

## Canadian Organization for the Rights of Prostitutes

Frank Jones argued against the legalization of prostitution in the November 30 Star, and we agree with him. Legalization is a system of state control that sees prostitution as a vice and regulates it as such. It allows licensed prostitutes to work in designated red light zones but it prosecutes prostitutes who work outside the zones as criminals. It is not very different, then, from the present situation in Canada which allows prostitutes to work legally by advertising in the paper and going out to their clients place, but prosecutes them if they bring clients into their own home, or if they solicit in public.

Any system that treats prostitution as a crime or a vice invites corruption. Legalization and criminalization both make prostitutes vulnerable to exploitation. And the more repressive the law, the more it drives prostitutes into the hands of criminals. This is why we don't agree with Jones' argument, in support of the Cabbagetown vigilantes, that prostitutes must be harassed and prosecuted. This only leads to the very situation that Jones claims he's trying to avoid.

The way to get the criminals out of prostitution is to get prostitution out of the criminal code, and to enforce assault, sexual assault, coercion and kidnapping laws against those who exploit prostitutes. Decriminalization means that all criminal laws regulating prostitution would be repealed, and prostitution would be regulated in the same manner as any other business. With decriminalization, prostitutes would no longer need to fear being arrested themselves, and they would be able to get help if they were ripped off, raped, assaulted or forced to work for someone. The few who have pimps now, wouldn't need them anymore to bail them out.

Decriminalization is the only solution that will reduce street soliciting, and it will do it without the use of force. Criminalization obviously hasn't worked. Even when police had the power (which they're asking for again) to pick up known prostitutes just for being on the street, they still couldn't stop street soliciting. Legalization doesn't work either. Many prostitutes work illegally in places like Amsterdam because they've been refused or deprived of a license, or because they refuse to be finger-printed and photographed like criminals to get one. Decriminalization would allow prostitutes to move indoors of their own free will. Given the choice most prostitutes would work indoors-- it was the closing of the body rub parlors in the Seventies that led to the increase in street soliciting in Cabbagetown in the first place, as police readily admit.

Some people oppose decriminalization because they say it reflects badly on Canadian society to condone prostitution. Choosing decriminalization doesn't mean we condone prostitution, it only means we've acknowledged that we can't stamp it out or control it using the criminal law. Besides, allowing an activity that is going to take place anyway, to take place indoors in a clean and dignified setting reflects better on Canadian society than the spectacle of masked vigilantes and police officers hounding prostitutes and their clients on the street as Jones recommended.