



SWAC ATTACKS !

Fourth Issue

**SEX WORK
AUTONOMOUS
COMMITTEE**

SWAC Attacks!

Fourth Issue

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Taking Back our Humanity: a Question of Strategy!

By Adore Goldman,

Translated by Tess McCrea



Faced with the Trudeau government's broken promises to decriminalize sex work in its second term, the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform (the Alliance) launched a constitutional challenge to laws criminalizing sex work in March 2021. The coalition, which brings together 25 sex worker (SWer) organizations and allies across the country, has exhausted other avenues: lobbying political parties and making media appearances has proved not to be enough. The Alliance, along with six other plaintiffs, claims that the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* violates the fundamental human rights of SWers under the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.¹

It must be said that at the time of the lawsuit, the ground seemed ripe for legal change. In the winter of 2020, an Ontario Superior Court judge declared certain provisions of the law

on prostitution to be unconstitutional.² Two owners of an escort agency, who had been charged with pimping, succeeded in having these laws recognized as impeding the right to safety of SWers. In the summer of 2023, a SWer won her case against a client who refused to pay her in Nova Scotia Small Claims Court.³ Adjudicator Darrell Pink handed down a landmark decision, which described the plaintiff's work as "legal". Internationally, the European Court of Human Rights has just agreed to hear the case of 261 SWers against the French government. The plaintiffs similarly argue that the criminalization of clients and third parties hinders their human rights.⁴

However, in September 2023, almost a year after arguing before the Ontario Superior Court, the Alliance was disappointed by the outcome: Justice Goldstein ruled that the

law was constitutional, and that decriminalization might be a better legal model, but that it was ultimately for Parliament to decide, not the judiciary. In the face of this decision, Jenn Clamen, coordinator for the Alliance, declared that SWers across Canada were “extremely devastated” by the ruling, finding it “not only insulting, but ignorant”.⁵ Monica Forrester, plaintiff in the case, added that “Indigenous, Black, migrant and trans sex workers bear the brunt of the criminalization of sex work, as we are communities that are already excessively policed and under-protected”. The Alliance plans to appeal the decision.

We would, however, like to express some reservations about the Alliance's strategy of legal challenge. Relying on the courts to arbitrate our political conflicts is a risky gamble. We believe that there are other avenues that have not yet been explored to achieve the decriminalization of sex work in Canada. We need to exert real power if we want to achieve our goals and concretely improve our working and living conditions. Our proposition goes as follows: by organizing into unions, it's possible to organize for decriminalization on a much more lasting and powerful basis!

“Judgement does not come suddenly; the proceedings gradually merge into the judgement.”

- The Trial, Franz Kafka

Before elaborating on our perspectives on this fight, we first want to substantiate our critique of legal challenges as a strategy.

Our first criticism concerns the complexity of the judicial system, and our inability to impose our strategies in this arena. For most of us, the courts are intimidating and impenetrable. We don't speak their language. We don't have the tools to make our stories and political demands heard. So we need lawyers as interpreters. They are the ones who plead our cause. The words of SWers thus become mere testimony. And for us SWers who don't work in Alliance-member organizations, or who are not plaintiffs, we are completely deprived of any strategic power in the matter. It's also disempowering to have to transform the language of political organization into the language of the courts. The opponent's control of words gives him great power; we find ourselves trapped in this Kafkaesque bureaucratic absurdity.

In this case, even before the trial began, compromises had to be made to fit into the judicial framework. For example, it is not possible to attack both criminal and immigration law at the same time. Yet it is under the latter that SWers who do not have permanent residency are deported. The strategy has been to attack the criminal law first, then turn towards the immigration law. In our view, this two-stage strategy is a strategic error. In New Zealand,

the first country to decriminalize sex work, migrant sex workers who are not permanent residents are still unable to work legally, twenty years after decriminalization. It is convenient for the government to claim that it has decriminalized sex work while continuing to use arguments against sex trafficking. In other words, repression is shifted entirely onto migrant sex workers. Yet we know that difficulties immigrating through regular channels lead people to turn to third parties to cross borders and find jobs in Western countries, whether in the sex industry or elsewhere.

Our second criticism is that resorting to the courts also leaves us without an organized SWer movement capable of exerting power against the government. Because even in the event of a court victory, the bill will still need to be written. In 2014, after the Bedford ruling that declared the sex work law unconstitutional, the Conservative government introduced the current model that criminalizes clients and third parties. It's not impossible that by the time of the Supreme Court ruling, a Conservative government will be in place again. In any case, a strong and organized movement, not limited to employees of Alliance-member organizations, will be necessary to ensure that there are no shortcomings in the new law; lobbying political parties and making media appearances is not enough.

It would be foolish to think we can do everything without picking our battles. Resorting to the legal system is a costly business: the lawyers, our interpreters, don't work for free. Litigation gobbles up an impressive amount of resources in terms of money and human labor. For example, the organization Stella spent \$120,105 on legal fees in 2023, and \$173,552 in 2022.⁶ Legal fees are their second-largest budget item after salaries and benefits. These resources are not being put into mobilizing and self-organizing SWers for political change and better working conditions.

Even with a law decriminalizing sex work in its entirety, many of us would still be facing unjust working conditions, powerless before our employers. It is direct participation in organizing resistance that educates us and makes us stronger. On this point, we agree with Justice Goldstein when he says that it's not up to the courts to rule; it's in the political arena that our fight must be waged. To limit ourselves to the legal arena is a mistake.

By centering the whole battle around a change of legal model, the SWer movement has easily been labeled a liberal movement by abolitionists and some of the left. While some are in bad faith, with concerns centered on a moralistic vision of sexuality, part of the opposition to decriminalization stems from doubts about the ability of sex workers to exercise control over their workplace for themselves. By



organizing in our workplaces while they are still illegal, we are proving to our opponents the power of our movement and its capacity for self-defense without relying on the state's power. We believe that the demonstration of this organization could be enough to force the state to decriminalize sex work.

"Stick Together ladies! Your unity is all you have... and all you need!"

- Exotic Dancers Union at San Francisco's Lusty Lady Theater⁷

As Triple-X Worker's Association of BC pointed out, Goldstein clarifies the law with respect to the right of SWers to unionize. The judge is unequivocal on the subject: "As I have already emphasized, properly interpreted, PCEPA does not prevent sex workers

from forming an association or a collective where it is not a commercial enterprise".⁸ So it would be possible for SWers to organize ourselves into a union!

One of the main objections to the union strategy is that it requires SWers to put themselves on the line in the workplace in an illegal context. It is impossible to deny this risk. But we must remember the context in which the first trade union movement was born in the 19th century.

At that time, Capital's grip on the working day was almost total; it was not uncommon for regular shifts to exceed 12 hours. There are known examples of workers dying of fatigue at work. Child labor was common. In this context,

the only thing that put a stop to the capitalists' greed was the mobilization of workers to limit the working day, at a time when the right to unionization did not exist in any industry. SWers share with the workers of the nineteenth century the almost total absence of rights. Our workplaces are completely deregulated. And yet, even in such a context, organization springs up, and we are capable of gathering power. But to do that, we have to meet up, get up, come together... Organize!

Even in legal environments such as strip clubs, we are unable to enforce working conditions that we consider acceptable, which proves that criminalization is not the only obstacle to better working conditions. Organizing is essential to obtaining rights. This year, strippers

at the Star Garden in Los Angeles succeeded in making their workplace the first (and only) unionized strip club in the United States since the closure of the Lusty Lady. A few days later, the dancers at the Magic Tavern in Portland also launched a petition to unionize. At an event organized by SWAC, Reagan - a Star Garden stripper who participated in the strike and took part in the unionization campaign - said that it all started in the dressing rooms. It was while talking to their colleagues that the dancers decided they'd had enough of their dangerous working conditions! They went to their boss with a petition. In response, he fired two of the dancers. So they decided to go on strike. After several months of resistance, the fired employees got their jobs back, and the Star Garden has now reopened with unionized



employees who have more control over their working conditions.

The unionization strategy also echoes the mobilizations of the Argentinean and Indian SWers. In Argentina, SWers have a union, the *Asociación de mujeres meretrices de Argentina* (AMMAR). AMMAR is part of a national confederation, the *Central de Trabajadores Argentinos*, which brings together traditional trade unions as well as groups of unemployed workers, tenants and Indigenous groups.⁹ AMMAR has a number of demands, including decriminalization, an end to police harassment and access to the same rights as all workers, such as unemployment benefits and pensions. The union has succeeded on numerous occasions in having several local laws criminalizing SWers lifted.¹⁰

In India as well, it is the organization of SWers that has enabled them to establish a balance of power in the face of the state and the police. Prabha Kotiswaran, a lawyer and researcher, reports that in the 2000s, SWers working at the bus stations of Trirupati succeeded in imposing de facto decriminalization through their organization in the face of the forces of law and order.¹¹ Kotiswaran also notes that in Calcutta, the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC), a SWer organization with 60,000 members is:

fostering an active political culture of protest against abusive customers,

landlords, and brothel keepers. [...] despite a highly abusive anti-sex work criminal law, an organization of sex workers has taken root to achieve the results of labor laws that the DMSC is so keen to have applied formally to the sex industry.¹²

These tactics enabled SWers to self-regulate in this context rather than resorting to the police, who were often no help to them, and even detrimental. These examples show that beyond legal reforms, self-organization is even more important to improving our working and living conditions.

Organizing into a union would allow us to self-organize in our workplaces and improve our working conditions, but it is also possible that this strategy could lead to decriminalization. Firstly, by organizing, we are proving that it is possible to ensure our safety by our own means, without recourse to the police. Secondly, when labor disputes arise, the State will be forced to take a stand. Confrontations between SWers and their bosses are likely to lead to conflicts that the government will be forced to resolve, probably by decriminalizing our work and applying the Labor Code to our workplaces. Of course, this legal mechanism is not a miracle pill, and respect for our rights at work will always require mobilization. But it would certainly give us some leverage and legitimacy. After all, it is always workers' resistance that provokes economic and political restructuring.

A Battle for our Humanity

Legal challenges such as the ongoing one are based on the following premise: everyone has fundamental rights guaranteed by the state. Where there is a shortfall, the judiciary system is responsible for rectifying the situation. This human rights thesis postulates that there is an intrinsic humanity for all, the denial of which is merely an error to be corrected in an otherwise functional system.

This basic premise is a liberal fiction: in our class-based society, the stranglehold of patriarchal and race-based capitalism denies the humanity of a large part of the population. Furthermore, according to this ideology, only citizens enjoy

these fundamental rights; migrants are in no way guaranteed access to them. As Leopoldina Fortunati puts it, “[i]t is only by devaluing them, by reducing [the individual] to a thing of no intrinsic value, that capitalism succeeds in forcing them to define themselves as labor power, to sell their labor capacity in order to obtain an exchange value”.¹³

If the state guarantees individuals theoretical equality, it is to maintain the illusion that they are free to sell their labor. Thus, according to Lucien Sève, “the social exteriority of the human world in relation to individuals entails, in any class society, its eventual inaccessibility to the majority - humanity has so far progressed through a massive atrophy



of individualities”.¹⁴ There is a huge gap between the rights that the State “guarantees” us and those that we actually benefit from. Sève invites us to nurture an “ambition for radical emancipation: to form a new world where everyone can [humanize] themselves without impediment”.¹⁵ Bringing our humanity up to date therefore involves collective resistance against the denial of our humanity. It is by joining forces with our fellow workers that we can truly fight against the denial of our rights.

We cannot count on the State to enforce them. Besides, legal changes are never an eternal guarantee. It’s easy to imagine a post-PCEPA¹⁶ future where cities have re-criminalized street-based sex work, where the police continue to harass the most visible sex workers - particularly trans and racialized sex workers - and where migrant sex workers become the focus of the fight against sex trafficking. It is also very plausible to imagine that the injustices in our workplaces will persist and that state institutions will still be conspicuously absent when it comes time to seek justice.

