



Network

NEWS FROM THE ENGLISH COLLECTIVE OF PROSTITUTES

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20p

STOP POLICE ILLEGALITY AND RACISM

The police are used to arresting prostitutes when and how they please, whether or not we're working. They run their business with confidence and arrogance — they are the law.

You're nicked, taken to the station, expected to plead guilty, fined and then back on the street to earn the money to pay the fine until the next arrest. Up to now there's been very little hassle for the police. They have the backing of the courts and they expect most prostitutes to plead guilty because it's so hard to win against them and also we can't afford any publicity which might damage our families.

Some of us got so fed up with being victimised that we got together with other women to fight for our rights. That's how in April 1982 the English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP) started a legal service at the King's Cross Women's Centre. We called it Legal Action for Women (LAW) to give a new meaning to the LAW. Many girls who work in the area started coming to LAW wanting to plead not guilty. After we won a couple of cases the police got worried. They began keeping an eye on the Centre and picking on the women who used it, many of whom were Black women and women who work for ourselves, without pimps. They arrested a girl's boyfriend because she was pleading not guilty. They threatened the girl's best friend with taking her kid away, and even told her mother up North what she was doing in King's Cross — just to break up her family.

At the same time the police refused to arrest pimps and rapists when we reported them. One of the girls, who was threatened by a pimp that he would break her ribs if she didn't hand over her money, was told when she reported it to the police that they couldn't do anything until her ribs were broken. Another woman who isn't a prostitute was raped in the area. When she reported it, the police accused her of being a prostitute and arrested her boyfriend for pimping because he's Black. They gave her such a grilling at the police station that she withdrew her complaint.

We had to do something to protect ourselves and our families. We knew that in 1975, prostitutes all over France went on strike and occupied churches all over the country to protest against police harassment. We decided to occupy the local Church. So on the 17 November, at 7 pm, we walked into the Holy Cross Church one by one with our kids, and told the vicar that we were staying. We had decided to take our children with us so the police couldn't snatch them from our homes without us knowing. We had no idea then that we would be in the Church for 12 days with three babies under 4 months.

That same evening we issued the following press release: 'We are here to demand:

1. An end to illegal arrests of prostitutes;
2. An end to police threats, blackmail, harassment and racism;
3. Hands off our children — we don't want our kids in care;
4. An end to arrests of boy-friends, husbands, sons;
5. Arrest rapists and pimps instead;
6. Immediate protection, welfare, housing for women who want to get off the game.'

And we asked to see councillors, MPs and representatives of the Home Office.

SUPPORT

The following day people started coming to the Church to visit us. Working women from other areas, local residents, members of the church, Black and immigrant women's organisations, women from Greenham and Molesworth peace camps, lesbian women, gay and heterosexual men, brought food and blankets, cooked, babysat for our children and donated money towards the cost of heating the Church. (We had to pay a £240 bill even though the church warden and the vicar refused to put

on the heating for more than eight hours a day.)

Several MPs and councillors came to meet with us to see what we wanted. As a result Camden Council agreed to provide a contact person in housing and one in social services to help women who want to get off the game.

Most so-called feminist organisations didn't bother to come to support prostitute women.

The door was locked and only people who had been screened by one of us were allowed in. The press could come in at fixed times when all the women in the Church were wearing masks so that we couldn't be identified. Some days there were as many as 50 people in the Church including the women sleeping there and visitors.

Every day some of us went out to different red light areas to let the girls outside know what was happening inside. Some women who were still working in Argyle Square wore masks and badges in solidarity with the occupation. There was so much support that we felt at home in the Church in spite of the constant threat of being evicted. As one girl said: 'It was great, there should be many more!'

News of the occupation travelled fast and prostitute women in other countries organised support. We also received telegrams from Italy, Germany, Canada and USA; women in Venice, San Fran-

cisco and Philadelphia held pickets outside the British Consulates there demanding justice for prostitutes in King's Cross.

MONITOR

The police were furious. They tried to divide us by telling lies about the occupation to the women who they thought hadn't come to the Church. But they were also scared knowing that so many people were watching them and the number of arrests went down. We knew they would try to retaliate when we came out of the Church so we refused to leave until Camden Council agreed to put a person on the beat to monitor police activities for one month. The monitor was supposed to be out in Argyle Square for at least 5½ hours a day between 2 pm and 10 pm so as to cover part of the day shift and part of the night shift. She was supposed to watch everything the police did when she was around and keep a record of whom they arrested, why and what time. Such information, compared with what had gone before the occupation, would have established whether the police were picking on Black girls and on girls who used the Centre, pleaded not guilty and had no pimps. Unfortunately the monitor didn't listen to us. She was afraid to stay out after 6 pm in spite of the fact that the women in the square

Turn to page two



Gigi Turner

Women in the Church celebrate our victory. The media tried to discredit the occupation by saying that there were no 'real' prostitutes in there. But working girls were not fooled by it. A prostitute woman from the North told us: 'We knew it was the real thing in there. No social worker would have stayed in a cold church all that time for the sake of us girls.'

