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MONEY FOR PROSTITUTES IS MONEY FOR BLACK WOMEN

The Black Women for Wages for Housework group fully endorses the statement of Wages for Housework-San Francisco and the Los Angeles Wages for Housework Committee that AN ATTACK AGAINST PROSTITUTES IS AN ATTACK ON ALL WOMEN. We make this endorsement because the struggles of prostitute women against police harassment on the streets, against beatings, against fines and jails, against being declared "unfit mothers" in the courts and having our children taken away, against being treated like animals and outcasts, against pimps, racketeers, and businesses that profit from our misery, and, what is key to all these attacks, against not having any money to call our own, are struggles that we as Black women are all forced to make.

Prostitution is not a game, it is WORK--the work of serving men sexually to get the means to live. It is the work of being at the disposal of men's sexual needs and their fantasies of what a woman is supposed to look like, supposed to do, supposed to be. Prostitution is work that Black women were forced to do on the plantations and that we are forced to do today. It is our work that some men "make their living" on--we don't play at prostitution. We are forced to sell our sexual services on the streets, in hotels and massage parlours, or in our apartments--to take on the second job of prostitution--because we are not paid for the first job we all do as women, housework, the job of producing and taking care of everybody so that we all can work and make profits for the Man. Prostitution is one way that Black women are using increasingly to refuse our poverty and dependency on men which is brought about by not getting paid for our first job.

To turn back the rising tide of our refusal to be penniless, the Man makes sure that part of the job of being a prostitute is to be used as a sign to other women of where the bottom is--to be labeled a whore and an unfit mother, a Negress (which they used to call us), a loose woman. So that part of the work of being a prostitute is to be made an example of what it costs us to refuse the poverty the Man forces us to live in, to be a whip against other women to make sure that they strive always to be "respectable" though poor. And this means that part of the work of being a prostitute must also be living with not only the contempt but the envy of other women for having the little bit of money, the little bit of independence, that they don't have.

Who among us, as Black women, is above prostitution? Racism--our being forced as Black women always to have the least money, the least possibility of getting a job, the least access to school, the worst housing, and the first "opportunity" to be fired, fined, or jailed--already means that all Black women are suspected of being or expected to be prostitutes anyway! In a sweep arrest--when women who are just walking down the street can be arrested as prostitutes--who gets swept up first? It's always open season on Black women.

The terrorism that is practiced by the Man and by individual men against prostitute women is a terror we all know, a terror in the Black community that always falls first and heaviest on Black women. Whether it is the terror of being beaten in the bedroom or in a parked car, on the street or in the jail, or the terror of not being able to find a decent place to live where the police don't feel free to break down the door, it is terror rooted in our having to be at everyone's disposal because we don't have the money to be able to say NO, to be able to choose where and how we want to live and whom we want to sleep with.

A ghetto is built around prostitutes like the ghetto in which all Black women, in one way or another, are forced to live. It is a ghetto where we are branded, denied our legal rights, and isolated from other women. If we are on welfare, doing the work of taking care of our



children and ourselves that all women do, we are branded as cheats, as if we are getting something for nothing. If we are lesbians, refusing to sleep with men as a way to have some independence in our lives, we are branded as freaks. It is a ghetto where if we are not dependent on an individual man to protect us--whether it's a husband, a boyfriend, or a pimp--we are considered fair game. It is a ghetto where even if we don't work the streets as prostitutes, we are often forced to sell our sexual services in exchange for rent, for food, for gas and lights, and in exchange for being "left alone" by the police.