Clearly, the right to our humanity is something we must seize by uniting. We could, for example, organize to block the deportation of our colleagues, to retaliate against police officers who abuse their power, or to have unjust regulations lifted from our workplaces.

We will no longer allow ourselves to be humiliated, whether by our bosses, the courts or the State! To paraphrase James Baldwin, humanity is not something that is given to us, humanity is something that is taken! And it's high time SWers take it!



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¹ The plaintiffs contend that the law violates SWers’ rights to safety, liberty, personal and sexual autonomy, life, equality, freedom of expression and freedom of association. In October 2022, the case was heard before the Ontario Superior Court. Find out more about the case:

Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform. (2022). *CASWLR vs. Canada. Our Charter Challenge to Sex Work-Specific Criminal Offences*, from <https://tinyurl.com/infosheeteng>

- ² Jean-Philippe Nadeau. (2020). *Des dispositions de la loi fédérale sur la prostitution sont anticonstitutionnelles*, from <https://tinyurl.com/radiocanfantasyworldescort>
- ³ Radio-Canada. (2023). *Travail du sexe: un jugement rare contre une loi qualifiée d'«hypocrite»*, from <https://tinyurl.com/radiocanpetitescreances>
- ⁴ Human Rights Watch. (2023). *Europe: Pivotal Moment for Sex Worker Rights*, from <https://tinyurl.com/hrweuropeancourt>
- ⁵ Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform. (2023). *Media Release: Sex workers are deeply disappointed with the Ontario Superior Court decision dismissing systemic harms experienced*, from <https://tinyurl.com/caswlrpressrelease>
- ⁶ Stella, L'amie de Maimie. (2023). "États des résultats pour l'exercice terminé le 31 mars 2023", *États financiers pour l'exercice terminé le 31 mars 2023*, p. 1.
- ⁷ The Lusty Lady was a peep-show in San Francisco where the workers led a campaign to unionize, which they won in 1997. At the time, it was the first unionized club in the United States. To find out more about this campaign, see the film *Live Nude Girls Unite!* (2000) by Julia Querry, a former dancer at the Lusty Lady, which does a great job of explaining the ins and outs of this movement.
- ⁸ Triple-X Worker's Solidarity Association of B.C. (2023). *In Canada the Government Does Have Business in the Bedrooms of the Nation Ontario ruling in constitutional challenge of Canada's sex work laws disappoints but offers clarity on the sale of sex and freedom of association*, from <https://tinyurl.com/triplexpressrelease>
- ⁹ Kate Hardy. (2010). "Incorporating Sex Workers into the Argentine Labor Movement", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 77(01):89 - 108, from <https://tinyurl.com/ammrlabormouvement>
- ¹⁰ Amalia L. Cabezas. (2012). "Latin American and Caribbean Sex Workers: Gains and challenges in the movement", *Anti-trafficking Review*, from <https://tinyurl.com/latinamericancaribbeananswers>
- ¹¹ Prabha Kotiswaran. (2011). *Dangerous Sex, Invisible Labor: Sex Work and the Law in India*, Princeton University Press, p. 130.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p.248.
- ¹³ Translation from: "[c]e n'est qu'en le dévalorisant, en réduisant [l'individu] à une non-valeur, que le capital parvient à l'obliger à se définir comme force de travail, à vendre sa capacité de travail pour en obtenir une valeur d'échange." Leopoldina Fortunati. (2022). *Production et reproduction: l'apparente antithèse du mode de production capitaliste*, from <https://www.revue-ouvrage.org/production-et-reproduction/>
- ¹⁴ Translation from: "l'extériorité sociale du monde humain par rapport aux individus comporte en toute société de classe son éventuelle inaccessibilité pour le grand nombre - l'humanité jusqu'ici a progressé à travers une massive atrophie d'individualités." Laurent Prost. (2009). "Entretien avec Lucien Sève", *Le Philosophe*, no 32, from <https://tinyurl.com/philisophoیرهseve>
- ¹⁵ Translation from: "ambition d'une émancipation radicale: former un nouveau monde où chacun puisse s'[humaniser] sans entraves." *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*. The law that criminalizes sex work in Canada, and is being challenged in the current constitutional challenge.

Photos: MMC Photographie

Sandwich Blues

By Maxime Holliday,

Translated by Céleste Ivy

On February 20th, 2021, I got into my car to visit the escort agency closest to my home. I was done with the restaurant business and I needed more time to make music. But the rent of my 4 and a half wasn't going to pay for itself.



At the escort agency, the people responsible were two guys that vaguely seemed to be tweaking and the facilities were disgusting. I chatted with the girls there, smoking ciggies in the laundry room that doubled as their smoking room. The guys told me I could have started right now to try it if I wanted too but I didn't have a bra, only panties, to advertise myself to the clients, so I left.

Afterwards, I went to an erotic massage parlor.¹ There, I was greeted by a receptionist in a clean, nicely decorated lobby.

I immediately filled in the application form because it was clear that I was gonna be better off here than at the other spot. When you start out in the industry, you have to choose a working name. I wanted to take the name Jasmine because of *The BEEaUtiFuL PrIiinCEs\$*. Of course, there was already a girl working there with that name. So I made my first genderfuck affirmation by choosing a guy's name.

I also bought a beautiful gold watch to easily calculate the time of my sessions without having to look at the clock on the wall in front of the clients.



One of my long-time lovers stopped touching me when I told him I'd started to sell sexual services. I think he wanted to sound critical and cynical by telling me that I "had found my way" but it was still true.

**Whores are powerful witches,
whether they know it or not.**

In the staffroom, I meet girls with larger-than-life characters with whom I feel privileged to establish sorority-like bonds. I found a clan. The salon manager wears a scar across her face, a mark left there by her ex. She looks after her children and takes care of her salon and of "her girls" at the same time. She often cooks us small

meals and puts them in the staffroom's freezer for the cost of 5\$. The parlor is well-kept and she gives us a cut of the room rental that clients pay. At the end of our shift we just have to tip the receptionist. With the additional money of the extras, when I work during the day, I make an average of 500\$ per 7-hour shift.

When the salon had to close because of the pandemic and curfew, Nancy², a colleague about thirty years my senior took me under her wing to go work at the hotel with her. She had experience of these things. You have to know which hotel to go to so as not to be reported by the staff, which app to download to get an anonymous phone number and which sites to post your ads on. The thing is: it's also safer and less boring to work in pairs³. In the end, I only went for two days and didn't really like it. I found it too difficult to manage answering the calls and texts by myself, considering that a third of them came from guys who just wanted to waste our time and/or verbally assault us. In the parlors, the institutional facade and the receptionists spare us that.

All in all when the salon reopened a few weeks later, Nancy was no longer working there. I heard from colleagues that she had a fight with everyone and turned real paranoid. She thought I was an undercover cop because I hadn't stayed to work with her at the hotel.

I kinda understood why though. Compared to her, I was fucking straight edge. I never use on the job, I'm pretty much always chilling in my corner, working on my laptop and I obviously don't come from the same social background as Nancy. The girls laughed their heads off that she'd think that because I'd have been a pretty fucking weird cop and very dedicated, let's say. We had a good laugh about it, but I was a bit sour for real.

I live alone and I pay my rent, internet, hydro, gas, insurance, my car, my food, and my cat's food. I produce my own music. I exercise. I have time to invest in each of my priorities. I'm now in a healthy, dynamic romantic relationship with a wonderful person. I'm dating a rare pearl and on my hands are tattooed oysters. In the hollow of my palms, like a precious treasure, I often trace their name and those of our lovers.



Sometimes, I'm afraid that customers will be disgusted by my leg or armpit hair -which I don't shave- and turn aggressive. But I think often they don't even see it. And I also think that sometimes they find it beautiful. In any case, I wear my hair actively, a soft accessory to the revolution of our bodies that starts in the bedroom.

September 2021; following my move, I started to work in a new parlor in Montreal. The owner is completely fucked up. The customer traffic is fine. Here we have to do the laundry ourselves and pay a 10\$ fee per client to rent our room. Big girl from a small town switched games.

**“Working is whoring
Whoring is working”**

I wrote a letter to my mother to tell her about my work. We’ve always been super close and we had an excellent relationship. I thought it would bring us closer. That she would be proud to have a daughter who cared enough about the relationship to get over the fear and social stigma and share her secret. That she’d find it intense but would ask questions and trust me regardless. But her reaction was the worst-case scenario I could have imagined. She panicked. She asked me to stop right away by trying to send me cash. In fact, she was so unsettled that I suspect she or one of her close friends once had a traumatic experience related to sex work. Despite my patience and attempts to rectify the situation, she stopped hearing and seeing me. All that’s left is judgment and anguish. After a couple of months, she’s still as blocked as ever and I regret opening up because it’s excruciatingly painful to carry all the shame and hurt of my own mother. To feel that her support can be conditional. A difficult impact. I am weakened.

Once, I went with a friend to work two days in an extra club⁴ in the middle of nowhere. The men over there had mustaches and smelled of a little milk or manure. They were farmers, not very rich, and they would dress up as nicely as they could to see the visiting girls from Montreal. Raymond⁵ knew I would be there that week and brought me earrings as a gift but never wanted us to go to the room to buy my services. It seemed like he was just really happy that a new person came all the way there and he wanted to feel like a provider for a beautiful girl. I left there burnt out with 2000\$ and the bittersweet feeling of having had privileged access to the heart of a small, isolated, rural community, touching in a way as tragic as it was pathetic.



On November 26, 2021, I take the metro to a station I don’t know, to go do a shift at a downtown strip club. I think I’m pretty brave, and for good reason. It’s the first time in my life going

inside a strip club and it's to work. As usual in the industry, I learned how to do it right here and there, by watching others and with a few tips from a young girl super proud to show me what she knew. The boss was so aggressive and demeaning that when I left, at 3 am, I knew I'd never go back.

More than a year later, I met a girl who told me she once worked at this bar. And one night she was working and unable to move because she'd had drugs put in her drink, this same boss had ordered another dancer to take her out in the alley with all her stuff. The colleague in question refused and decided to take her to the hospital herself in her car. The boss fired both of them on the spot. The bar is Wanda's, so be careful babes.

**The sexual energy inside me
is an immutable fire that
requires only a few resources.
A fire that roars and heals.
I educate and curse. I cast
spells of all kinds.**

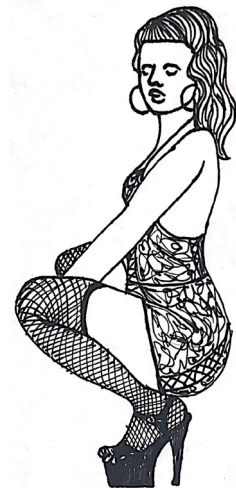
Since moving to Montreal, I've been involved in an autonomous militant committee run by and for sex workers. I find there solidarity, anger, love and intelligence. Courage, dignity and benevolence.

**I am a good witch and a bad
witch. Boy, make me a \$andwich.**

After learning from an activist book that, to avoid getting accused of "brothel-keeping", a landlord could decide to evict his tenant if he suspected her of being a sex worker, I felt super unsafe in my own home for a full week. I felt inferior and fragile. Imagining the loss of my home, my balcony on which I have my morning coffee, the little birds in the vine. Having to start all over again, alone and dispossessed. The worst possible scenario.

I'm gonna arrive pretty tight at the protest. I stopped to print my speech at the stationary shop. I'm gonna lead a protest for the first time in my life. We're gonna march to show that we exist and, above all, to shout that we want fucking rights. That we look out for one another.

We'll march and we'll dance and we'll scream, for us and especially for those whose lives are too fucked up to do all that.



These days when I go dancing it's in the suburbs. In Montreal, I find the bars too posh and it disgusts me. I have no willingness to play the luxury game and anyway, I don't have the casting it seems. I applied to two spots but the bosses aren't calling me back. Finally, I went straight to Cleo even though dances cost 10\$⁶ cause I can come & go whenever I want. I kinda see diversity in the staff so I suppose (I wish) that the management is less racist and fatphobic than elsewhere.

