of this is committed by men, and surely that is the effect of civilisation amplifying and distorting the biological differences over many generations? The women's movement has a daunting task in seeking to change those effects built up over millennia. I hope they can succeed, but I hope they do not forget the basic biology: they will surely never change that? A Human Male.

Scotland.

MARY STOTT is wrong to think that the sexual drive is less forceful in women than men, and that it is necessarily "horrendous" for women to relieve their ten-

sions by choosing men, just as men choose women. Some women feel themselves unattractive and inadequate and have the need to buy sexual services. I see nothing wrong with that. I regret only that Miss Stott finds this new honesty amongst women regarding their sexual needs, so shocking. — Yours etc., Pamela Manson, London SW7.

THREE CHEERS for Mary Stott's article — exactly my sentiments, and very well and forcibly said, and certainly an antidote to that Jill Tweedie of whom I thoroughly disapprove. — Yours verily, Olive N. Hickman, Claverley, Shropshire.

PEOPLE of either sex who feel a call to serve as what Lars Ullerstam calls erotic Samaritans should be encouraged. More, they should be honoured — for they are socially valuable. Like other providers of needed services, they earn a reasonable fee.

The encounter with a prostitute, brief though it is, need not be soulless. The client seeks more than crude physical release. He or she needs a moment of comfort akin to love. Like any great courtesan of old, the aware prostitute can pleasantly and profitably supply this. — Yours sincerely, Francis Bennion, 24 St Aubyns, Hove, East Sussex.

I DISAGREE with Mary Stott's apparent acceptance and reinforcement of the "chasm" between prostitutes and other women. The real chasm is between those women who actively participate in sex and the rest (perhaps the majority?) who, for one reason or another, are bribed, coerced or cajoled into being the passive object of another's passion. Mary Carr, 16 Bucks Avenue, St Albans, Herts.

1
PROTECTION OF PROSTITUTES.
 10 MINUTE RULE BILL PRESENTED BY MAUREEN COLQUHOUN
 IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS -

PROTECTION OF PROSTITUTES

3.32 p.m.

Ms. Maureen Colquhoun (Northampton, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Sexual Offences Act 1956 and the Street Offences Act 1959; to provide for the better protection of prostitutes from exploitation and victimisation; and for connected purposes.

In seeking leave to present a Bill for the protection of prostitutes, I am aware that it will not be a popular issue in the House in a general election year, but I am convinced that it is a reforming issue that the House should no longer overlook. The Bill seeks to amend the Sexual Offences Act 1956 and the Street Offences Act 1959 and to provide for prostitutes better protection from exploitation and victimisation.

The present laws, which are over 20 years old, have not attacked prostitution; they have merely been an invitation to treat all prostitute women unjustly. They have attacked their civil liberties and lost them many human rights, I do not hide the fact that I believe that all prostitution laws must be abolished, but the amendments are an attempt at this stage to put injustices right quickly and to jog the memory of the House about the bad legislation that was introduced in the post-Wolfenden era. The amendments should also ensure that the law applies equally to men and women.

Prostitution has grown since the 1959 Act. With the best intentions, and wishing to deter prostitution, Parliament at that time introduced this appalling legislation, which has prevented women, once convicted, from getting away from prostitution. It has given a woman the stigma "common prostitute" for the rest of her life, and forced her back on to the streets to pay the ever-increasing fines. The amendment will abolish prison sentences. Women should not be imprisoned for soliciting. That view is supported by probation officers, lawyers, social workers and even the Police Federation.

The Bill will establish one simple offence to cover all persistent street nuisances, not only soliciting, and evidence from the person or persons annoyed will be an absolute requirement. The offence will include kerb-crawling, persistent salesmen, drunks and members of religious

sects who attempt to sell people records on the street. I emphasise that it is only the peculiar sexual hypocrisy of the British that would single out prostitution or soliciting as an offence.

