

## **Appendix 1**

# **SEXUAL FREEDOM COALITION PROPOSAL TO THE HOME OFFICE FOR THE REFORM OF THE LAWS SURROUNDING PROSTITUTION**

**Original draft sent to the Home Office  
In January 2004, now updated November 2004**

The Sexual Freedom Coalition is delighted to learn that the Home Office will consider all proposals for the reform of prostitution law, no matter how radical. Home Office ministers have been reported to claim that nearly every model for dealing with prostitution has been tried in Britain over the last 700 years.

The Sexual Freedom Coalition proposes an entirely new model. It is both radical and visionary, extending beyond the problems of prostitution to provide much needed improvement to our nation's sexual healthcare.

• **LEGAL CHANGES:**

- 1) The decriminalization of prostitution, i.e. the removal of the laws restricting prostitutes from trading (not the kind of restrictive legalisation that could lead to a black market just as bad as the current one).
- 2) The laws that protect all workers from abuse and exploitation need to be strictly applied to protect sex workers.
- 3) A change in the drugs laws to provide free drugs on prescription and rehabilitation for addicts, plus the implementation of Treatment Testing Orders

- SAFER SEX EDUCATION AND SERVICES IN SAFER SEX CENTRES ATTACHED TO EXISTING HEALTH CENTRES

- 1) Providing free "no-stigma" sexual health care, safer sex education and support services for the whole community, including sex workers.
- 2) Offering respectful services for sex workers, including referral services, to eliminate crime, raise opportunities and standards, and reduce street prostitution.

We believe this project should be implemented as soon as possible, for two reasons. Firstly, much of the sex trade is run by gangsters and protection racketeers. Pressure also comes from increasing economic hardship, coupled with higher lifestyle expectations in many countries across the globe.

The second reason is that Britain has the worst sexual health care in Europe. Special clinics are under-funded and have long waiting lists. The public is reluctant to go for regular sexual health checks, despite the fact that many people have serial and/or multiple partners without using safer sex. This has resulted in a steep rise in sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. There is an urgent need for safer sex education and properly funded, easily accessible, "no-stigma" check-up and treatment centres.

## **OUR BACKGROUND**

The Sexual Freedom Coalition takes a responsible role to gain sexual freedom for all consenting adults. We contribute to political reform and debate on issues in the media.

The SFC, with Prostitution Pride and International Union of Sex Workers, advised the Green Party on their Political Policy Document on Prostitution and the Sex Industry (November 2000) to which the Home Office is referred <sup>1</sup> and <sup>2</sup>. Our expertise has been gathered from two decades of research, attending international conferences, looking at systems in place around the world, and listening to prostitutes, clients and lawyers.

The International Union of Sex Workers is now affiliated to the GMB trade union, to improve the legal status of sex workers.

## **POLITICAL, LEGAL and OTHER SUPPORT**

The Green Party supports the decriminalization of prostitution, and much of what is contained in this proposal <sup>4</sup>. MPs from other political parties have supported our position, for example Edwina Currie

(Con), Teresa Gorman (Con) and Evans Harris (Lib).

We gratefully thank solicitor John Blandford, Britain's leading lawyer to the sex work trade, for his expertise.

Our proposals have also received support and expertise from the Outsiders Trust<sup>3</sup>, advising on the sexual needs of people with disabilities.

### **DECRIMINALISATION**

It has been proven throughout history that men and women who enter this industry of their own volition, are free spirits, choosing the profession because of its potential, not just for money making but also for human interaction, flexible hours, and opportunity to be autonomous. That is why it is so hard on sex workers, whether they call themselves prostitutes, call girls, rent boys, masseurs or masseuses, escorts, surrogates, working girls or boys, to have their profession discriminated against, and more tightly controlled by the state than any other profession.

The answer to many of the problems surrounding prostitution is setting these workers free, i.e. decriminalisation, as has been proved in Sydney, Australia and New Zealand.

The proposals offered in this document are forward-thinking and require a turn-around in attitude. They provide a framework within which the sex trade can operate safely, alongside other sexual services. In other words, prostitution should be respected just like any other profession.

### **RESPECT**

It is our view that sex workers need to be treated with care and sensitivity, because their work is highly personal. They are, after all, offering access to their bodies and intimacy to strangers.