My best songs

for stripping :

M.I.A- Bad Girls

Ciara- Body Party

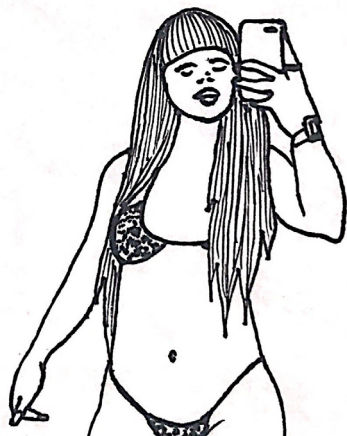
Troy Boy- Do you?

Rihanna- Sex with me

Beyoncé- Naughty girl

Future- Mask Off

Nathy Peluso- Delito



I left the parlor I'd been working at since my move because the boss was too toxic and it was starting to take too much out of me. Yannick Chicouane, if you're reading this, know that all your masseuses, past and present, hate you and are plotting to ruin you. You're a manipulative narcissistic pervert of the worst kind. A shitty pimp, a dangerous abuser. I curse you, and all the men who exploit women's sexual power to make yourselves rich. Fucking loser. Fucking coward. I'm listening to Lingua Ignota and lighting candles of doom in your direction. If I catch you, I'll eat you.

“I'm paid to lie to you
but I often
tell the truth.”

Jiz Lee

January 2023. I decided to go to school to become a sexologist. The first step was to take basic college courses that I hadn't done because I studied arts. I found a new parlor to work in. It was the only spot that was hiring when I was looking at this time of year. It's handjobs only. No fellatio, no penetration; no clients, no cash. I go mostly to study and see the receptionist I adore. If I'm lucky, I do one or two clients and walk out with 200\$ cash.



One night at the bar, a client ran off to avoid paying my colleague to whom he owed money. I tried to stop him by getting between him and the door so he slammed into me and I pulled a ligament in my knee. There was a bouncer. There were police. Bouncers and cops are useless. In this industry, you have no choice but to take the law into your own hands.

August 2023. I have the ruined knees of a summer in high heels, but plenty of cash saved in a little wooden box to start my university studies off on the right foot. I went to a cottage by myself for 4 days to recharge before school. I found it hard to stop working because sex work is like part of my

identity now. I wear the golden hoops Raymond gave me almost every day. I even let my mother wear them the other day when we took family pictures because she thought they were gorgeous.

When I got out of the lake earlier, I noticed that my watch had taken on water. You know, the beautiful watch I bought three years ago when I first started. The light still works but the numbers have completely disappeared from the screen. I wonder if I should take this as a sign that I need to take a break. Just enough time to find myself a new watch that will adorn my body to the height of all it has learned in the last three years.

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¹ For those who don't know, the difference between a massage parlor and an escort agency is that in a parlor, the girls don't move around. Also, when you work in an agency, the base price includes fellatio (and in the majority of agencies, in Montreal at least, they don't even hire you if you don't agree to perform your fellatios without a condom) and penetration. In massage parlors, the only thing that's automatically included in the service the client pays for at the reception desk is a massage and manual masturbation. Everything else is extra, at the girl's discretion.

² Not her real name. Not her work name either. A name invented for the zine.

³ Just sayin' for those who think that the current legal model concerning prostitution in force in Canada (the Nordic model; also in force in Sweden, Norway and Ireland) is good for sex workers because the sale of sexual services is not criminalized, don't get it twisted. All the other related things, which are criminalized, mean that working in a team, whether independently with one or multiple colleagues or in parlors, can be considered as pimping and brothel-keeping by the police. And that, you can be charged, arrested, and prosecuted for it.

⁴ A strip club where the girls can do extras, ranging from a handy in the cabins to full service in a motel room adjacent to the bar.

⁵ Not his real name.

⁶ You should know that usually, it's 20\$. It can be worth going all the way to Rimouski to take off your panties.

Sheet music: Every Day Blues, Miroslav Loncar





*Collaboration with
Damien Germain
@thebookofdamien*





A Voice for Invisible Workers

Interview with Crystal Laderas from SWAN Vancouver

By Latsami and Adore Goldman

SWAN (Supporting Women's Alternatives Network) Vancouver is an organization that promotes the rights, health, and safety of im/migrant women engaged in indoor sex work through frontline services and systemic advocacy in Greater Vancouver since 2002. Latsami and Adore from SWAC interviewed Crystal Laderas, the communication manager at SWAN, to know more about the challenges im/migrant sex workers face in their daily life as well as their demands as an organization.

SWAC: Your organization denounces how immigration laws target sex workers and how it puts them at risk. Can you explain how these laws harm sex workers?

Crystal: We recently had a woman telling us that because of the immigration ban on sex work, she barely goes out. So outside of work, she doesn't want to tell people what she does. She even lies to them because she's not comfortable with that. So she just stays away from all social situations and isolates herself at all times in order not to be detected, and that's sort of how the immigration and refugee protection regulations are impacting migrant's lives.

It bans all temporary residents like international students or somebody on a tourist visa from working at a strip club, massage business, or escort service. If you're caught, you're

deported. This leaves people constantly on edge. If you get into a situation where you're attacked and you want to call the police, they would run your ID and it would automatically get reported to the CBSA.¹

You want to go to the pharmacy to get some medication, but then they ask too many questions and they could report you to the CBSA too, and you'd be deported for trying to get some basic health care.

There are extreme cases too where you're working at a massage business, and it gets raided by police during a trafficking investigation. There are often two outcomes for the women: say that you're a trafficked victim, or CBSA is called to deport them as criminals. So these workers lose basic rights like access to justice and even human interaction because of some of these laws.

SWAC: What are some of the specificities related to the Asian community of sex workers you're working with? What are their needs?

Crystal: I think a lot of their needs are just kind of based on accessing services, but a lot of the mainstream services are just not available to them. So for example, our outreach team answers a lot of calls from women who

are trying to find low-barrier access to family doctors and pharmacies. We offer services in English, Cantonese, and Mandarin. So the women often ask SWAN to come with them for a health appointment so we can do translation. This is normal in the Asian and newcomer communities to have a loved one coming with you. But because the topic of working comes up in the middle of that health appointment, they prefer to have SWAN staff there with them doing the translation, so they don't get outed to their family. Also, the staff helps with making sure the healthcare workers aren't asking questions that they shouldn't be to make sure that work doesn't come up and that their immigration status doesn't come up. We know that some health care providers also receive anti-trafficking training and again, that could result in a call to the CBSA.

We also get a lot of calls and questions about labor-related issues, and that's where we hit some roadblocks. So if a woman's manager is late on paying them, they've been scheduled for hours that they didn't initially agree to, or they just have some dispute with a co-worker, they call us. We can try to work on solutions with them, but because the workplace is criminalized, there's really nothing more that we can do because they can't be protected under provincial labor regulations. At that point, if we can't find solutions within the system, we just listen. We're

there for emotional support because sometimes, they just want somebody to talk to about this and it's not something they can always talk to their friends about.

We've been accused of being traffickers just for doing normal, simple translation services that a lot of Asian and newcomer communities do for their loved ones. It's just different in this case because they can't have their loved ones there. So, we do have to push back on healthcare workers if they're asking a little bit too much about the woman's work or even status and things like that too. Like, is this absolutely necessary for this person's health? That could keep them from being deported.

SWAC: Your organization is very critical of the sex trafficking narrative. Can you explain why viewing migrant sex workers as victims is problematic?

Crystal: It's really frustrating because it ties into a lot of anti-trafficking narratives and how they target Asian sex workers. A lot of those campaigns or enforcement branches of the law are really driven by racist stereotypes. There's a lot of sensationalism that's making money off of fears and racist ideas about who's the victim and who's the bad guy. There's a savior complex and religious influence and moral stuff. It's just like a mixed bag of bullshit!

They decide who a victim is based on race, immigration status, or country of origin and not actual victimization. It's as if they'll push somebody who has been assaulted on the street out of the way so that they can kick down the door of a massage business and rescue Asians who don't need your help, didn't ask for your help and are just on shift right now wondering what the hell you're doing here.

We really have to constantly point out that it's not just white middle-class people who have the ability to consent to sex work, but the opposing narrative is that these women lack agency, they are powerless or are easily tricked. I think overall, the narrative is sort of a disguise created to hide what these groups are really doing, which is trying to stop a couple of adults from having sex in exchange of money, which is no one's business.

SWAC: With all the evidence we have today and all the sex workers sharing their stories and raising their voices, why do you think the government and also society at large don't want to change and don't seem to want to talk about it or to hear us?

Crystal: I think at the core, it comes down to these really long-held moralistic views in our society that are outdated and sexist. The people influencing the laws have a moral agenda, and laws have been shaped by societal views, and in turn, those laws influence society, and

then there's this horrible cycle that lasts for centuries. We saw this with the recent constitutional challenge. The Ontario Superior Court justice, in his decision, wrote that "sex work is inherently exploitative" (which we know is not true). He cited Canada's sex work laws and really echoed the arguments that were written into the preamble of the law.² The preamble talks about "human dignity and social harm caused by the objectification of the human body". We know that former conservative Minister of Justice, Peter MacKay wrote that law and that preamble. It's as if he was there during the first exchange of money for sex, writing with a quill pen, saying "hmm...".

It's so archaic and outdated, yet this is what shapes the law, and that law influences the public perception. I guess other than that it's just maybe easier for the public to believe everybody is exploited than it is to accept that sex workers have a choice in doing this job.

SWAC: It's interesting that it just keeps reinforcing the cycle because of the law; so a judge can easily say "Oh yeah, according to the law, it says that so it's that" you know.

Crystal: Yeah "It must be fact!". The law was written by somebody who had their own moral agenda, and they made it very obvious in the writing of the preamble. If you heard somebody speaking like that in public or an

institution, or at a restaurant, you'd be like, "What? Where is this coming from? Why is this person telling these people what to do with their own work and their own business?"

SWAC: Migrant sex workers occupy a special place at the intersection of the migrant workers' movement and the SWers' movement. Is it a challenge to navigate this intersection? Have you been able to create solidarity between both movements?

Crystal: To be honest it has been really difficult because it just kind of feels like we don't really fit anywhere. But the truth is, just like how there's racism in the broader society, there's also racism within the movements. So we have run into people who say "Oh, we don't do outreach at the massage businesses because all those women are trafficked". That's the same racist narratives that we just talked about being repeated.

There's also a dominant "out and proud" approach to sex work advocacy and I'm really grateful for all the activists and organizations who do this, but it does not work for the women we support. Having face-driven advocacy is not possible. I'm talking to you because I'm not a sex worker, I'm a Canadian citizen and my first language is English. Those are privileges that allow me to speak. We're always trying to find low-barrier ways for the women to participate in our advocacy, and I

can tell you that they have a lot to say, but they don't want to be the face of a movement, they don't want to be on camera, they don't even want their voice recorded.

So we have been putting effort into migrant communities and alliances with them, we've been speaking at rallies, etc. But sex work can be new and uncomfortable for that crowd as well, and it's important to remember that many of them can come from countries where sex work is highly criminalized; there are very harsh penalties for doing it and so that has created a lot of cultural stigmas. We try to say that these migrant sex workers are migrant workers too. They're international students, they're mothers, they tried to work at hotels or in hospitality where they faced racism and exploitation and left; they live in fear of deportation and family separations. So even though the work is unfamiliar, those are very common experiences and emotions felt by a lot of migrant communities. We know it's going to take some time and understanding. We have a common goal, so we're hoping that by fighting immigration policies rooted in racism, they can understand that and we can collectively change things. But it's a very interesting intersection to find yourself in.

SWAC: New Zealand is often shown as the decriminalization model. Yet, 20 years later, migrant sex workers still can't work legally. What strategy should

be implemented so that the same thing doesn't happen in Canada?