The Street Offences Act 1959, which deals with soliciting, was a mistake. It is wrong that a woman can be in danger of a prison sentence without a shred of evidence being produced in court that anyone has been affronted by her actions. Moreover, the present laws ensure that the incompetent prostitute, the working-class girl, is the one who gets into trouble. Successful and competent prostitutes operate within the law; it is the immature, inexperienced, ageing or socially inadequate women who are the victims. These women, during a period of police observation, do not succeed in picking up a man, and they are arrested. That is usually followed by a caution or charge, fines and returning to the game to pay them.

It is a totally unjust system that a woman can be twice cautioned on the evidence of a single police officer. On a third occasion, still on the evidence of a single and often the same police officer, she can be charged with loitering with intent for the purposes of prostitution. If she pleads not guilty before the court, the same police officer reads out the evidence of his two cautions. Before any offence has been proved, a person innocent in the eyes of the law can be labelled as a common prostitute. There will be provision in the Bill to abolish the term "common prostitute".

The Sexual Offences Act 1956 will be amended to delete that part which classifies more than two women living together as a brothel. That law has forced prostitutes into the hands of organised crime, making them totally dependent upon poneses and pimps and part of a terrifying mafia. They must be able to live together to protect one another. The sooner that that happens, the better for the women concerned.

Finally, I emphasise that prostitutes and prostitution are not a menace. I have spoken with many eminent psychiatrists who say that it is accepted in their profession that prostitutes have great therapeutic value in society. In this country the Reichian school of psychiatrists uses sex therapy. Many psychiatrists accept

that prostitutes are the oldest therapists in the world and are practitioners of professional therapy. Indeed, they help people deprived of sex to sort out their problems. Prostitutes deal primarily with all the sexual things that have gone wrong.

The first people to whom men go when they have sexual inadequacies and problems are prostitutes. Therefore, to some people in society there is great respectability in and acceptance of prostitution and its social and therapeutic value. It is time that the degradation, the harassment, imprisonment and fining of these women was stopped.

To sum up, this short amending Bill to existing Acts seeks to abolish prison sentences for soliciting, establish one offence to cover all persistent street nuisances with evidence from the persons annoyed, abolish the term "common prostitute" and delete that part of the Sexual Offences Act 1956 which classifies more than two women living together as "a brothel". I hope that the Bill will have the support of the House.

3.41 p.m.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): I rise to oppose the bringing in of this Bill. I do so because I believe in the sanctity of our womenfolk. I believe that that view is widely shared in all parts of the House. I do not believe that any person or party is in a sole position to claim that he or it alone stands for this belief. In all parts of this House and in all sections of the community there is concern that the standards that have made this nation and protected its womenfolk in the past are in serious jeopardy.

There is an awareness that in the wake of what has been called "the permissive society" there has been a moral delinquency which has affected every part of our society.

I make it clear that no one in this House has any right to point a finger of judgment or condemnation—

Mrs. Renée Short (Wolverhampton, North-East): Then sit down.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am well aware that the founder of Christianity himself, when confronted with a woman who had lost her virtue, said:

"He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

[Rev. Paisley.]

Today in this House I want to stand for the protection of all womenfolk—

Miss Joan Lestor (Eton and Slough): The hon. Member will need protection himself.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Having run the risk of being an Ulster politician for the past 10 years I think that I shall survive even the threats of the womenfolk on the other side of this House.

The person who has been caught up in prostitution through exploitation, victimisation, or by her own choice, has lost the greatest thing in life—the purpose for which she came into the world. She has lost her goal. All of us here today remember our own mothers, and thank God for them. We all remember the sanctity of the family and the joy and peace which flows from family life. We must also remember that the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Colquhoun), who asked leave to introduce the Bill, made it clear that her objective in the end was to abolish all laws on this matter. This is only the beginning of a

scheme to undermine what lies at the very heart of the moral fabric of our society.

If this Bill is bought into the House, it will be a sad reflection on our nation. It will be a green light to many people—[*Interruption*—of course those who are laughing now know the colour of prostitution, but I must plead ignorance.

There is one phrase from the Bible that I want to leave with the House today. It is that "Her ways are the ways of death." I believe that the exploiters and the exploited, the victims and those who make them so, those who pay and those who are paid, will find one day the eternal wisdom of the eternal Book. I call upon all hon. Members to vote out this proposal today.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 13 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and Nomination of Select Committees at Commencement of Public Business):—

The House divided: Ayes 130, Noes 50.