The SFC established in its Prostitution Pride Campaign that good sex workers provide much more than sexual relief and pleasure to clients – there is just as much informal counseling, mothering, skin contact and reassurance. We learned too, that clients invariably act in a supportive way when they find themselves in the company of a frightened and vulnerable young novice who is finding the work difficult. It is common for a prostitute to marry a client. Sex work is not only about sex, and its activities should not have to be conducted in an environment of furtiveness, discrimination and illegality.

Britain, however, denies its sex workers acceptable working conditions, lawful tenancies, advertising and recognition.

## **THE CURRENT SITUATION**

Recent initiatives have failed, including

- licensing massage parlours and saunas
- setting up unofficial tolerance zones in some cities but not others, depending on the whim of the local police chief and/or local authority
- prosecuting kerb crawlers

Current laws are confusing and conflicting. The Provisions of the London Local Authority Act 1991 allows the licensing of establishments for massage and special treatment, but Lambeth Council were unaware of this when it prosecuted the "Streatham Sauna".

British laws are also unfair. The National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham is served by local licensed massage parlours – essential for attracting international exhibitions. Why should foreign businessmen be allowed access to sex workers, when a British male in his car, searching for a sex worker in the only place he knows he might find one, risks losing his wife and his job by being prosecuted and having his details published in the local newspaper? The South London Press regularly names and shames convicted kerb crawlers.

We do not agree with the idea that selling sex is unacceptable - many people hire out their bodies in different kinds of ways to earn a living. However, we agree that people should not feel forced to sell sex in order to support a drug habit, fund their pimp or feed their children. While we cannot alleviate the latter, helping sex workers out of drug habits and away from pimps is an important function of our scheme.

Drug addiction and crime are social problems, which sometimes *use* prostitution as a remedy, rather than the other way round. The three topics need to be dealt with separately. All drug addicts are not prostitutes and most prostitutes are not drug addicts.

The SFC does not want to see Britain repeat the mistake made in Holland, where, since legalisation, clients now choose the *illegal* establishments because licensing regulations make the legal brothels more expensive to run, and charges are higher. Brothels must be safe, but sex workers should be allowed to work from residential premises without paying a licence fee and installing fire exits and the like.

## **CARE IN THE INDUSTRY**

Chad Varah, Companion of Honour, CBE, MA, DSc, founder of The Samaritans, set up a "Brenda" service for men who make "dirty" phone calls. This service was part of The Samaritans and offered free sympathetic phone-line support from women to *help* these men, and

wean them off their habit. The problem with some commercial sex services is that they feed off guilt, selling unsatisfying thrills which soon lead to a craving for another "fix".

With less criminality involved, less stigma, and hopefully fewer sex workers working in financial desperation and fear, the profession can take a more responsible role.

### **REDUCING THE NEED**

Our scheme reaches out to other members of society, to eventually reduce the enormous need for sex work that currently exists (resulting from guilt and shame and lack of communication between couples) to a level where the trade will need to employ only those who passionately want to do this very special work.

Prostitution is an answer to problems, not a problem itself. Many disabled and older people are sexually shunned. 40% of British marriages end in divorce. Asian men undergo arranged marriages. These problems cause men to resort to prostitution.

### **PROPOSED SERVICE**

Our proposal involves the setting up of local Safer Sex Centres, within existing holistic Health Centres, providing support, education and contacts. It supports sex workers however they work, be it alone, together, for agencies, in night clubs, or in brothels.

We propose that the service employs trained sex professionals. Britain has a large pool of experts who have been trained in sex therapy (most are members of the British Association for Sexual and Relationship Therapy).

What this service is to be called is very important, using care to avoid attracting overwhelming criticism of public spending on sex.

The service could be funded by the Department of Health. The Department of Health are stepping up the funding of sexual health, as a response to current sexually transmitted epidemics, and this scheme fits in perfectly. Other aspects of sex work coming could come under the control of the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Culture.

The scheme will not work if it suffers from the same social stigma as GU clinics and today's sex industry. Dr Sarah Gill of the GU clinic at St Mary's, Paddington, complains that people are afraid to be seen there, and will only take the step of getting tested if they have a serious problem. Stigma of visiting the centre can be reduced by

good public relations and providing a sex positive, up-beat welcoming environment.

Once our proposal has proved to work well, and gained the confidence of the public and the sex trade, there might be an option to get sponsorship and introduce charges to make the Centres self-financing.