Crystal: Yeah, it's a tough question. What happened in New Zealand wasn't full decriminalization, as migrants are still banned from doing sex work and they face some of the same problems and risks as they would if they were working here. So I'll just give an example: when SWAN spoke to the House of Commons Committee [on the Status of Women for its study on human trafficking] this past summer, politicians admitted many of them hadn't even heard about the migrant ban on sex work.³ So we have to really drive down these messages over and over and over again. Whatever the place, we do advocacy everywhere we are because even if Canada's prostitution laws were repealed, migrants would still face the same risks. It wouldn't change much for any of them. They could still be deported, they could still be held at the immigration detention center here in Surrey, for an indefinite amount of time, not provided a translator,

traumatized, not knowing if they're going to see their kids again. But I would just say that New Zealand was definitely a learning experience and that can't happen here.



XXX

¹ Canada Border Services Agency.

² Government of Canada. (2014). "Preamble", *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*, from <https://tinyurl.com/pcepacanada>

³ To learn more about SWAN appearances at the committee: SWAN Vancouver. (2023). *SWAN Vancouver speaks to House of Commons Committee*, from <https://tinyurl.com/swanvancouver>

Photo: Clémence Lesné

Ground Score Diaries

By Jesse Dekel

When we learn about a colleague's death, we generally don't need to know the circumstances to know it's a violent one. I'm not necessarily talking about the kind of violence that ends up on a true crime podcast or the front page of the *Journal de Montréal*. Although these stories do exist, there are often multitudes of them that are never talked about; deaths that occur after a series of traumas and injustices; a series of month-ends, filthy apartments and crooked landlords; a series of closed doors, access counters, and waiting lists. Death by despair.

I recently lost a friend. There are those friendships that are made amid struggle, and there's something different about them. You know that no matter what, there will always be that common experience connecting you. That's how it was with Jesse.

Our first interaction was at a meeting of the Sex Work Autonomous Committee. Back then, it wasn't called that. In fact, the project didn't yet have a name. Melina May and I had put out a call for mobilization, and this was the second meeting we'd organized. We didn't really know what we wanted to do, and I don't even know if we believed in it ourselves. We had a bit of impostor syndrome. But now we could say there were three of us, and that counted for a lot!

Jesse wasn't afraid to speak up for SWers. She didn't do it because she loved her job, but because she wanted to organize with her colleagues to improve her working conditions. She didn't care about charity; for her, we had no time to lose. We had to be political if we wanted to make gains that would improve our lives!

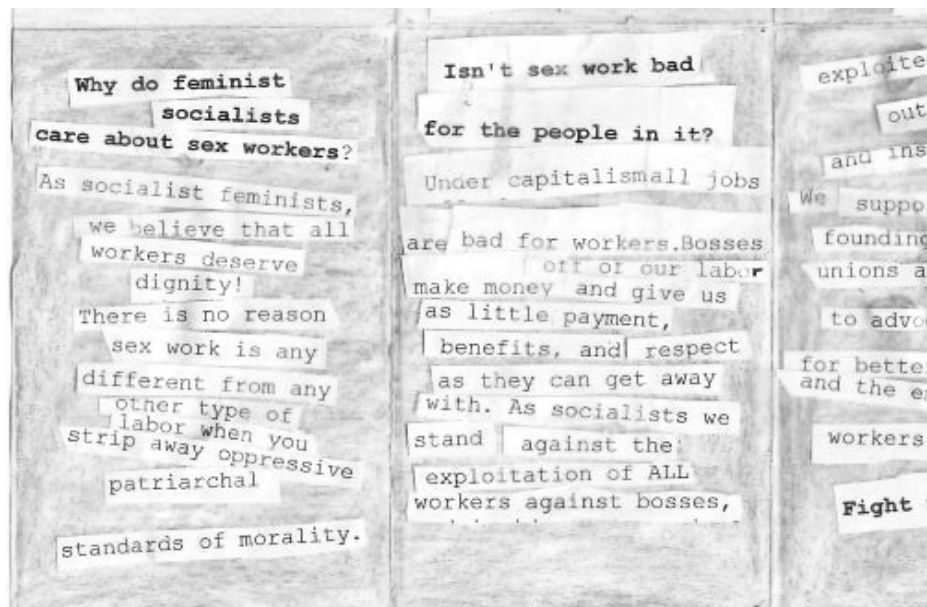
I remember the first action we organized with SWAC on May 1st, 2021. It was she and I who led it. We were speaking out against the curfew, the total lack of consideration for SWers during the COVID-19 health crisis, and the repression. Jesse confided in me that it had been her happiest day of 2021. She continued to get involved despite her return to New Zealand during the summer of 2021 and the 18-hour time difference.

The last time I spoke to Jesse was the day Carole Leigh died. Carole Leigh was the first person to define herself as a sex worker. Jesse had posted in her story a photo of her encounter with her a few years earlier when she was living in San Francisco. I had replied to her story because I was impressed; to me, Carole Leigh was a legend in terms of hooker activism. I'd asked Jesse if she wanted to talk soon. She said she was going to Auckland that week, but we could call the following week. In the end, she and Carole Leigh passed away the same week.

I think we must remember when we lose people. I think one way Jesse would have liked us to honor her life is for us to continue the whore resistance and not compromise.

A few weeks before she passed, Jesse sent me a manuscript of her diaries from her time in San Francisco. She wanted to publish them. I told her I'd give her a hand with proofreading and sending it out to publishers. Unfortunately, I didn't have the time. So I'm taking the liberty of publishing a few excerpts here.

Adore Goldman



Jesse Dekel's zine handed on June 2nd, 2019 in Oakland during the International Sex Worker's Day.

05.12.18

Sleep was shit, I kept waking up uncomfortably, and frustratingly at every move.

Early in the morning, I left Angel's apartment because she had to be somewhere at 8, and I took a bus to the HSRC¹. I got there at 9, and Rose was late and came at 9:50, instead of 9:30, so I just sat down looking at dog shit for a while.

The Cole Street Clinic is this incredibly overt friendly LGBT friendly place, with a crapload of free snacks (of which I helped myself dearly), and the most patient staff. Unfortunately, I am not patient. And I spent a total of like 3 and a half hours there, sitting in various waiting rooms, and saw a total of 3 doctors and case managers.

I talked about everything case managers usually ask about. Being homeless, suicide attempts, drugs, being undocumented, etc. There was a lot of talking. I did a urine test, and a TB² test (finally), and checked my weight, which was something around 149 pounds/67 kgish. I guess I've gained 5 kg since I got to America. Being homeless means being well fed, or I'm just over-eating because of the scarcity of available food? I don't know. I still had to do the urine STI test even though I told the doc about my lack of sex. Ugh.

Eventually, I got the American prescriptions, and a new sleeping med prescription because Zopiclone is non-existent in the States, or something.

I was there way too long and spent so much time fucking around on Shazam, it was so boring and stressful. The case manager printed out 50 pages of my medical record. Eugh.

Because it went on for so long, and I had a job interview at 2, they called a Lyft for me, and I got to my interview at New Door³ 5 minutes early.

New Door is like a hip, trying to be youthful, cool place-zone-area. The interview mostly consisted of really personal questions (confidential, don't worry!) about legal history, drug history, etc. Super weird. I answered them all. There's a two-week stipend-paid orientation starting January, and a follow-up interview next week. So that means I think I 'got' the job, though I think everyone does because it's literally an unemployment program.

I walked straight to the San Francisco General Hospital, which didn't help me at all because I have no travel insurance, and then walked to a Safeway, where I was told my concerta would cost \$600 USD, and my hormones \$120. Fuck. So I left after trying to call my travel insurance and failing to sort it out.

I'm so frustrated with this all.

I ate at a shitty sandwich store and bussed to the Haight to go to the Homeless Youth Alliance needle exchange because I wanted a sleeping bag and fentanyl strip tests. Luckily, I bumped into Rose, who took me to Sonya. I was so happy to see her. I like her so much. She's so great. I really like the way I feel around her. I ramble. She's fucking great.

Afterward, I headed to HYA⁴ and got the fentanyl strip tests, sleeping bag, and snacks. I asked about hormones and was taken to a nurse/doctor room thing, and told about some resources from a couple of really helpful people who were really supportive. I'm exhausted by how nice people are to me. So much niceness.

I left and walked around looking for a sidewalk to crash on. Some dude, Randy, told me there's a rule where we can't sleep/lie down until 11 pm. He also had this joke. What's the difference between Medford's tea, and a bottle of piss? They're both a bottle of piss.

Medford is this German guy who gives out food to homeless people, including tea. What a sweetheart.

I found a little alcove in front of a kitschy storefront and across the street from 'The R Tours'. This is where I lie in my blue sleeping bag and sleep on the sidewalk.

I had dinner at a taco shop and brushed my teeth/washed my face/did my nightly routine in their store bathroom.

I will sleep on the ground in my warm, blue sleeping bag.

06.12.18

I woke up multiple times in the night, the first time to go on a tempered, agile, pee mission. And the second time, to pee on a tree 20 meters away from my sleeping bag.

It was a nice sleep except for that.

When I woke up, I didn't need to get dressed obviously, so I just bussed to Tom Weddel's place. Some Russian guy (by his self-proclamation) ranted to me and was super racist, so I argued with him. He also said he gets all his free money + stamps through SSI (Social Security Insurance) and made a weird comment about New Zealand's meth.

I waited almost an hour at the clinic, even though I was the first to arrive 15 minutes before opening because I am an idiot and didn't go to the right place. I met a couple of doctors, Shannon and Doctor Zabin, the latter who sorted some hormone stuff, and wrote a letter for me to give the SF General Pharmacy about signing up to SF city insurance or something like that.

A doctor gave me a bunch of fentanyl strip tests, and Doctor Zabin asked me to learn how to administer Narcan, a drug given to people overdosing on opioids. So another nurse took me to a room, and gave me a quick demo and explanation, and gave me Narcan, and registered me as a Narcan carrier on the database. So now I have a bunch of clean needles in my possession, fentanyl strips, and a tab of acid.

We tested a tiny sliver of the acid for fentanyl. I put on gloves and cut that sliver off with teeny scissors. Luckily, there was no fentanyl, and I am just a crazy person.

After that, I walked to Thomas' apartment and picked up my contacts, and the bag I was storing there. He had a friend over, who told me about some trans and undocumented persons' resources. I used his bathroom to brush my teeth etc, left some items to donate, and then headed off to the HSRC.

I ate lots of food and talked to Sonya and Rose. Camila offered me a job as a youth representation during an intern interview, paid via gift cards, and I accepted. So an hour after closing, I stayed back and participated in an awkward jelly interview, which mostly consisted of people questioning the interviewee about whether she had ever been homeless and if not (not), how would she be able to relate and connect with homeless kids. There were lots of neighborhoods repping and posturing. It was uncomfortable. I asked the obligatory 'do you have any transgender friends' query that I was probably brought in to ask, and she said no.

I got my gift cards and talked to Camila, Rose, and Sonya about the Jazzys shelter. They may have a bed tomorrow night. So I'm meeting Sonya at 10:30 am at HSRC tomorrow, and heading to Jazzys. I'm thinking about getting into sex work. It sounds like a good way to make money in my position, but I don't really know. I talked to Sonya about it, and she said she doesn't recommend it but can provide me with good resources, should I decide to.

So I decided to go to the SF General, and Angel said they are open till 7 pm. I got some laundry money and took a half-hour bus there. Angel was wrong. They close at 5 pm. It was 5:20 pm. So I decided to go to the SF LGBT center because I thought it would be open. I was wrong, the youth program closed at 6 pm. It was 6:15 pm. So I headed to the Contemporary Jewish Museum and spent \$5 for an exhibition. It was pretty nice, there was one of a Jewish tattoo artist called 'Lew the Jew' and one on Jewish clothes. There was also an embroidery workshop, and I embroidered a gold thread through a flower.

I accidentally stole a bunch of food from a private event. I had no idea it was a private event until I ate everything. I feel kind of bad about it. I think it was a retirement party for a sweet old Jewish lady.

I decided to stay at a hostel. So I went on Agoda and booked a \$30 night at Amsterdam Hostel. Walking there, I saw a massive line in front of Gamestop.