BRITAIN

THE Sun

Tuesday, March 6, 1979

TODAY'S TV: PAGES 12 and 13

BRITAIN

FRANKLIN



THREE KNOCKS AND ASK FOR...

MPs give 'the green light' to a better deal for prostitutes

By Our Parliamentary Staff

PERMISSION to introduce a Bill to change the law in favour of prostitutes was given to Mrs. Maureen Colquhoun (Lab., Northampton, N.) in the Commons yesterday in spite of a vigorous denunciation by the Rev. Ian Paisley (UUUC Antrim, N.).

The Protection of Prostitutes Bill, which has almost no chance of becoming law in this session of Parliament, amends the 1956 Sexual Offences Act and the 1959 Street Offences Act to give prostitutes better protection from exploitation and victimisation.

It would abolish prison sentences for soliciting, establish a single offence to cover all street offences with evidence from those annoyed, and get rid of the term "common prostitute."

Mrs Colquhoun, who conceded that this was not a popular issue in Parliament in election year, said eminent psychiatrists had told her it was accepted in their profession that prostitutes had great therapeutic value in society and were practitioners of professional therapy.

Mrs Paisley said the Bill was only the beginning of a scheme to undermine all the laws at the very heart of the moral fabric of society:

Women squeal

MPs granted Mrs Colquhoun leave to introduce the Bill by 130 votes to 50.

Several women in the public gallery who squealed when the vote was put were shown out by attendants.

Mrs Colquhoun said the present laws had not attacked prostitution but were an open invitation to treat all prostitutes women unjustly. The law had attacked their civil liberties and lost them many human rights.

All prostitution laws must be abolished eventually, but her present proposals were an attempt to right injustices quickly and to jog MPs' memories about the wrong legislation of the post-Wolfenden era.

The present laws actually prevented a woman, once convicted, from getting away from prostitution, forcing her to



Mrs COLQUHOUN said the law which classified more than two women living together as a "brothel" should be amended.



Mr PAISLEY said: "Today in this House I want to stand for the protection of womenfolk."

carry the stigma "common prostitute" for the rest of her life and forcing her back on to the street in order to pay ever-increasing fines.

The Bill had wide support from probation officers, lawyers, social workers and the Police Federation, who had proposed that imprisonment for soliciting should be ended.

Mrs Colquhoun referred to people who might be a nuisance on the street such as persistent salesmen, drunks, and religious sects attempting to sell records and commented: "It is only the peculiar sexual hypocrisy of the British that would single out prostitution or soliciting as an offence."

"It is wrong that a woman can be in danger of a prison sentence without a shred of evidence being produced in court that anyone has been affronted by her actions."

'Terrifying Mafia'

Present laws ensured that the incompetent prostitute, the working-class girl, was the one who got into trouble. Successful and competent prostitutes operated very well within the law in a different way.

"It is the immature, the inexperienced, the ageing or the socially inadequate woman who is the victim."

The law which classified more than two women living together as a "brothel" should

be amended, Mrs Colquhoun said.

"This is a law which has forced prostitutes directly into the hands of organised crime, making them totally dependent on pones and pimps and part of a terrifying Mafia. They must be able to live together to protect one another."

Many psychiatrists accepted that prostitutes were the oldest therapists in the world and were practitioners of professional therapy. They helped people deprived of sex to sort out their problems.

'Sanctity of womenfolk'

Proclaiming his belief in "the sanctity of womenfolk," Mr Paisley said: "I believe that right across this House there is concern that the standards that have made this nation and protected its womenfolk in the past are in serious jeopardy. That concern is reflected right across the nation."

"There is an awareness that in the wake of what has been called the permissive society has come a moral delinquency which has affected every part of our society."

When Mr Paisley said no MP had the right to point the finger of judgment or pass condemnation, a woman's voice cried from the Labour benches: "Sit down then." "Today in this house I want to stand for the protection

of all womenfolk," roared Mr Paisley. "You will need protection yourself," shouted a woman Labour MP, back.

'A green light'

But Mr Paisley, undeterred, had no doubt that having been an Ulster politician a long time he would survive the threats from Labour women MPs.