English Collective of Prostitutes — "the girls' union"

We are a network of prostitutes from all levels of the sex industry: Black and white, immigrant and British, lesbian and straight, street workers, call girls, part-timers, professionals, women who work in saunas, massage parlours, escort agencies and night clubs. Like most prostitutes we couldn't come out and speak publicly for ourselves. We needed the support of so-called respectable women who understood about illegality, money and the police. So in 1975, we joined the Wages for Housework Campaign, an international network of women who want money for all their work — including sexual work — from the government for all women.

We are campaigning for:

- the abolition of all laws against prostitutes. Our bodies and our money are our business, not the law's. What adults choose to do in private is their own affair, not the government's.
- justice against illegal arrests and police harassment
- the right to work and live with other women
- the right to have a relationship with a man if we choose to
- financial help and housing for women who want to get off the game or run away from a pimp
- the abolition of the cohabitation ruling which cuts women off Social Security if they are having a relationship with a man
- the increase of all Social Security benefits and women's wages, and payment for housework, so that no woman is forced into prostitution by lack of money

We are campaigning against:

- State brothels and legalised red light areas where prostitutes have to register with the police and have their record in the computer for life, like in Germany.

STOP POLICE

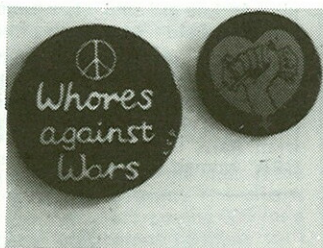
Continued from page one

had guaranteed her protection. She spent much of her time going to court, not to testify for any woman she had seen being illegally arrested when not working, but just to find out what was happening. She also spent a lot of time going from door to door interviewing residents.

In spite of all this her presence was a protection for all of us, and the rate of arrests stayed down...until her job was finished. At the beginning of January, Camden Council published the monitor's report which had no mention of the occupation, the ECP or the Women's Centre. The police saw that Camden Council would allow the ECP to be isolated and decided that their time had come. They flooded the square and arrested hundreds of girls in an attempt to regain control of the beat.

VICTORY

But they couldn't steal our victory. In spite of police retaliation, the occupation has changed our lives. It has shown that 'whores' can organise together and win. There are women pleading not guilty all over Britain now, and lawyers are finally having to learn how to represent prostitute clients. Nobody wanted to hear what prostitutes had to say, but we made people listen to us. Now prostitute women have many new friends.



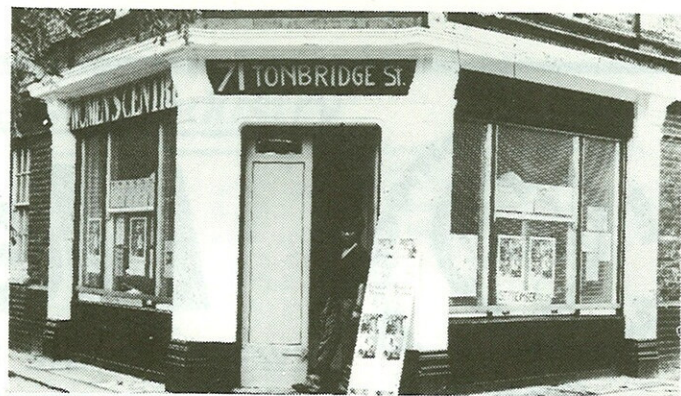
These badges are available from the centre, 30p each.

Jo Pacino

AND WHEN DID YOU FIRST NOTICE THIS DESIRE TO EARN A LIVING BY WALKING THE STREETS AND ACCOSTING PASSERS - BY ?



Thanks to everybody who took part in the ECP survey about prostitution in London. The answers by 100 working women will be out soon. They will give



Gigi Turner

King's Cross Women's Centre - base of the ECP and LAW
71 Tonbridge Street, London WC1. Tel: 01-837 7509
open Monday-Friday, 11am- 5pm

Campaigning is expensive in time and money. Any time and/or financial contribution you can afford to give will be most welcome.