People waiting for the new Smash Bros game, Super Smash Bros Ultimate. I got to Amsterdam Hostel and excitedly jumped into the shower until I realized it's fucking broken I couldn't even use it as a bath because there is no bath plug. So I used the lower bath tap while lathering soapy water on, and splashing myself upwards for like 30 minutes. It was fucking stupid. Ugh. I'm stupid.

12.12.18

I feel so fucking tired of all this shit. I went to the HSRC today yada yada yada. Talked to Sonya.

I printed off some resumes that were tailored to hospitality jobs and dropped them off at a couple of places. We walked by an art exhibition of blot sheets and saw some Alex Gary-type murals on them.

We hung out at the LGBT center, and I played *Fire Emblem* and watched *Blue Planet 2*. Then I headed to St. James Infirmary⁵. The sex workers' infirmary. I met with a harm reduction counselor, who I talked to about hormones and sex work. I am so lethargic, and my right nostril feels rough and sore, for seemingly no reason.

I got to the St. James Infirmary and took the elevator to the 4th floor where I checked in with a receptionist and filled out a bunch of forms. After that, I waited in a social room where some gay Robin Williams movie was playing, and there was free food and clothes with a 'you try it on, you keep it' policy. I grabbed a couple of croissants and a 'non-store' food bag. Someone complimented my necklace, and I talked to a worker about the new Smash game. People were nice. I was given a number to wait (54) for my doctor/counselor, and after 15 minutes or so, she came out to get me. The door to the meeting space wouldn't open, so she asked me to go sit back down and came to get me again a few minutes later.

She asked me all about what was going on. "You're undocumented, trans, trying to get hormones, and homeless". She said it was going to be really tough in San Francisco. Really tough. She warned me.

I asked her how to get into sex work and she told me. She asked if I was scared, and I told her I was scared of the cops catching me and deporting me more than anything. She said that wouldn't happen. She told me to ask for cash upfront. And to always be nice. I need to dress up. And wear heels. And a mini skirt.

We talked about access to hormones, and she said that I should probably just pay for them. She also told me about where I can go to find sex work, and what to expect in terms of rates, and what to do. She told me what to wear, and how to get clients. She said that I'm young and trans and that I can sell that. I just need to work.

I asked for sex worker resources, and she asked me if I have ever done sex work before. I said no, and she told me all about it. She told me what to expect, where to go, and how to make sure I get paid.

She gave me heels, and her card and said “I worry about you.” and “I hope this city doesn’t swallow you up.” and “But you can do it.” She is a 60-year-old trans woman from Australia who worked as a showgirl in Vegas in the 80’s.

I left feeling lethargic and couldn’t get Google Maps to work properly so I walked after failing to find the 2nd bus stop.

I feel tired and stupid and shit. I can’t write properly. I keep making mistakes. Nothing is changing. I just want to play video games all day. I don’t want to be here. I am sick of this place. I don’t know what to do. I have no motivation. I hate this all. What am I supposed to do??? I hate this. Should I leave? This reminds me of when I was homeless in Wellington. I thought to myself “I’m struggling so hard to find a place here, but I don’t even see why this place is worth it. I hate it. It’s not so special”. That’s what I’m feeling again. Why the fuck am I in San Francisco?

09.03.19

Today, I finally continued my e-payments account verification and tried out camming.

It was really difficult at first, but slowly, after broadcasting for an hour in total, I got 11 viewers at once. People would comment saying my lips are sexy, and DM me. One guy became my ‘room moderator’ for a while, and gave me advice on ‘teasing’. He sent me a GIF of him stroking his cock. I really liked the attention, and honestly was semi-hard the whole time, despite being fully clothed. I got out the fake plastic DUREX practice penis [stolen from the doctor’s office] and blew it. I only got 1 token, which is 5 cents in the hour, but I had two offers to meet older men, one in exchange for \$200. I liked it a lot, and I need to get better at it. I have to learn how to properly use apps and bots, for my broadcast to function smoothly. I’ll try tomorrow.

Turns out I didn’t even need to verify my e-payments account and could have started earlier. I guess Monday. Fuck.

I really fucking like the sexual attention. I have never felt desired before.

One person joined my chat room and asked me how many inches I am. I replied saying I use the metric system, and he left.

Fun fun fun.

Other than that I mostly just watched anime, and worked on a ‘Top 10 Places To Cry’ joke article⁶. I wonder if it will actually get accepted.

At 4:30 I left for Haight Street and checked out old action figures at Amoeba Records.

I bought a yellow long-sleeve mesh shirt for \$10 at K-POK and talked to Frankie and Drew who were sitting at a spot nearby.

There is this really cool art exhibition of tiny baby CRT TVs running anime footage on loops at the Red Victorian. I want to make something like that.

I returned to the house and watched Berserk Arc 1 with Kat and Antoinette while sharing a fruit granola smoothie, and pizza. The movie was average compared to the 1997 anime.

Afterward, I studied HTML online for a while, and talked to my cousin Guy, wishing him happy birthday.

I am sick, and my lips are sore. I had a dream where I tried to memorize music and a comedy concept. There is something in my eye. I'm lonely except when I'm not. I'm sad except when I'm bored. I'm bored when I'm not stressed. I'm busy when I'm not organized. I'm a boring, stressed walking contradiction, with nothing to offer in a timely manner.

I canceled all today's plans because I am a piece of shit, who sucks in terrible ways.

I need to study. I need to read. I need to write. I need to relax. I need...

Tomorrow I might buy a Nintendo Switch. If anything, it will give me things to write about. And jerking off for strangers online who compliment my titties' potential to 'fill out'.

I like sucking on the dildo-looking thing and looking salacious. I want people to want me. I hope I can get money because fuck, what I am doing being homeless. Ahhh... everything is weird, fuck.

I am an ugly regressive freak. I am hideous, I am disgusting. A gremlin. Ugly. Ugly. Freak. Gremlin.

23.03.19

This morning, I had my date with Kat. I think it went pretty well. We sat and talked at Coffee To The People for a couple of hours, and then walked up Haight. Checking out stores as we did.

I bought a zine DIY guide from Silver Sprocket.

The only thing that was off was when we passed by some Dirty Kids, like Misha, and Kat asked if I 'volunteer' with them. Which felt kind of condescending or something. I'm not exactly sure how to articulate this emotion/response. I still really enjoyed her company, and she's very cute.

I jokingly said that her leather shoelaces were 'very gay' and she told me how she finds that kind of comment weird. Ahh.

I do like her though, and want to spend more time with her.

We went to the taco restaurant off Belvedere, but at 2:30 pm-ish she had to leave because her HIV-positive friend's viral load was really high, and his nurse wasn't there to help him.

After the date, I went home. And at 6 pm, I decided to go to this comic book store closing party/sale. It took 40 minutes to get there, and the place was packed full of obnoxious, loud American nerds standing in front of the comic book racks that I wanted to check out.

I ended up buying a Saga enamel pin that was 50% off for a total of \$5. Then I left. The event was anxiety attack-inducing, and I didn't see any comics for sale that I was interested in.

After that, I bussed to a McDonald's that was also peak full and I gave up. Then I bussed home.

I watched a couple of episodes of Jojo, and at 11 pm I began broadcasting on Chaturbate.

In total, I made \$32.25 worth of tokens. This guy named Al joined my chatroom and was dropping tips. At one point, he sent me his phone number and eventually convinced me to call while blocking caller ID.

I started talking to Al on the phone. He is a 35-year-old electrician who lives in Santa Clarita, and his birthday was March 17 or 18.

He only likes girls and said a lot of nice things about my lips.

I added a password to my broadcast, and he paid me tokens as I stripped and touched myself.

I had phone sex with him, while he jerked off.

After pretending to ride him, and do a couple of different positions, I masturbated until I came.

After that, he jerked off until he finished, and tipped me a total of 625 tokens, I think.

Good stuff. I am a sex worker.

The first time, I made 1 token. The second time, I made 100 tokens, and this third time, I made 625 tokens. I'm learning, hopefully.

07.04.19

This morning following 2 cancellations (one from Bualia, and one from that dude Dan who I met at Comix Experience), I decided to try to display and do tarot readings. At 11:45, I went on Haight to where Peaches, Curls, and Catfish were, and sat down facing a storefront with my display.

I was at it for 2 hours. Two crust punks came to ask if I'd seen their dogs and then were total jerks. One bought a pin off of me for 30 cents, and the other demanded a free reading followed by them both tag-teaming to lecture me on how to do readings. They stamped my sign, even when I asked them not to. Assholes.

I wrote (Hebrew) reading \$5 on the sign, which in grammatically incorrect Hebrew transliteration means 'butthole reading \$5'. I made \$7.32 in total. I did one reading. It sucked.

I gave up at 2 pm, and spent all the money I made and more on a slice of pizza, an Arizona, and nachos.

The two dudes who go around bare naked with those chastity things on walked past us. I told Curls that I'd spange them as a joke, and I did. "I don't have any change on me. Where would I put it?".

After that, I went home in time for a community meeting feat. pizza. I said that the house is fucking hot, and Cocoa teased by saying that it might be my hormones and asked if I was going through menopause.

Earlier in the day, she said that there was a drag show that we were invited to last night, but I said that I was "Incredibly high on cocaine" so couldn't go. She laughed.

I watched Jojo, and at 9:30 pm went back out on the street. Peaches was tired, so went to crash, and I saw Toast. I went to a corner store to buy a fizzy drink and a man near me kept swearing/talking to himself loudly. I didn't buy anything, and when I walked out after this guy, the store owner screamed at him, telling him to give back a can that he apparently stole. Toast told him to give it back, and the store owner told Toast to "Kick his fucking ass". The guy said that it's harassment and threatened to call the cops. Toast told him to "Get the fuck off of my block" and counted down from 5. A bus stopped because this guy was in the middle of the road, and then he banged on its door and said "Let me in, this guy is telling me to get off the block right now." The bus let him in, and as it drove off, Toast ran with it and slapped the window yelling "I knew you'd listen. Bitch!" Wild.

Fuck mentally ill people? This world. Sucks. Fuck.

What a waste of a weekend.

At home I cammed, and the guy from Santa Clarita came back on my broadcast, and I phoned him. We organized a private show at 30 tokens per minute, in which I got naked and jerked off, but didn't cum. He spent around 500 tokens on me, and when he ran out, we ended the call.

I finished camming after that.

Gaaaaaaaah. Surely I can do more than jerk off and watch anime? No? Probably not then.

At least I got to do cocaine.

01.06.19

This morning I went to the Castro⁷ to sell a couple of books at Dog Eared Books, and to check out the historic gay synagogue *Sha'ar Zahav*. All the services were over at the temple, so it was a waste of time, and I only made \$4 from the books.

I went home, and then at 5 pm, I went to the DSA⁸ office for the Socialist Feminist sign-making event. I got an email this morning from Lia saying that they nominated me as one of the new socialist feminism co-chairs, but obviously, I'm not going to do it if I skip town. So the whole sign-making event was awkward, as I didn't want to bring it up.

I made a whole bunch of pins with the badge maker and signs that read "Sex Work Is Real Work" or "TERFS and SWERFS Fuck Off", and had lots of fruits while I was at it.

Christian from the ILWU⁹ said he was going to a ILWU party, so I invited myself and took the 33 to the Mission with Lia. I told them that I'm going to Montreal. It went well.

I got to the Hilton hotel where the party was at 8:30 and met Kevin and this other guy from DSA. We went in, and I was instantly surrounded by the ruling class of rich liberal Democrats.

This fancy rich lady dropped a couple of prongs on the floor and walked away, so I told her, and she went back to pick them up. Hehe. The party was really uncomfortable. Everyone was so rich, and I was so out of place. So much old money. Kevin and the other guy went with me to the fucking YIMBY¹⁰ party upstairs, and the security guard stopped me, asking if I was "at the right place" (regarding my attire), so I told him yes.

That party was fucking obtuse. There was a very impressively plastic surgeoned lady speaking to Kevin about how Bernie was trying to 'whore her out' or something, and the whole crowd of rich fucking yuppies made me want to vomit.