"If this Bill is brought in it will be a sad reflection upon the nation," he said. "It will also be a green light to many."

There was laughter at this. "Those that are laughing know the colours of prostitution," said Mr Paisley. "I must plead ignorance."

Mr Paisley ended his speech to a cry of "Hallelujah" from a woman in the public gallery.

THREAT LIFTED

Silence on clients

Last night, because of the vote in favour of the Bill, prostitutes lifted their threats to name some of their highly placed clients.

Miss Helen Buckingham, a leading campaigner to improve the position of prostitutes under the law, said there was "no need now" to identify men in the public eye who had been clients.

EURO-POLL DAY 'FOR GENERAL ELECTION' CALL

The Prime Minister was predictably non-committal in the Commons yesterday when it was suggested that he might mount a General Election on June 7—day of the first direct elections to the European Assembly.

Mr STEEL, the Liberal Leader, floated the idea during a Commons Question Time exchange. He asked Mr Callaghan if he had noted that M. Gaston Thorn, Prime Minister of Luxembourg, intended to hold a general election in his country on the same day as the Euro-election.

But Mr CALLAGHAN would only comment that he was quite sure he would be as successful as the long-serving Premier Thorn in holding office.

Commons Sketch

AIDING THE FEMALE THERAPIST

By FRANK JOHNSON

A BILL relaxing the laws against prostitution won a majority yesterday from Members of the world's oldest, but most frowned upon, profession (politics).

But first the latest on the subject in which you are all really interested: devolution.

Yesterday's was the first Prime Minister's Question Time since the blows sustained by the Government in the referendums last Thursday. It rapidly emerged that the Prime Minister had as yet no idea what he was going to do about devolution. Back to prostitution.

The Bill was, appropriately enough, a Private Member's measure.

(From now on, this column will do its best to keep all its entandres undoubled.)

The authoress was Mrs Maureen Colquhoun (Lab., Northampton N.). She is either

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the most stupendously courageous M.P. or the most exhibitionist: perhaps a little of both.

Some time ago she announced to the world that she was a lesbian. Short of announcing that she was also a practising monetarist, it was difficult to think of what else she could do to outrage her apparently rather bigoted constituency Labour party, many of whose members have been trying to prevent her from being their candidate at the General Election.

But there she was yesterday, getting up to put the case for women who go out to work. And the case she put was highly convincing.

Her Protection of Prostitutes Bill would abolish prison sentences for soliciting and would ensure that, before a prostitute

Continued on Back P, Col 6

Therapist

By FRANK JOHNSON

Continued from Page One

could be convicted of a street offence, there would have to be evidence that she had actually annoyed someone by approaching him.

It would also abolish both the law whereby a building in which more than two prostitutes lived could be classified as a brothel, and the offence of being "a common prostitute."

Mrs Colquhoun persuasively demonstrated that these laws "actually prevent a woman, once convicted, from getting away from prostitution, forcing her to carry the stigma of common prostitute for the rest of her life, and forcing her back on to the street in order to pay ever-increasing fines."

She added that the present laws ensured that it was the incompetent, ageing, immature or emotionally disturbed prostitute who got into trouble — "successful and competent prostitutes operate very well within the law in a different way."

Present arrangements "force prostitutes directly into the hands of organised crime, making them totally dependent on ponces and pimps and part of a terrifying mafia."

Although she was an M.P., Mrs Colquhoun, then, turned out to have a heart of gold.

'Oldest therapists'

"Eminent psychiatrists have told me that it is accepted in their profession that prostitutes have great therapeutic value in society and are practitioners of professional therapy," she said. "Many psychiatrists accept that prostitutes are the oldest therapists in the world."

The calling in aid of eminent psychiatrists forced one momentarily to part company with her, especially since one of those whose opinion she quoted was Dr Wilhelm Reich, a cult figure of the liberated, boring 1960s.

On these delicate matters, one should no more be guided by Wilhelm Reich than by the Third Reich. Moreover, Mrs Colquhoun's insistence that the prostitutes were more or less hospital ancillary workers meant that under her Bill they would have to join NUPE.