Legal Action for Women — (LAW)

In April 1982 the ECP started a legal advice service for *all* women. Some of the women who run it are prostitutes. LAW has helped many women to defend themselves. Among our victories:

loitering

A woman unjustly charged with loitering was found **not guilty** at Clerkenwell Court in June 1982. She was on her way to the doctor when she was arrested. She was 'guilty' of having to walk through the red light area of King's Cross in order to get there.

soliciting

Another woman who had been unjustly charged with soliciting was found **not guilty** at Clerkenwell Court in October 1982. She was arrested while talking to two friends outside the hotel where she lives. She told the court that the only way she could pay her rent was by working as a prostitute because the hotel where she and her two children live in one room, charges £84 a week and Social Security only gave her £61. What other job open to a Black single mother could pay such high rent? Like many other women she can't get off the game until she finds alternative accommodation.

rehoused

With LAW's help she and her two children have now been rehoused by the Council.

changes in the law

You can't be sent to prison for loitering or soliciting anymore — prison sentences were abolished 31 January 1983. This also means that if you plead not guilty and your case is remanded, you should be given **unconditional bail**; the court no longer has the right to ban you from a particular area.

finest

Some magistrates are so upset by these changes that they've put up the fines, knowing that you can still go to prison if you don't pay your fine. One woman who was fined £150 decided to fight them and came to **LAW** for help — she appealed the sentence and won her case. The appeal judge said that such a high fine was wrong as it could only be paid through more prostitution — at the rate of £10-£20 per client that makes 7 to 15 punters for the court's sake! He reduced the fine to £15 at £5 per week, which can be paid off Social Security, other wages or a loan from a friend.

LAW is open every Thursday at the King's Cross Women's Centre where the ECP is based. If you need legal support phone — 01-837 7509.

The rights sheet about prostitution laws, "A guide to the rules of the game; A-Z for working girls", is available from the Centre.

Vice Girls who blame Maggie

(Daily Mirror 20.5.83)

Jobless girls are turning to prostitution — and blaming Margaret Thatcher. The girls, mostly 17 and 18, are calling themselves "Thatcher's Girls" in a protest against unemployment. Helen Buckingham, founder of 'Prostitution Laws Are Nonsense' said: "The girls are very angry. If Mrs Thatcher hadn't created so much unemployment they would have gone into normal jobs."

USA

The Wages for Housework Campaign in the USA has launched a petition to remove the laws against prostitutes. The petition has been written in consultation with our sister organisation, the **US PROSTITUTES COLLECTIVE**, and has been endorsed by many groups and individuals. These include: Alliance Against Sexual Coercion, American Gay Atheist, Boston Rape Crisis Centre, Mental Patients Liberation Front, National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Prison Research Education/Action Project, Rape Action Project, San Antonio Gospel Tabernacle, Wages Due Lesbians.

The petition also demands:

- An end to harassment of prostitutes and their families
- Amnesty for all prostitutes and the removal of all criminal records relating to prostitution
- Immediate housing, welfare and protection for any woman who wants to leave the profession, including housing and viable alternatives for juvenile runaways who depend on prostitution.

TRINIDAD

The newly formed **Trinidad Collective of Prostitutes** has joined the coalition in support of the US petition. Women's organisations in Trinidad and Tobago can no longer ignore the situation of their sisters who are prostitutes but must be prepared to "... take a side".

ITALY

On the 20 February 1983, the ECP was invited to a conference in Pordenone by the **Comitato per i Diritti Civili delle Prostitute**

(Committee for the Civil Rights of Prostitutes) to discuss changes in the law. The conference was attended by prostitutes, government ministers, MP's, councillors, and hundreds of members of the public. The new legislation proposes to decriminalise soliciting and brothel keeping.

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

Prostitute women who've worked for many years in the inner city area of Darlinghurst, are being pushed out as property developers move in and house prices go through the roof.

Two years ago the New South Wales government made soliciting on the streets legal. But the law was changed in March, after pressure from the newly arrived middle class residents. It is now illegal to solicit in a residential area.

After being kicked off the streets, some women have been pushed into the hands of pimps who've taken over some of the brothels that women used to run. Now the local council is attacking women who work from flats or houses by charging them rates for business properties. The police are using the new law as an excuse to arrest women working in the commercial area, saying it's residential because some people live above the shopfronts! Meanwhile high unemployment means more women coming to Sydney from country areas to go on the game...

Prostitutes are getting together with other women to defend our livelihoods against big business and politicians happy to catch votes at our expense — a health and information centre for prostitute and non-prostitute women is being set up in the main red light area.