For us the ghetto has always been a place of few choices and no security, the place we are all trying to get the money to get out of. It means being at the mercy of butchers who pass themselves off as doctors and deny us any real health care. So that as black women--especially if we're on welfare--we're likely to be sterilized, as if we are prostitutes somehow "guilty" of polluting the environment with our children and our sex. The ghetto is the place where black teenage women, who have the highest unemployment rate of any group in the USA (as high as 60%), are unable to find any other kind of job but prostitution, and where they are being arrested and booked daily in droves as so-called "juvenile offenders." It is the place where increasingly Black women who are struggling against tuition and cutbacks in the colleges and universities are forced to supplement their income by prostitution in order to stay in school. It is the place where Black women who are not US citizens, who came to this country because they had no money back home and who are increasingly being fired from their low-paying jobs here, are forced to be on the run, to make a living by prostitution, or be deported. The ghetto is the place where we are forced to be anonymous, whether we take names to use "in the game" or not, because being Black women we're not supposed to have any past, present, or future, any struggle or victory we can call our own.

The ghetto is where Black women are divided against each other according to how we get our money, how much work we can refuse to do and still get by, and according to the money and power the men we're attached to have--just as prostitutes are divided according to whether they work on the street, in the massage parlour, or in a private apt., whether they service a dozen small customers or only one big one per night. The ghetto means that our "options" as Black women in the labor market run most often from the toilet; to the kitchen, to the sweatshop, to the switchboard, to the typing pool, and that to be a prostitute at this point in time might just seem to be a better deal. And whether we work as prostitutes or not, to get and keep any of these jobs always means keeping up appearances of what--as women in this society--we're supposed to be. Above all, the ghetto is wherever Black women are living from hand to mouth in constant crisis--and that is everywhere, whether we work as prostitutes or not.

And it is because all Black women, including prostitutes, are refusing to accept the Man's crisis as they way we are supposed to live that the attack on prostitute women is being stepped up right now. They are looking for ways to turn all of us around, to make us go back, to give up what we've won. Because all of us are using the money, the power, that we have already won to refuse to settle for any less and demand more. Just as Black women who get welfare--which is the first wage women have won in this country for the work we do in our homes--are resisting the welfare cuts and demanding more money, everywhere we are refusing to take only what the Man dictates we should have. We are refusing to settle for the sweatshop just because the Man tells us it's a "respectable" job: "respectable" or not, we demand cash money. We are refusing all the cuts, refusing to be pushed out of school, refusing to live only on welfare or



unemployment, refusing the closing of daycare centers and hospitals, refusing to force our children to eat less and go without. More and more we are refusing to be at the disposal of men--whether as lesbians by refusing sex with men altogether, or as straight women by demanding satisfaction for ourselves in our relationships, or as prostitutes by demanding to be paid for our sexual services. More and more we are refusing to be isolated and divided from other women as if there is something wrong with us for refusing to be poor--as demanding money for our work becomes the rule, not the exception.

The welfare struggle organized by Black women in the sixties and continuing today, like all the struggles by Black women against the Man in whatever form He takes--whether it's the telephone company, the gas company, the health care industry, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, the landlord, the transit authority, or the jip-joint businesses--are a tremendous source of power for prostitutes, for all women. Prostitutes are organizing a massive struggle around the world to demand their money: in Ethiopia in 1974, prostitutes began organizing a union to demand a basic rate of pay. In Australia, prostitutes demonstrated in front of the Anglican cathedral. And in June of '75, prostitutes went on strike all throughout France, occupying churches, rejecting the moral hypocrisy of the church just as Black women in this country have rejected its racist hypocrisy. By organizing themselves, by being public in their organizations whenever they can, prostitutes, like Black women, are saying by our actions that we have a story to tell, a story about the struggle we are making to be independent. In their statement in Lyons, the French prostitutes said: "We are women like all women."

The struggle of prostitutes is the same struggle Black women are making. It is the struggle to have the money--which is the power to be independent:

- to determine all the conditions of our lives;
- to determine whom we want to sleep with;
- to determine whether we have children or not and to be able to keep our children;
- to satisfy our own needs and to build a life for ourselves.

It is the struggle to be paid for all the work we do as women, including sexual work.

The Black Women for Wages for Housework group joins women throughout the world in saying:

NO to the attack on prostitutes in San Francisco.

NO to the attack on prostitutes in New York.

NO to the attack on prostitutes everywhere.

When prostitutes win, all women win. MONEY FOR PROSTITUTES IS MONEY FOR BLACK WOMEN.

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