They would then go on strike. There would be demands that their work be done by troops. (W R A C S? Guardsmen?) It does not bear thinking about.

Therapists listen

In the public galleries, Mrs Colquhoun's speech was listened to raptly by several women in fluffy coats or sweaters who, one was given to understand, were eminent therapists.

These visitors were something of a disappointment. Just as some of the miners, when they lobby M.P.s, bring their lamps and helmets, so one had hoped that the therapists would bring what, according to the more entertaining and disgraceful newspapers, are the apparatus of their profession: chains, divers' suits, Father Christmas boots.

Not so yesterday. The women looked like respectable typists, although these days respectable typists sometimes look like, so to speak, therapists.

A couple of the visitors squealed with approval when, after Mrs Colquhoun's speech, the Speaker asked if she be given leave to bring in the Bill and a majority of M.P.s shouted in favour.

The girls were clearly under the erroneous impression that the Bill had been passed. Apparently they were not students of Parliamentary procedure. No reason why they should be. Therapy's their game. They were hustled out by the attendants.

A Paisley bawl

Before the vote, the Rev. Ian Paisley (UUUC Antrim, N.) bawled a speech which must have persuaded many a Tory who was against the Bill either to abstain or vote in favour.

He quoted Christ's attitude to the woman taken in adultery, correctly interpreting the parable as meaning that "no M.P. has the right to point the finger of judgment or pass condemnation."

"Sit down, then," cried Mrs Renee Short (Lab., Wolverhampton NE), drawing a perfectly reasonable inference, but Mr Paisley crashed on. He failed to address himself to the crucial point that the existing laws actually made it more difficult for women to give up prostitution.

Instead, he concentrated on such assurances as "I believe in the sanctity of women," thus proving to his opponents on both sides of the house only that he believed in the sanctimony of Mr Paisley.

Parliament—P81

DAILY STAR

BRITAIN

Wednesday, March 7th, 1979 BRITAIN'S BEST BUY ★

HOOKERS' HEYDAY!



Ian Paisley: 'I am standing for the sanctity of womenfolk.'

Dance of joy as MPs vote for the call girls' charter

HAPPY hookers danced for joy last night . . . in a House of Commons courtyard.

Call-girl campaigner Helen Buckingham and Selma James led a victory jig after M.P.s gave the green light to slacker laws on brothels and soliciting.

They voted 134 to 50 in favour of Maureen Colquhoun's controversial Protection of Prostitutes Bill, despite a damning sermon from the Rev. Ian Paisley.

Helen, whose "refined" accent once lost her a job in a nightclub, said later: "As a working prostitute, I am absolutely thrilled with the decision.

Selma, of the English Collective of Prostitutes, added: "This is a victory for two million women in this country. It was surprising and heartening to see how many men on both sides of the House agreed with our campaign."

Several prostitutes were in the Commons' public gallery to hear the first reading of the Bill, which may never become law because of the growing queue for legislation. Roars of laughter and



Helen Buckingham at the Commons . . . "I am absolutely thrilled"

by DAVID BUCHAN
Political Editor

disapproval greeted Mr. Paisley as he unleashed his wrath on the evils of vice.

"I am standing for the sanctity of womenfolk," he told M.P.s.

"The standards that have made this nation great and have protected its womenfolk in the past

are now in serious jeopardy.

"I want to give some warnings in the wake of permissive society. There what has been called the has grown up a moral delinquency that has affected every part of our society."

As he ended with the biblical text: "Her ways are the way of death," Labour M.P. Russ Kerr yelled "Hallelujah."

Threat

There were shouts from the public gallery and some women were led out.

Several high-ranking politicians and churchmen may also have breathed a sigh of relief . . .

The prostitutes — who say top men are among their customers — had threatened to name names if the vote went the other way.



Daily Mail, Wednesday, March 7, 1979

Therapeutic

PARLIAMENT BY
**ANDREW
ALEXANDER**



THE sharply improved attendance in the Commons yesterday was, no doubt, due to the conscientious desire of MPs to see if the Prime Minister would give anything away at Question Time on the pressing issue of devolution.