One guy lectured me on how trickle-down economics/housing equity is connected, and I wanted to cry. I was so out of place, and a bartender asked me to take off my bag because I knocked some serviettes off his table. There was free wine though.

It was so high in the tower, and the weird environment got boring. I went back downstairs and met Jennifer from the Tenants Union, and Kate-Mary from DSA. And Xavier from DSA. We went to a liquor store, and Jennifer bought me Anchor Steam beer. Then we headed to the Moscone Center on Howard and the 4th.

At one point, when I was leaving the YIMBY party, this DSA East Bay person in an elaborate transport system-themed dress decorated with political pins talked to me in the elevator. Also occupied by yuppies. I complained about being uncomfortable surrounded by rich people, and they said it's an important skill in politics. Guh.

We got to the center and went to the Bernie 2020 party. Bernie Sanders had just left the conference. We drank, and I met up with Jen Snyder.

We went to a nurses' party for free food and beers, and another party for the same. I got drunk, and Christian told me to email him about NZ sex workers' unions, so he can talk to Bobby from ILWU about unionizing sex workers with this helpful info.

Jen Snyder and this political consultant Jim, and I fucked around and drank a lot. At one point, this liberal in a 'Ruth Bader Badass' shirt gave me shit for my 'Nazi Punks Fuck Off' shirt and said he didn't think there were still Nazis, and that American History X was just a movie.

We got more drunk and laughed at the middle school prom playlist playing. Eventually, we got kicked out at closing time, and I saw the dude running against Pelosi who befriended me. He said he was reading poetry at the Mission and had vegetables thrown at him until he smoked weed with the throwers.

Jen got us a Lyft to the Haight, and I walked home from her house. What a weird fucking night.

03.06.19

Yesterday was the first day during the almost 7 months I've been in America that I didn't write in my journal. It feels sort of shitty, but I'm also happy that the shtick went on for so long, straight.

So I guess I'll just recite the events of the last two days.

Yesterday morning, I woke up at 9:30 and didn't have enough time at all to shower, so I just put on my clothes and bussed to the DSA office to meet Lia so that they could give me a ride to the International Sex Workers Day event held at Oscar Grant Plaza, in Oakland.

Jay was there too, and we all loaded Lia's car with DSA shit and drove to Oakland.

The event was great. I noticed that I had a big ass smile on my face half the time, and I just fucking loved feeling as though I was part of a community. I am a sex worker. I'm one of them. They are like me. It feels to me as though freelance sex work is lonely work, and community is hard to find, but being surrounded by all these fellow sex workers was so communal, kind, and caring.

Carol Leigh, aka Scarlet Harlett, the person who coined the term 'sex work', interviewed me about how anti-sex trafficking laws are oppressive and screw over sex workers, as well as lucrative multi-billion dollar businesses for Christian reactionary NGOs.

I gave out the sex workers' zine at the DSA table to passersby and ate lots of bagels, strawberries, etc from the Coffee Not Cops stall.

After the event, Lia gave me a ride to Mission and 24th, and I had McDonald's, then skated to the 33 bus stop at 16th and Mission. The bus took like a half hour to arrive, and I only stayed home for a minute before heading off to the St. James Infirmary fundraiser gala.

I was let in the fancy as fuck gala, that had security guards and 'mixologists' in tight shirts, and when Jay arrived, we snuck into the actual \$200 ticket gala area.

Jennifer Holliday from Dream Girls sang, and it felt like a movie. Christina Aguilera was there too apparently.

Back downstairs at the after party, Molly and Eugenia, whom I met at the sex workers' day event, showed up. Jay left, and as I was getting pretty wasted, I was invited to an after-after-party in a hotel room.

A group of us took Ubers to this fancy as fuck hotel, and Molly kept buying me drinks. One with olives in it, which tasted awful.

We headed up with the group to a hotel room, where we drank, and people snorted cocaine in the bathroom. Molly said "You're really cute. Do you want to kiss a little bit?" and I said, "I'm really sorry, but no". We then all got kicked out of the hotel room by management for some reason, so we just went on a weird little pub crawl that I really don't remember much of. Just drinking, peeing, and Molly holding my hair as I vomited in a toilet.

Molly called me a Lyft home, and at like 3:30 am I got there. I passed out immediately in all my clothes, without taking my meds or writing in my journal.

So that was yesterday.

This morning I woke up with a horrible headache and a huge overall hangover. I vomited into the toilet, and at 10, had a meeting with my case manager Kristina. I told her that I had a migraine, and I had my head in my hands in pain for the entire time. The meeting only lasted 15 minutes, and I went back to sleep afterward.

At 12, I had my doctor's appointment with Dafna and I vomited in the toilet once more. So hard that I cried. I told her about falling off my skateboard, and she ordered my refills.

I headed to the HSRC after that and gave out stickers that I got from the sex workers' day event. A 90s cartoon was playing on YouTube, and I ate pasta, to satiate my disgusting queasiness.

I left and went back home to sleep. I was so fucking hungover. Christopher dropped off the new house keys, since we no longer have day staff, and can let ourselves in. Fucking cool.

Alice got home, and while in pain in bed, I asked her to Google the symptoms of a broken chest. All the symptoms match up, except pain when touching. It hurts so much. I wish I mentioned it to Dafna. Hopefully after therapy tomorrow, I can see a doctor.

We ordered Burger King, and I spent most of the day napping. I watched the end of *Leave No Trace*, which I started on the plane ride here, 6 months ago. What a cliffhanger.

I think the hangover is ending. I'm sick of feeling so damn shit.

What a weird two days.



Jesse speaks at the May 1st, 2021 rally, SWAC' first action in response to the lack of rights and protections for SWers during the pandemic.

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¹ Probably refers to the Haight Street Referral Center, a drop-in center for homeless youth in San Francisco.

² Tuberculosis.

³ New Door is a non-profit organization offering employment programs to San Francisco's youth.

⁴ Homeless Youth Alliance.

⁵ St. James Infirmary is a peer-based non-profit organization serving SWers throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. They are the first occupational health and safety clinic in the U.S. run by SWers for SWers! COYOTE members, the first sex workers organization in the U.S., like Margot St. James and Priscilla Alexander, founded the clinic.

⁶ Jesse Dekel. (2019). *Top 10 Places to Cry*, from <https://tinyurl.com/top10jesse>

⁷ Gay neighborhood of San Francisco.

⁸ Democratic Socialist of America.

⁹ Probably referring to the International Longshore and Warehouse Union.

¹⁰ Referring to "Yes In My Backyard" as opposed to NIMBY - "Not In My Backyard". Jesse saw both of these tendencies as gentrification tactics, but YIMBYs had a more pervasive way of dealing with homelessness in gentrifying neighborhoods. The YIMBYism movement wants to tackle the housing crisis by rezoning and increasing the supply, failing to view the class element of the housing question and reducing it to supply and demand question.

Because Working is Playing the Whore!

By Melina May and Adore Goldman,

Translated by Mehrad Abad

In Quebec, several unions have historically taken anti-sex work stances and actively advocated for the criminalization of clients and third parties. Instead of showing solidarity with other workers fighting for better working conditions, these positions have perpetuated a class contempt, suggesting that we are victims to be saved rather than exploited workers, much like unionized workers.

Thus, the positions of several unions have not only undermined class solidarity but also solidarity among women: following a controversial stance on the agency of SWers during a General Assembly of the *Fédération des femmes du Québec* (FFQ) in 2018, the *Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux* (CSN), the *Syndicat des professionnels du gouvernement du Québec* (SPGQ), and the *Syndicat de la fonction publique et parapublique du Québec* (SFPQ) left the federation. Here, we aim to deconstruct the arguments of these groups suggesting that our struggles are individualistic and devoid of collective action within our movements.

And you, have you chosen your work?

The Question of Agency and Choice

A cornerstone of the arguments of unions against pro-sex work stances, like the one taken by FFQ, is the criticism of the concept of agency. According to the defectors from the federation, this stance promotes individualism and disregards systemic oppressive structures

such as patriarchy, capitalism, and racism. We believe there are nuances to consider and elements to clarify for a worthwhile debate that includes us.

The questions of choice and agency are central here. The definition the FFQ presents of agency is as follows: “the ability of an individual to act upon the world, things, beings, to transform or influence them.”¹ We acknowledge that this definition is individualistic. However, asserting, as the CSN does, that “according to estimates, over 90% of prostitutes are coerced by poverty and violence into enduring sexual exploitation”² appeals to pity and charitable sentiments rather than solidarity among workers.

It's not surprising that some SWers claim to have chosen to work in the sex industry. After all, the primary condition of capitalism is that the worker is free to sell their labor power but lacks the means to independently realize their labor power (without a capitalist who owns the means of production).³

These SWers aren't wrong in asserting that they chose sex work, even though it was a set of circumstances that led them there. While these circumstances may sometimes be more or less constraining, for most, it represents the best or least bad option. Several reasons explain this: sex work enables many to earn more money in less time, with some flexibility in terms of scheduling. It

can be started and stopped at any time and doesn't require diplomas. These features are appealing, especially for single mothers, individuals with chronic illnesses, or disabilities preventing full-time employment. This work also allows many to return to education and later secure better-paid jobs.

However, for some, the possibilities are more limited. This is the case for migrants working in the sex industry. They face the most challenging conditions. Due to their precarious immigration status, employers have the leverage to blackmail and further exploit them, similar to their migrant colleagues in other industries like agriculture. However, the anti-prostitution argument completely ignores these individuals' desire to migrate. For example, the CSN focuses solely on traffickers and pimps but remains silent about the role of the State and its immigration policies in these abject working conditions.⁴

It's also noteworthy that many SWers have another "civil" job that doesn't provide enough income to sustain them through the month. Sex work then serves as supplementary income. This is also the case for several unionized workers. Among our colleagues, there are nurses, social workers, beneficiary attendants, community workers, public service employees, blue-collar workers, etc. By not supporting the struggle of SWers, unions not only demonstrate a lack of solidarity with other workers but also with a segment of their base.

Certainly, being free to choose to sell one's labor power doesn't mean we aren't exploited! On the contrary, it's a false choice since working is inevitable. Individually, we might choose our work, but we can't choose not to work! Depending on the options available to us, we choose the least bad option. In this regard, we believe it's fruitless to pose the question of choice or no choice. Because we must work, and our work is exploited and undermined by violence, we'd rather discuss organizational strategies to improve our living and working conditions!

Don't save us, we've got this!

For Genuine Solidarity among Workers!

Following the adoption of positions by the FFQ, the CSN lamented a departure from the federation's values and interests: collective action would have been replaced by individual experiences. We don't aim to defend the FFQ on this issue. It's undeniable that collective action has been dwindling in the FFQ for several years, similar to many other community organizations. Additionally, it can't be said that unions are a very prolific ground for struggle. The struggles and interests of workers are often paralyzed by bureaucracy and the management of major union bodies.

While the CSN "believes [collective action] remains the best way to defend the interests of everyone,"⁵ it nonetheless advocates for the criminalization of the sex industry as a savior, meaning police

intervention rather than the struggle of workers. If there's anything that hinders the collective organization of SWers and more broadly, community organization, it's repression and surveillance!

It's important to remember that the Nordic model advocated by the CSN and other unions has serious consequences for SWers and our ability to defend our rights and protect our integrity. The criminalization of clients means they're generally reluctant to reveal their true identity, complicating the identification and reporting of dangerous clients.

In a system of criminalization, arrests, evictions, deportations of our migrant colleagues, the closure of our workplaces, and the absolution of our bosses from ensuring a safe and inclusive work environment are all means to undermine SWers' organization. Furthermore, our initial attempts at workplace organization already face these concrete impacts: if we organize against our boss, there's a risk the police will arrest them and close our workplace. Consequently, we'd all lose our jobs, and our migrant colleagues would be deported.