San Francisco, USA: picket in support of the church occupation.

LEGALISED KIDNAPPING

This single mother was charged with brothel keeping for working from home. Her 10-year-old daughter who previously knew nothing of her mother's occupation, was taken away by the police. She's pleading not guilty and fighting to get her daughter back from social services. This is what happened.

They broke the front door in and broke the lock. There were about 10 police in all, three of which were women. My daughter was crying and screaming for me to rescue her. They refused to let me comfort her. We were then taken to the police station. I was refused to make any phone calls. My daughter was taken away from me. I was allowed no contact with her for four days, I really did believe that I would never see her again, and I was going out of my mind with worry and grief. I pleaded with the police to tell me how my daughter was and they just retaliated, hatefully, that she was obviously better off where she is now than when she was with me. Also calling me an unfit mother which is totally untrue. They couldn't have hurt me more if they had picked up a knife and twisted it in my heart. Everything that I did was to improve our life-style and escape the 'poverty' trap.

My daughter has changed from being a normal, happy, well balanced child, into a nervous, embittered child who hates the police and authority now. Her heart is full of revenge and hatred for those people who are trying to destroy a once happy family whose only real crime was poverty. They have put her in a new school, and she now has the hard task of making new friends all over again, in the face of all the damaging publicity. And what is worse, she has been subjected to medical examinations, obviously to see if she has been used sexually in some way, which I find utterly outrageous.

If the police were acting in the best interests of the child then they should have sent a social worker to my home and quietly discussed the situation first, perhaps even to offer some help job-wise or housing. Something must be done to change the laws that make it so easy for the police to invade our privacy in our own homes, and to be able to just snatch our children away. It is merely 'legalised kidnapping'.

FED UP

I've worked on every beat over the last 8 years and I've been in Balham for the last couple of years. But I've never had so much hassle as I've had during the last six months. I got nicked 11 times in two weeks recently and my friend was nicked 40 times in the last month. I'm fed up with pleading guilty when I wasn't working. The last time, I was in a car with this guy who was my regular when the police stopped us. They told me to shove off and questioned him: "How much does she charge? Where does she take you? Did she solicit you?" He said I was a friend and he'd met me in the pub. The police got really nasty and told him they'd call his family and job if he didn't tell them the truth. He got scared and told them. So I got a radius slapped on me by the court because I pleaded not guilty and the case was remanded. The police said they'd pick on me more because I pleaded not guilty. When I came out of court I went to pick up my kids and I got nicked again. The police beat me up in the van and insulted me something wicked!

They've really got heavy lately. They're scaring the punters away by stopping and threatening them. They're stopping mostly Black guys, and they've tried to do one guy for pimping but he's not a pimp. The residents are also getting nasty, they've been calling the police, chucking buckets over us, breaking bottles over the roads so punters can't drive down them, and shouting obscenities at us.

cut off social

I was a teacher up to two years ago. I taught for five years. When I became unemployed like so many teachers and other women, I went on Social Security, but I was cut off when a neighbour informed the DHSS that I was living with a man. I tried some cleaning jobs but in the end I was just sick and tired of being badly paid, over-worked and financially dependent. So I went on the game.

Prostitution is hard work and I'm constantly worried about the police arresting my husband for pimping. Many women do a full-time job at home looking after children or elderly parents. We are not unemployed, we are working without pay, or recognition. By going on the game we are making up for all the welfare the State should provide. I would leave this work if I had the money.



22.12.1982. Members of the ECP and other friends congratulate Marcella Claxton (sixth from the right) and her solicitor Ruth Bundey (fourth from the right) outside the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board for winning £17,500 compensation. Marcella was attacked by the Yorkshire Ripper in May 1976. She was turned down by the Board when she first applied for compensation in 1978 on the grounds that she had 'misled the police' and 'provoked the attack upon her' because she was a prostitute. Marcella has no convictions for prostitution. At the time of the attack she gave a very accurate description of Sutcliffe but it was dismissed by the police who insisted she had been attacked by a Black man. Had they been less racist, many lives would have been spared.

As a result of winning compensation, Marcella had to come off Social Security. Her solicitor has written to her MP to ask for changes in the law so that single mothers who are crime survivors are not forced to live on their compensation money.