On the other hand, of course, we had to bear in mind that the rise in attendance might conceivably be due to the fact that Mrs or Ms or M/s Maureen Colquhoun, Labour MP for Northampton North, was due to ask leave, under the 10-minute rule, to bring in her Protection of Prostitutes Bill. And sex, it is said, fascinates MPs even more than devolution.

Besides, in a threat more galvanising than anything yet thought up in the Whips office, London prostitutes had threatened to reveal the names of their MP clients if the Bill did not get on its way.

In the public gallery of course there were various members of the oldest profession in the world, come to see the second oldest profession at work.

We scanned the public gallery keenly. Over there in that corner, perhaps? But no, that of course was the wife of — MP.

What about that prosperous-looking young woman further along with that mercenary air? Ah, no, that of course was the mistress of the Member for —

One's attention was diverted at that point to the floor of the House where Ms Colquhoun was now on her feet.

Ms Colquhoun, a small, cheerful dumpling of a woman, put an argument which was simple enough. The present law enabled the label common prostitute to be permanently attached to a woman on the minimum of evidence and without even the proof that she was causing a nuisance. Moreover, by declaring that more than two prostitutes living together constituted a brothel, the law made such women dependent on pimps.

IF the main theme of her speech contained some sensible matter, she also, inevitably, managed to drag in a certain amount of sociological jargon about deprivation and the class war.

She looked forward, she said, to the day when the laws on prostitution were abolished. Until then she wanted the changes she outlined, for a profession which she insisted performed a valuable therapeutic function.

It was when she was part way through her speech that one realised that the attention of many MPs was not on her at all but on the gallery. They too were playing the game of trying to recognise the prostitutes. Or, who knows, they might even have been looking nervously for familiar faces.

When Ms Colquhoun sat down, up loomed the figure of the Rev. Ian Paisley, Unionist MP for North Antrim. 'Aha,' cried MPs, scenting fire and brimstone.

But Mr Paisley's speech was in fact lousy. It was sheer evangelical pulpity at its worst. He had prepared just about one heading and he simply got up in the expectation that the spirit would move him.

That approach might work in a fundamentalist chapel, where votes are not taken after sermons and where barracking is not permitted. But in the Commons it was worse than useless. The flesh was willing (Mr Paisley made a lot of noise) but the spirit was weak (he kept repeating himself).

Unfelicitous

Thus, amid growing scorn from other MPs, mainly Labour, we heard vague calls from him to protect the 'sanctity of women'. MPs were also invited to remember their mothers. And the joys of family life.

If the measure went through, he boomed in an unfelicitous phrase, it would mean 'the green light' for some people. The House roared with laughter; even Mr Paisley managed to grin.

After ten minutes of vague warnings about moral decay, Mr Paisley quoted from the Bible about coming to judgment — always a useful text for elected politicians to remember — and sat down.

'Hallelujah!' jeered a Labour MP. The Speaker then called a division. It was at that point that the moment we had all been waiting for arrived. Several groups of prostitutes and others in the gallery, evidently not well informed on parliamentary procedure, broke into applause in the apparent belief that this meant the measure had gone through.

There were some uneasy confrontations between the attendants and the ladies which looked at one point like turning rough. But peace eventually prevailed.

And down below the voting went on, with the motion eventually passing comfortably. The Bill will get nowhere due to lack of parliamentary time. However, the gesture had been made.



DAILY MAIL
8 MARCH '79.
BRITAIN

From Panthers to Parliament ...

Wilmette Brown is American, black and lesbian. Right now she thinks our British House of Commons is wonderful.

Not that Wilmette Brown is overly enamoured of any great political institution, unless it's her own Wages Due Lesbians, Black Women for Wages for Housework - or the English Collective of Prostitutes and its sister organizations.

The wonderful thing about the Commons is that it contains Maureen Colquhoun and has just given her permission to present a special Bill tailored to the demands of English prostitutes. That's something Ms Brown is very keen on, to put it mildly.

She flew into London to lend American support and solidarity to the English prostitutes' campaign. She spoke at the eve-of-debate public meeting in the House of Commons Grand Committee Room and since then has been helping her British colleagues organize, organize, organize.