### **THE SERVICE PROVIDES:-**

- wheelchair accessible, disability friendly, pansexual services for sex workers, clients and the public
- a comfortable, un-threatening, homely atmosphere
- free or subsidised condoms with attractive safer sex education leaflets
- **services specifically for sex workers:-**
  - friendly support groups, training, drop-in provisions with free condoms, up-to-date warnings on dangerous/difficult clients, and social get-togethers
  - a register for sex workers and establishments in the area, and free referrals. This is to promote professionalism and, in turn, offer alternatives to sex workers working in the street and places where they are unhappy
  - help, and advice on re-training, for sex workers who wish to leave the industry
  - respectful support for victims of coercive and abusive trafficking
  - support in coming off drug habits and leaving pimps
  - advice on negotiating working conditions and pay with employers and clients
  - advice on paying tax, pension provision, and investment
  - legal support so that people who coerce and abuse sex workers get prosecuted
  - support on health and safety issues if working from home, in a flat or brothel
  - good practice guidelines for employers, including a Child Protection Policy
  - support for underage people who have been caught working in the sex trade

- other outreach services as required, including a mediation service for problems which occur in the street
- contact with the police to clamp down on coercive and abusive trafficking and underage brothels

### **Support for Clients:**

- specialist support for clients who use sex workers because they cannot find a partner, with social skills training, and assertiveness training and help in negotiating their needs with people who are inhibit them e.g. parents or care workers

### **Services for the General Public:**

- well-woman and well-man clinics, contraception and safe sex advice, with GU testing and counselling. This environment must be more conducive for the public to come for health checks, than clinics attached to hospitals
- an intense safer sex education programme
- sex therapy, drug and alcohol counselling
- structured surrogate services for people with disabilities and singles with sexual problems
- support for people who are continually rejected and cannot find a partner but pay for sexual services
- telephone helpline, including a "Brenda" service for people who are addicted to telephone sex
- confidential support for individuals worried about their sexual desires
- safer sex workshops offered to companies and other organisations, which will become incorporated into standard health and safety procedures
- trained sex educators visiting schools, including schools for children with special needs
- free workshops and education for vulnerable people, such as children, inexperienced disabled people, people with learning difficulties, and older people, to protect them from sexual exploitation and abuse
- special sex education for young visually impaired, blind and deaf-blind people

- networking to unearth local child abusers and rapists (who often pick on prostitutes as easy targets), offering a legal structure to deal with them
- easily affordable workshops and classes on sexuality, techniques, topics such as sex and religion, marital difficulties, etc, some of which could be run by sex workers
- help in finding partners, with contacts for local emotionally isolated people and relevant training for people who feel helpless and depressed
- supervision for educators, counsellors and therapists

- **above services online**

Good websites offering reassurance, the opportunity to access information and advice from home, and encouraging people to come to the centre.

## **ECONOMIC INCENTIVES FOR THE GOVERNMENT**

- less crime and police time
- less drug addiction, therefore a better economic contribution from an otherwise capable section of society
- increased revenue from taxation
- less medical costs of treating sexually transmitted diseases and people with AIDS
- more healthy people available for work
- a sexually enlightened society is a healthy society and more productive

## **PILOT SCHEMES**

We don't expect that the Home Office will leap into such a liberal programme without a period of trial and research. We have the following suggestion.

South London has historic traditions of providing brothels "outside the city walls" since medieval times. Southwark was famous for its 'stews' (brothels owned by the Bishop of Winchester). It would be an ideal place for a pilot scheme. This pilot scheme comes with the support of Shane Collins, Green Party Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Lambeth and Tim Summers, Green Party Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Vauxhall.

Croydon might be a good second location for a pilot scheme, where the local paper is seeking readers' views on "liberalising" laws relating to sex workers. The third and fourth pilots could be in Birmingham and in a city in the North of England.

We thank the Home Office for inviting contributions, and would be happy to participate in further consultation, if invited.

Dr Tuppy Owens  
20<sup>th</sup> January 2004 (amended 24<sup>th</sup> November 2004)

- 1) <http://www.sfc.org.uk/policy>
- 2) <http://www.outsiders.org.uk>
- 3) <http://www.greenparty.org.uk/policy/mfss/respinsi>
- 4) <http://www.sfc.org.uk/docs/default.htm>