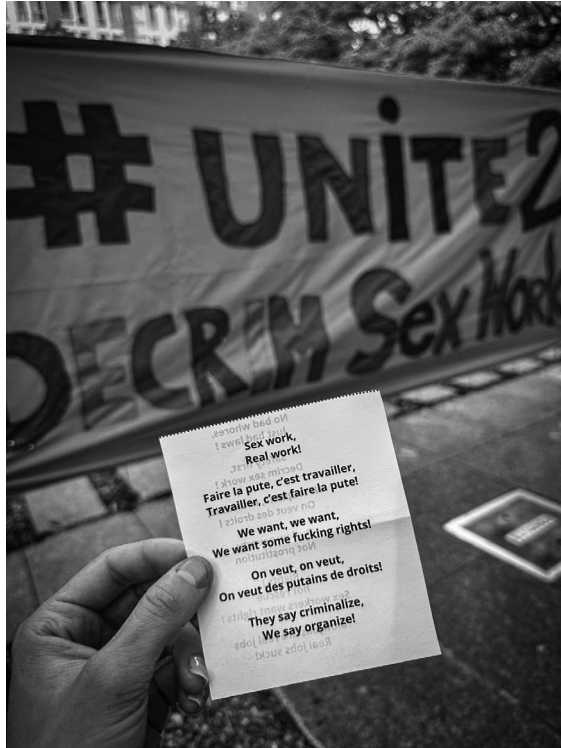
We don't want your savior complex and appeals for more resources to get us out of the industry. What we need is genuine class solidarity. It's high time for unions to stand on the side of the people they claim to defend. We are workers; we want labor rights; we want

sick leave, parental leave, holidays; we want to be able to report abuses by our bosses and clients using the same mechanisms available to other workers.

The organization of SWers has never waited for the support of unions to operate, nor to create and strengthen ties with communities and allied groups. We know that the legal reforms we demand alone cannot fight against the structural violence SWers often face, being at the intersections of several forms of oppression. That's why our collective strength is also at the core of other struggles, against the penal system, against borders, transphobia, sexist violence, colonialism, and against our general oppression. While the CSN worries "about the effects and repercussions of prostitution on all women,"⁶ we respond that our struggle is part of a more radical project, a class struggle, a struggle of women and genders, to reject the exploitative conditions that weigh on all of us.

**Because working is playing the
whore**

And playing the whore is working!



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¹ Translation from: “*faculté d'action d'un être; sa capacité à agir sur le monde, les choses, les êtres, à les transformer ou à les influencer.*” Confédération des syndicats nationaux. (2014). *Document de réflexion sur l'adhésion de la Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN) à la fédération des femmes du Québec (FFQ)*, p.5 from <https://shorturl.at/gGPTX>

² Translation from: “*selon les estimations, plus de 90% des prostituées sont contraintes par la misère et les violences à subir l'exploitation sexuelle.*” Confédération des syndicats nationaux. (2014). *La Prostitution, une pratique à dénoncer, une exploitation à combattre*, p. 6, from <https://shorturl.at/chtXS>

³ “For the conversion of his money into capital, therefore, the owner of money must meet in the market with the free labourer, free in the double sense, that as a free man he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity, and that on the other hand he has no other commodity for sale, is short of everything necessary for the realisation of his labour-power.” Karl Marx. (1867). “Chapter Six: The Buying and Selling of Labour-Power”, *Capital*, Volume 1, from <https://tinyurl.com/lecapitalchap6>

⁴ Confédération des syndicats nationaux. (2014). *La Prostitution, une pratique à dénoncer, une exploitation à combattre*, p.4-5, from <https://shorturl.at/chtXS>

⁵ Translation from: “*estime [que l'action collective] demeure la meilleure voie pour la défense des intérêts de toutes et de tous.*” Confédération des syndicats nationaux. (2014). *Document de réflexion sur l'adhésion de la Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN) à la Fédération des femmes du Québec (FFQ)*, p.5, from <https://shorturl.at/gGPTX>

⁶ *Ibid.*

Photo: MMC Photographie

The Power Wielded by Cities: Striving for Local Resistance

By Céleste Ivy and Melina May,

Translated by Adam Hill

The criminalization of sex work falls under “Canadian” federal jurisdiction, but the criminal code’s *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* is applied by law enforcement, judges, and tribunals of the Canadian provinces. It is also this set of laws that allows for the setting up of victim rescue projects across several territories. In 2014, when the law had just been passed, Harper’s administration pledged 20 million dollars to the fight against human trafficking; a bit less than a half would go to applying the law and the rest to agencies and organizations providing services to those wanting to leave the industry.

Although cities do not have the power to directly criminalize sex work, several municipal governments and district councils seek to control and limit certain aspects. In this article, we want to expose the power that cities wield over our working conditions. We also want to propose local organizing among SWers: a fight within our neighborhoods and our cities would allow for forms of resistance that are more direct, decentralized, and spontaneous. We will set out examples of repressive municipal regulations in Montreal, Laval, Toronto, and Edmonton: zoning regulations that threaten to make our spaces of work disappear, mandatory licensing in certain cities, and consequences of this on SWers’ integrity and security. We will also explore the birth and implementation of John Schools in Canada, presented as an alternative to the current criminal model that targets

a particular demographic of clients. We will conclude by putting forward several strategies of organization and local action.

Urban Zoning: a Constant Threat to our Workplaces!

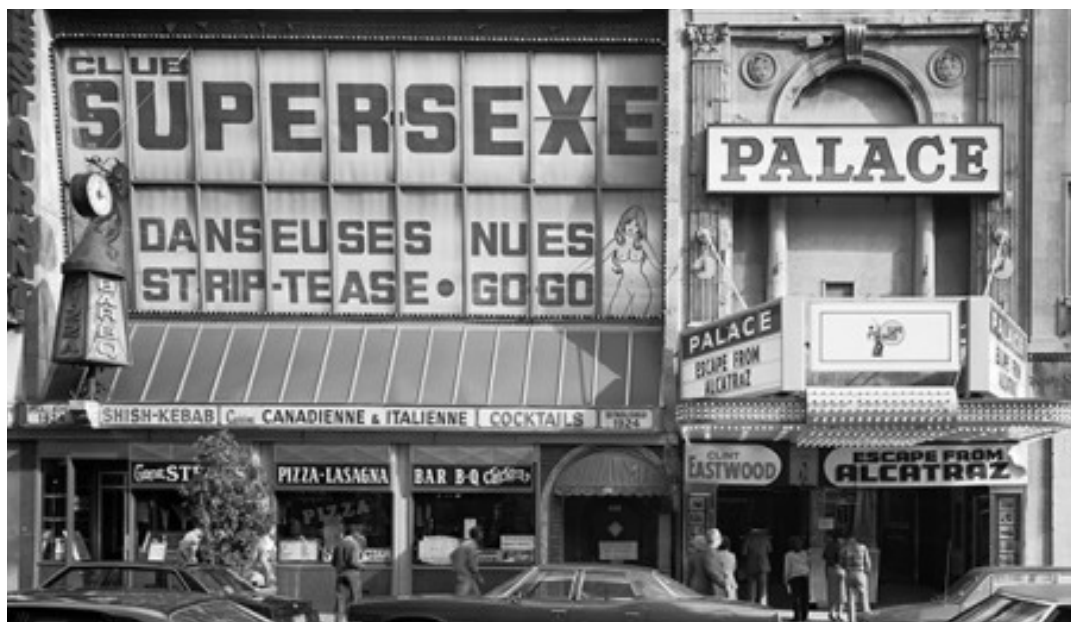
Increasingly, municipal governments are making use of zoning and urban planning regulations in order to target and shut down our workplaces. Although these regulations are formulated as if designed to guard against public disturbances and to ensure public health and security, we maintain that their aim is rather to undermine the working conditions of SWers and to “sanitize” cities of troubling, visible prostitution. This strategy also contributes to the larger process of gentrification.

During the 2007 *Rendez-Vous Montréal Métropole Culturelle*, the City of Montreal and the Ville-Marie district presented the *Programme particulier d’urbanisme du Quartier des Spectacles* as the outline of plans for the urban renewal of *Place des Arts*. The primary motivation of the urban transformations initiated by this program was to visually sanitize the *Quartier des spectacles*, historically the Red Light District, center of Montreal’s entertainment and sex work, supposedly with the aim of reviving a “dead” neighborhood. These attempts at clearance date back to the 1950s, when the then mayor Jean Drapeau launched multiple political campaigns and urban renovation projects aimed

at revamping the neighborhood.¹ There was a distinct irony in the political discourse that claimed to want to make Montreal a more lively and cultural city: the *Quartier des spectacles* was already a cultural center, but in a form that the municipality preferred to erase. Confronted by the literal destruction of their place of work and increased street-level surveillance, SWers were forced to relocate to neighborhoods where their presence would be less visible to the authorities and where finding clients would be more difficult.

Among the tactics adopted by district councils and municipal governments, the tightening in the issuance of business licenses has proved effective in closing massage parlours and strip clubs. In Montreal, this strategy formed part of the electoral promises of Coderre's administration when he came to power in 2013.² If this tactic

was not successful, several districts of Montreal have, since then, adopted measures to get rid of massage parlors in their neighborhoods. Since 2017, the Rosemont-La-Petite-Patrie district no longer grants commercial occupancy permits to businesses suspected of seeking to open erotic massage parlors. Following this decision, eight massage parlors have seen their business license revoked, forcing them to close down shop.³ This tightening of licensing was proposed by the mayor of *Projet Montréal*, which goes to show that the erasure of our workplaces is a project that rallies the left as much as the right. In September 2023, the district announced their intention to pursue legal proceedings up to the Superior Court in order to shut down the last erotic massage parlor in their jurisdiction, Spa Bamboo. This parlor had appealed the decision in 2017 and continued its activities.⁴ In Laval, since 2018, massage parlors and strip clubs are





Images of the industrial zone in Laval from Google Earth Pro

banned across the whole jurisdiction except within the industrial zone at a maximum of five establishments, which are not allowed to display any signage or advertising.⁵ Such municipal measures explain the disappearance of clubs across Quebec at large: fifteen years ago there were 220 establishments in the province, now there are no more than 60.⁶ In Toronto, the *Division of Municipal Licensing & Standards* allows only 63 adult entertainment licensing in its jurisdiction since the 1970s. Zoning laws and the procedure for applying for an exception, which costs between \$100,000 and \$250,000, make the opening or relocating of these clubs almost impossible.⁷

We have all met a SWer who dreamed of opening their own establishment, offering better working conditions and increasing inclusivity, but the stubbornness of this municipal sanitizing prevents the

industry from developing ethically. Andrea Werhun, author of the memoir *Modern Whore* and social worker at Maggie's, a pro-SWer activist project in Toronto, speaks to this same point:

I dream of a world where women or people who are sex-worker allies are running these clubs, and creating the type of environment where people feel both entertained but also fulfilled on a meaningful level, where they're like, 'Oh, this is just, like, a really great entertainment complex where people are enjoying themselves'⁸

If these measures undermine the owners of clubs that already exist, the opening of new clubs by a woman or allies with fewer resources and administrative connections is basically impossible, which is in itself anti-feminist.⁹

Cities make use, therefore, of their zoning and urban renewal powers in order to close our workplaces and to push us further and further from city centers towards industrial neighborhoods, which are less well-lit and more isolated. The decrease in the number of our workplaces and their lack of regulation also increases competition between employees and the power held by employers. An activist with SWAC and dancer explains the following: “Dances at my club are still priced at \$10 because there are not many strip clubs and the managers let anyone come in at any time, which means there are so many girls on the floor and so much competition.” The closure of massage parlors and strip clubs will not put an end to the need to work for many. Forced out of our workplaces, many of them will turn to working from their home or outcalls¹⁰. This further isolates us and puts us at greater risk of assault.

Licenses to Work: a Means to Control and a Threat to Security

In certain Canadian cities and provinces, for example Ontario and Edmonton, SWers in lawful spaces need to obtain a license in order to prove their age and work in a massage parlor or strip club. Although these licenses serve, *inter alia*, to inhibit access for minors to these spaces, they are also a means to control, weaken, and surveil SWers.