Rallying support now for the English prostitutes is a prime task - for it could be another breakthrough in the international and multi-faceted campaign which has absorbed Wilmette Brown's thoughts, efforts and considerable abilities since the time she left the Black Panther Party in 1969 because it was too male-dominated and sexist.

Hand in hand

The break meant she could assert herself as a black lesbian and work through the black movement to benefit her black sisters, lesbian or otherwise. She soon found that included prostitutes too - and in turn that has led to participating in a broad-fronted alliance which spans all kinds of minorities in America, Europe and Africa.

Sexual and racial oppression go hand in hand with economic exploitation, she says - and the current upsurge in militant prostitutes' organizations all over the world highlights this.

It is something Wilmette Brown has believed from the beginning. When she first began to come out in New York at the age of 19 in 1966 - she's 32 now - there were always

hookers in the gay bars.

"It seemed perfectly natural that it be that way," she said. "I always thought that lesbians and hookers were two backs of a coin in terms of struggling against the way our relationships with men are set up.

"One woman is saying 'No, I don't want to sleep with men' and the other is saying 'If I'm going to have sex with men I want to be paid for it.'

"Black women, because we have the least amount of power in society generally, are the least able to come out and organize explicitly as prostitutes. We have a large number of black women working as prostitutes, either as their only job or as part-timers when the rent or gas bill is due.

"And there are plenty of black lesbian prostitutes, so it's not like bringing together some kind of abstract issue. Very often those three things are together in the same woman."

Wages

Wilmette was in at the beginning of the Wages For Housework Campaign around 1975, which gave rise to Wages Due Lesbians on both sides of the Atlantic and of Black Women for Wages for Housework, which has been her main concern in New York.

For the last few years she has been working increasingly closely with the various prostitute organizations in the States, such as Coyote and Puma. Her links with American prostitutes' leader Margot St James are strong - one of the reasons she came to London for the House of Commons meeting was to bring a copy of the film on Margot and the American hookers, *Hard Work*.

"Margot has been so valuable and strong. She has said she's no longer working as a prostitute and by making herself public she has been able to speak out effectively on behalf of prostitute women, absolutely invaluable.

"I'm doing the same kind of work in relation to black women who are prostitutes. I can come out and say I'm a lesbian and I'm black and I'm in contact with prostitute women but I'm not a prostitute myself. It's a big power for black prostitute



Wilmette Brown - 'Lesbians and hookers are two backs of one coin.'

...the travels of Wilmette Brown

women who can't speak out publicly themselves."

Wilmette now works "pretty well full-time" for the movement. At first she funded herself - by using unemployment benefit. "I'm sure that's not the way the State intended the benefit to be used, but it gave me the time to do the work, even though it meant living very close to the ground..."

Trade-off

Now after 18 months, she doesn't have to rely on the dole to keep her going. Fees from speaking engagements at universities and colleges all over the States help. "You just have to choose your priorities, trade off your time against your money and stretch them both."

Efficient use of time, money and all available resources are the hallmarks of the Wages for Housework international collective, say its members. In London, a great deal of the work for the Wages for Housework Campaign, Wages Due Lesbians, the English Collective of Prostitutes and PLAN (Prostitution Laws Are Nonsense) is carried out from the licensed squat in North London in which we met. It's another way of cutting overheads.

The prostitute question challenges conventional morality and traditional double standards, says Wilmette. "It also challenges the economic basis of the system, the whole discrimination against women, against black people and against gays."

Even in the feminist and gay movements there is a lot of prejudice and hypocrisy towards

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Photograph: Bob Workman, Gay News

...the travels of Wilmette

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prostitute women, says Wilmette, but at last it's on the wane. Prostitutes still find it hard to come out in women's groups, but like lesbians a few years ago, it's getting easier.

And as the issue comes more into the open, prostitutes can take a bigger part in throwing light on the nature of sexual, racial and economic oppression. "Visibility is very important."

Women who choose to live without men often find they are forced to live off them as prostitutes, she says. Without a man's wage, many women are forced to choose between forfeiting their education or prostitution - with all its legal risks. One of the campaign's platforms in America is to demand adequate educational grants for women. "The Ivory Tower of the academic world thinks it's above such things as lesbianism and prostitution. That's bullshit."