Violence against women in the sex industry

Anti-porn groups were planning an invasion of Soho on 28 May. The ECP, *Black Women for Wages for Housework* and *Women Against Rape* circulated a letter of protest:

"Anti-porn groups have never made a distinction between the sex industry and the women who work in it, whose livelihood they are threatening. By refusing to come out on the side of women in the sex industry, they have in effect taken sides against us. In Sweden the authorities have publicly thanked 'vigilantes' in the women's movement for helping to close down sex shops and night-clubs, forcing women back on the dole. One stripper's appraisal of the 'vigilantes' attacks was "I imagine I shall be back in the dole queue before long".

"In King's Cross Labour MP Frank Dobson and some right-wing residents have called for a police crackdown against prostitute women, as though this could increase the safety of any woman in the area. The police have already said that they are 'too busy' arresting prostitutes to spend time on protection.

"Because Black women have the least money, we are most often forced into areas of the sex industry which are the most visible and open to police harassment — beginning with soliciting on the street.

"The connection between economic vulnerability and sexual vulnerability is evident. We have pointed to the government, whose economic policy is forcing more women into prostitution, as the biggest pimp. To imply that more censorship is the solution is to line up with the repressive forces in this society.

"The invasion of Soho is likely to result in beatings, arrests and more street sweeps and cleanups. Is the women's movement going to fight for more power for women, including women in the sex industry, or more power for the police? more sexual choices for all women or the imposition of sexual standards? Are women in the sex industry going to be blamed for violence against women, and hounded out of making a living?"

As a result of our letter and other women's protest, the invasion of Soho was cancelled. Anti-porn women decided to go for a 'walk' around Soho instead.

No to MADAME MARGARET

Most of the women who work on the streets of Soho are Black. There are some white girls but they don't get picked up as often. I work on the street because I don't want to give money to any man, any landlord or to Madame Margaret. The police are jealous of the money I make and they often try to take my rings off my fingers when they arrest me. I don't like the way they rough me up, grab me and call me names. I get very aggravated when they do that. They also try to do you for both clipping and soliciting. That's unfair — it's either one or

for prostitution but I've never been a prostitute. I don't fuck the men. I'm a clipper. My children don't know what I'm doing — I look after them properly, they've got everything they need.

It's difficult to be a prostitute when there's nowhere to take the clients. You go to a hotel and you're stopped by security. So a lot of girls are forced into clipping. The police abuse their powers: you're sitting in a cafe with other girls, doing nothing, no business at all, just having tea. They come in and intimidate the owner into kicking the girls out so they can arrest you. And when they arrest you, they take your money and never give it back to you. It goes straight towards paying the fine. About 200 girls work in Soho, depending on what's going on in other areas. If there's a crackdown in King's Cross then you get the girls from King's Cross coming down.

at the bottom

The problem with the clubs is the girls at the bottom. The clients get so ripped off, paying £80 for a bottle of champagne that isn't even champagne and so on, that by the time they get to the girls they've got no money. They've been cleaned dry by the clubs and there's nothing left for us girls. That's not fair really, especially since the reason they came in the first place was to meet the girls.



Soho landlord

*Half my wages I paid
to that man
Half my time I layed
for that man
Half my mind I gave
for that man*

For what?

SOHO FLATS

The police have nothing to do with these flats really, we're not doing anything illegal — there's only one girl working and the maid. As long as they don't see a girl soliciting out of the window or at the door we don't get any aggravation from the police. They raided us some months ago though. Four CID burst in, searched everywhere, took all the working gear and the money. They took us to the police station and kept us for eleven hours. They did it to all the flats. No one's been charged and they gave no reason for it. It's the first time it's happened since I've been working, and I've been in Soho for 6 years. It's humiliating, being put in a van in the middle of the day with everybody watching. They still haven't returned the equipment and the money they took. Then the landlords get frightened and just throw you out. Most flats have had notice to quit.

HAPPIER ON THE GAME

I have been much happier on the game, living on my own with my daughter, than living with my daughter's father who made me do everything for him. He was violent to me if I didn't consent to his strange sexual demands before I got my housekeeping money every Friday.

NO BAD WOMEN JUST BAD LAWS

"The prostitution laws are an attack on all women, to keep us women from having too high an economic standard, keeping sex and money separate in our minds but not in our lives: and making us all aware constantly that if we don't dress 'properly', if we wear too much make-up, if we walk with too easy a gait, we might be a prostitute. So really the repression of prostitutes is the repression of all women from expressing their sexual feelings and their bodies as they like . . . Prostitutes aren't persecuted because society doesn't like prostitutes, but because it's a very important way of keeping women in their place."

Selma James, spokeswoman for the ECP

Gigi Turner



ECP and supporters at International Women's Day for Peace, London, March 1983