



Decriminalize Sex Work

Sex workers' historic day at the Supreme Court of Canada

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NATIONAL: Toronto sex workers bring their historic fight for decriminalization and protection from violence to the Supreme Court of Canada today.

In what is known as the Bedford case, lawyers for three Toronto sex workers – Terri-Jean Bedford, Amy Lebovitch and Valerie Scott— will argue that Criminal Code provisions that criminalize and restrict sex workers' ability to work safely violate their Charter rights to liberty, safety and freedom of expression.

FIRST, a national coalition of feminists working in support of decriminalization of sex work and for sex worker's human and labour rights, will be in Ottawa to support sex workers.

“At long last, these courageous sex workers are bringing their compelling arguments to Canada's highest court. They will argue for decriminalization and ask the court to recognize the violence and stigma caused by the law,” said FIRST spokesperson, Esther Shannon.

“Together with many other progressive and caring organizations and hundreds of thousands of Canadians, FIRST urges the Court to make sex worker safety paramount by honouring sex workers' Charter rights.”

The Bedford case began in 2007 when Bedford, Lebovitch and Scott came to the Ontario Superior Court of Justice seeking to strike down Criminal Code sections related to prostitution because they violate sex workers' constitutional rights. The 2010 Superior Court Himel decision found in favour of the sex workers but the Harper government appealed the Himel decision and subsequently appealed an Ontario Court of Appeal decision on the matter. Both lower court decisions had found the law does violate sex workers' Charter rights, but the Court of Appeal ruled the communicating law was a reasonable limit on the right to expression. This means street prostitution still remains effectively illegal.

“The Harper government turns its back on the most endangered and stigmatized women in the country by seeking to maintain the communicating law, a provision that has seen street-based workers subject to extreme danger since its 1985 enactment,” Shannon said.

A similar Charter appeal brought by Vancouver's Pivot Legal Society on behalf of former sex worker Sheryl Kiselbach and the DTES Sex Workers United Against Violence (SWUAV) organization is on hold pending the outcome of the Bedford case.

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