"The Ivory Tower is full of lesbians and prostitutes."

Outbursts

One of the most important aspects of the allied campaigns is to bring divided minorities together, says Wilmette, citing effective joint action in Philadelphia when a campaign on rape led to anti-lesbian outbursts from the press. The same paper ran foul of the Puerto Rican community at the same time.

And it also managed to attack

the city's male gays. But instead of dividing and ruling, the paper ran into a wall of solidarity so strong that now it has agreed to give space to the minorities' views - and pay for them.

The campaign for prostitutes' rights does not ignore the position of male prostitutes, despite its strong emphasis on feminist issues such as child custody (is prostitution - or lesbianism - evidence of unfitness for motherhood, for example).

Wilmette recalls that it was generally assumed in the black ghetto that if a man was gay, he was getting money out of it. "People had the attitude it was a job."

"That really points to the power relation between black gay men and white gay men and power relations among men generally. Just as men have a certain kind of power over women because they have more money, some men have power over other men."

Dirty, dirty

"In terms of organizing, men really do have to look to women and see their own needs by taking an example and leadership from what women have been saying and doing. I've seen that to be the case among black gay men that I know in terms of coming to grips with their situation in relation to white men."

"The whole association of sex

with dirt and blackness and the whole hang-up about sexuality which has ruled so much against gays is also working against prostitute women. You know, 'black is subversive, black is dirty, sex is dirty...' Somehow if you do it for free and heterosexually it's clean. But if you do it for money it's dirty..."

"The gay movement as well as the movement of prostitute women really challenges and cuts through all kinds of linked assumptions."

Wilmette is optimistic about the future, despite what she sees as worldwide oppression of blacks, women, prostitutes and gays, all linked socially, economically and morally.

Prostitutes in France, Kenya, Ethiopia, the States, England and elsewhere are organizing against injustice and hypocrisy, demanding their rights to live full lives and the money to do so.

"This explosion of positive action all over the world doesn't really surprise me, really. My own experience has been so, speeded up over the past 15 years."

"When I look at my situation as a black lesbian woman today compared to what it was 15 years ago, I have so much more power and so much more freedom, and the ability to speak about myself, who I am and what I really think."

"I feel like we're relentlessly going forward..."

GAY NEWS

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Maureen wins on 'game' Bill

LONDON: The term "common prostitute" will be abolished if a new Bill to be presented to Parliament by Maureen Colquhoun MP becomes law.

Early this month Ms Colquhoun won Commons permission to present her Bill, aimed at protecting prostitutes from exploitation and victimization.

"The present laws, which are over 20 years old, have not attacked prostitution," she told the Commons. "They have merely been an invitation to treat all prostitute women unjustly.

"They have attacked their civil liberties and lost them many human rights."

Brothel

Once a woman was labelled a common prostitute - which takes two cautions and a single conviction - she could not get away from it and was often forced back onto the streets.

Ms Colquhoun said the law classified more than two women living together as a brothel. "That law has forced prostitutes into the hands of organized crime."

Her amendments would ensure the law applied equally to men and to women.

Her speech was opposed by the Rev Ian Paisley. "I do so because I believe in the sanctity of our womenfolk," he said.

"This is only the beginning of a scheme to undermine what lies at the very heart of the moral fabric of our society."

Hoots

Mr Paisley raised derisive laughter in the House when he said the proposed Bill would be "a green light to many people."

Ms Colquhoun won the vote by 130 to 50. Eleven other MPs joined her in sponsoring the Bill, which will be given a Second Reading on May 18.

The previous evening Ms Colquhoun presided at a crowded public meeting in the House of Commons Grand Committee Room. It was organized jointly by the English Collective of Prostitutes, PLAN (Prostitution Laws Are Nonsense) and PROS (Prison Reform On Soliciting).

The meeting was backed by feminist and lesbian groups.

Among speakers were Helen Buckingham of PLAN, Selma James of the Wages for Housework Campaign on behalf of the English Collective of Prostitutes, and Wilmette Brown of Wages Due Lesbians.

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