In May 2022, the Town of Newmarket in Ontario adopted a new classification of

licenses for massage parlor employees in an effort to curb the sex industry. As a result of the new measure, owners are obliged to prove that employees offering massage services received training at an accredited institution. The city’s mayor explained this decision as follows: “I think we really just want to drive [the sex trade] out of our town, quite frankly, [...] I don’t think it’s consistent with the values of our town.”¹¹ A petition launched by Butterfly, an organization that defends the rights of migrant and Asian SWers in Toronto denounced the measure as “perpetuat[ing] systemic racism and undue hardship by preventing non-English speaking, low-income, Asian women from working in [personal wellness establishments]”.¹² Following this decision, several businesses were forced to close overnight leaving many women and families without means of subsistence.

In Ontario, dancers are also required to obtain a license to work legally. SWers with criminal records and im/migrant SWers without permanent residency cannot apply for this license, which pushes them into work situations that are all the more precarious and criminalized.¹³ In Edmonton, massage parlor and agency employees must also obtain a license to work.¹⁴ Even if the physical copy of these licenses do not include any personal data, this data can nonetheless be accessed by employers, which threatens the integrity and security of SWers. In an open letter to the City Hall, ANSWERS, an organization that defends the

rights of SWers in Edmonton, denounced the harmful effects of such a measure: there are many cases of employers and/or colleagues disclosing sensitive personal information to SWer's family, civil employer, or landlord.¹⁵ The obligation to share personal information with employers is not only dangerous, it is also redundant because SWers receive payment directly from clients.

The stigmatization experienced by SWers is also anchored in the introduction of work licenses; they are treated as a danger to public health. These licenses are a way for municipal officials and police to control SWers more effectively, without concretely offering support services for harm reduction or for safe working conditions. These forms of legislation are born out of a vision that is anti-SWer, in which SWers are perceived as a threat to public health and therefore need authoritarian surveillance. Those SWers working within the majority of legal contexts conform to standards set in place by the employer. This undermines the possibility of unionizing since the autonomy of SWers is heavily restricted and any consideration of working conditions is pushed further to the side.¹⁶ The actual needs of SWers in terms of their general security, harm reduction, and the improvement of their working conditions are ignored.

John Schools: a Moralizing Boot-Camp

In May 2022, the City of Longueuil put

in place a pilot project financed by the Ministry of Justice designed to entrap clients and impose reeducation upon them by way of John Schools. Clients that were arrested by the police for the first time would have to pay \$1000 and commit themselves to an eight-hour long course during which multiple speakers would lecture them and explain to them the dangers of the sex industry. The former police chief of Longueuil and current head of the Montreal City Police Service, Fady Dagher, explained how the course plays out: the clients come face-to-face with a young victim who explains to them "how she feels abused, [...] how many drugs she has to take to get through her day, and how times she faked [an orgasm]." These programs refuse to consider SWers as actors in their own story. The offensive discourse that they expound foregrounds the popular narrative according to which SWers are passive victims that need saving, all whilst being presented as alternative justice programs.

The John School concept emerged in the 90s in San Francisco. The proponents of these programs defend them as an alternative to the punitive criminal model that remains ineffective, supposedly redirecting clients in a different direction. These programs can take several different forms, but at their core they offer the following choice to clients who have been arrested: commit to a day-long course or go before the tribunal, which would mean the risk of being found guilty and being given a

criminal record. The programs are also designed to handle as many offenders as possible outside of the traditional system and therefore at the lowest possible cost.

The first John School in Canada dates back to 1996 in Toronto.¹⁷ Around this time, a growing number of citizens, concerned for their security and quality of life, began to put pressure on politicians, legislators, and the police to take action on street prostitution in their neighborhood. In 1995, a local committee on prostitution was formed, consisting of police officers, social workers, and local councilors. The setting up and running of the first John School pilot project was taken on by the Salvation Army, which is, unsurprisingly, also involved in probation and conditional release programs for the Canadian penal system. Originally, participation in the program was free, clients were invited to contribute via donations to an exit program for street-based SWers. Since the donations were insufficient, the Streetlight Support Services agency took over administrative control of the John School program, and introduced a mandatory participant registration fee of \$400, of which 100% of the profits went to supporting the administration and mission of the agency.

These programs targeted and controlled a certain type of client: “the men diverted to the ‘John School’ tend to be working class, visible minority and English as Second Language (ESL)

immigrants with comparably low levels of education and income levels.”¹⁸ It would be factually inaccurate to suggest that this is a representative cross section of men that pay for sexual services in Canada. Instead, it seems clear that John Schools serve to punish a certain fringe of the industry’s clientele, those from poorer and more marginalized socio-economic groups.

Certain programs in Canada are still supported today by Christian associations such as the Salvation Army. This non-profit organization, renowned for its murky past and homophobic practices¹⁹, now has the power to interfere with the sex industry, extracting profit from it and exercising forms of control. These programs use moral panic about human trafficking to distract attention from the actual needs and concerns expressed by SWers themselves.

These programs have nothing close to do with restorative justice, as some current programs claim to defend themselves. Instead of offering an alternative to the criminalization of sex work, the John School model expands the scope of control and surveillance of sex work to non-governmental agencies.

For Workplaces Without Police: Local-level Resistance!

Keeping track of municipal politics becomes extremely important, even in the ideal context of decriminalization,

because they constitute one of the principal regulatory mechanisms that govern the lives of SWers. A good example of the reach of their power is the City of Campbell River, which, several days before the start of the three-year pilot project that decriminalized the possession of drugs in British Columbia²⁰, adopted a new municipal regulation that sought to impose a fine on those who consumed drugs in public spaces.²¹

In the face of constant threat from city governments, we must reflect upon strategies that can be put in place to protect our workplaces. In an extensive study of working conditions among dancers in the United Kingdom, the authors concluded their article by highlighting the potential that the granting of business licenses could have on defining workplace standards in the sex industry. According to Lo Stevenson, “[i]f these standards were negotiated with organized sex workers, adequately reflecting their needs and concerns, such a regime could not only increase autonomy and solidarity for sex workers, but also reduce reliance on costly and time-consuming litigation.”²² Putting pressure on local and licensing authorities, for example during city council meetings, to demand that business permits accord with our wishes or to block attempts by city governments to close our workplaces, could represent an interesting means of action.

Profiling, particularly of Asian women, during the inspection of massage parlors

is a well-known tactic. In solidarity with our migrant colleagues who face constant targeting by the police, we should demand that the City of Montreal as well as the multiple other sanctuary cities²³ in Canada make good on the commitments they have made towards those with this status and cease their collaboration with border services deporting SWers whether or not they have legal status. In Montreal, the collaboration between the police and Canadian Border Services Agency makes recourse to the protection of the police next to impossible for migrant SWers who are victims of criminal acts and abuse.

Although public health arguments are often mobilized to defend the criminalization of sex work, we believe that decriminalization could support the reduction in the transmission of illnesses transmitted sexually or through the blood. In the current context in which clients are considered to be criminals, it is difficult for SWers to gain the necessary information from their clients, because they are even more reluctant to go through a filtering process generally put in place by SWers. Communication with our clients, not tarnished by fear of the authorities, would significantly help reduce risks for both parties involved. If clients could share their personal information with less fear of arrest, SWers could better choose their clients. This is why the Canadian municipalities involved must bring to an end the application of the federal law that criminalizes the

sex industry as well as their punitive John School programs. The resources this would free up should be reinvested in community organizations that offer support and harm reduction services directly to SWers.



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¹ Jonathan Cha and Eleonora Diamanti. (2015). “En marge du quartier des spectacles: tensivité et trajectoires opposées du Spectrum et du Café Cléopâtre”, in Harel, Thibert and Lussier, *Le Quartier des spectacles et le chantier de l’imaginaire montréalais*, p.31-34, from <https://tinyurl.com/chdiamanti>

² Isabelle Hachey. (2013). *Le maire Coderre veut éradiquer les salons de massage de Montréal*, from <https://tinyurl.com/massageerotiquescoderre>

³ Marie Christine Trottier. (2017). *Huit permis de salons de massage révoqués dans Rosemont*, from <https://tinyurl.com/permisrosemont>

- ⁴ Emmanuel Delacour. (2023). *Un salon de massage dans Rosemont exaspère l'arrondissement*, from <https://tinyurl.com/salonmassagerosemont>
- ⁵ Radio-Canada. (2018). *Laval : les établissements à caractère érotique limités à une zone industrielle*, from <https://tinyurl.com/lavalzone>
- ⁶ Jean-Philippe Guilbault. (2023). *La dernière danse*, from <https://tinyurl.com/ladernieredanse>
- ⁷ Molly Hayes. (2018). *The last dance: Why the Canadian strip club is a dying institution*, from <https://tinyurl.com/thelastdancecanada>
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ Outcall means that SWers come to the customer for the appointment, either at his home or at a location of his choice, such as a hotel.
- ¹¹ Jessica Owen. (2021). *Sex work in massage parlours rubs Newmarket councillors wrong way*, from <https://tinyurl.com/newmarketsw>
- ¹² Butterfly. (2022). *Town of Newmarket: End racism against Asian massage businesses and workers*, from <https://www.butterflysw.org/newmarket-end-racism>
- ¹³ Lo Stevenson. (2023). *Imagining Decriminalization of Sex Work in Canada*, from <https://tinyurl.com/decrimcanada>
- ¹⁴ Mona Forya. (2023). *Letter to the City of Edmonton March 21*, from <https://tinyurl.com/letteranswerssociety>
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ Lo Stevenson. (2023). *Imagining Decriminalization of Sex Work in Canada*, from <https://tinyurl.com/decrimcanada>
- ¹⁷ Benedickt Fischer, Maritt Kirst, Cheryl Webster and Scot Wortley. (2002). *The socio-legal dynamics and implications of 'diversion': the case study of the Toronto 'John School' diversion program for prostitution offenders*, from <https://tinyurl.com/johnschooldiversion>
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ Zinnia Jones. (2013). *The Salvation Army's History of Anti-LGBT Discrimination*, from https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-salvation-armys-histo_b_442293
- ²⁰ From January 2023 to January 2026, adults in possession of certain illegal drugs for personal use will not face criminal charges, as would normally be the case under the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*. This change, approved by Health Canada, is an effort to combat the toxic drug crisis.
- ²¹ Ethan Morneau. (2023). *Campbell River bylaw sets \$200 fine for drug use on public property as decriminalization kicks in*, from <https://tinyurl.com/campbellriverbylaw>
- ²² Lo Stevenson (2023). *Imagining Decriminalization of Sex Work in Canada*, from <https://tinyurl.com/decrimcanada>
- ²³ The City of Montreal has had sanctuary city status since 2017. Several cities in Canada have adopted similar declarations to ensure that a person without legal status in a vulnerable situation can access municipal public safety services without the risk of being denounced to immigration authorities or deported.

Photos: Gabor Szilasi. (2019). *Club Supersexe et Cinéma Palace*, Montréal & Latsami

Recommendations by SWAC

To watch :

P-Valley, a TV-show by Katori Hall (2020)

Kokomo City, a documentary by D. Smith (2023)

Shiva Baby, a movie by Emma Seligman (2020)

Live Nude Girls Unite!, a documentary by Julia Query (2000)

Yes we fuck, a documentary by Raül de la Morena (2014)

To read :

Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation by Silvia Federici (2014)

This is my real name by Cid V Brunet (2021)

Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital by Leopoldina Fortunati (2022)

Le travail du sexe contre le travail by Morgane Merteuil (2014)

Les putains du diable : procès des sorcières et construction de l'État moderne by Armelle Le Bras-Chopard (2017)

Playing the Whore by Melissa Gira Grant (2014)

Smith, Molly, Mac, Juno. Revolting Prostitutes: The Fight For Sex Workers' Rights by Juno Mac et Molly Smith (2020)

To listen:

La politique des putes, a podcast from Intime et Politique (2020)

Nous sommes toujours là, a podcast from Stella (2023)

