



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Local groups back labour rights for sex workers

Canada's criminal laws make sex workers third-class citizens

VANCOUVER (April 30, 2009) – In honor of May Day, sex worker rights organizations and their allies are asking the public to support the fight for sex workers' labour rights.

“Sex workers have lives, families, and homes like anyone else. They're entitled to the human rights and legal protections available to other members of Canadian society, including labour rights.” says Tamara O'Doherty, a spokesperson for FIRST, a feminist group advocating for the decriminalization of sex work and the human rights of sex workers. “Unfortunately, the criminal laws turn them into third-class citizens with few rights.”

Most activities surrounding sex work are criminalized, but sex worker groups and their supporters say this prevents sex workers from controlling their working conditions and puts them at greater risk of violence and exploitation. Vancouver groups joining the May Day call for enhanced labour rights for sex workers include FIRST, PACE, the Coalition of Experiential Communities, SWAN, WISH, HUSTLE: Men on the Move and Pivot.

“By decriminalizing the sex worker industry, sex workers employed by agencies would be protected under employment standards legislation. Decriminalization would allow all sex workers to become legitimate taxpayers, contribute to Canada Pension and employment insurance, obtain credit, and manage their finances, just like any other legitimate business,” says Sue Davis, of the BC Coalition of Experiential Communities.

The criminal law forces street workers into isolated areas, endangering their safety while denying workers the right to negotiate the terms of a transaction and limiting their ability to negotiate condom use and otherwise manage their working environment. The law facilitates the exploitation of off-street workers by many agencies that hire them and can prevent sex workers from learning how to work safely. The law pushes all sex workers away from health, social support, and harm reduction services and saddles many sex workers with a criminal record that limits other working opportunities.

By accessing the following publications and links, the public can learn more about how decriminalization is key to creating and protecting sex workers rights.

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Contact: Tamara O'Doherty, FIRST, 604-534-4450
Sue Davies, BC Coalition of Experiential Communities, 604-671-2345.

Labor on the Margins: Sex Industry Safety and Stabilization, by Susan Davis and Raven Bowen, BC Coalition of Experiential Communities, 2007. This report contains recommendations by sex workers to help them organize for safe working conditions:

http://bccec.files.wordpress.com/2008/02/labor_on_the_margins.pdf

Voices for Dignity: A Call to End the Harms Caused by Canada's Sex Trade Laws, Pivot Legal Society, April 2004:

www.pivotlegal.org/Publications/reports.htm#VFDreport

Beyond Decriminalization: Sex-work, Human Rights and a New Framework for Law Reform, Pivot Legal Society, June 2006:

www.pivotlegal.org/Publications/reports.htm#BDreport

BC Coalition of Experiential Communities: <http://bccec.wordpress.com>

Supporting Women's Alternatives Network (SWAN):

www.swanvancouver.ca

Prostitution Alternatives Counselling and Education Society (PACE):

www.pace-society.ca

WISH: Drop-in Centre Society <http://www.wish-vancouver.net/>

Prostitutes Empowerment Education & Resource Society (PEERS):

www.peers.bc.ca

FIRST (feminists advocating for decriminalization and sex worker rights):

www.firstadvocates.org

Maggies' (Toronto): www.maggiestoronto.com

STELLA (Montreal, bilingual): www.chezstella.org