

Opening conversations about sex work

Passed at June 2019 national meeting

During the organising of rs21's 2018 Day Without Men event, several of the organisers had a long chat about whether or not we should include a session on sex work, following discussions in the wider movement and increasingly visible activism happening around decriminalising sex work. In the end, we decided that it would make more sense to have an opportunity to think about the politics of sex workers' movements internally, before we attempt anything more public.

In Britain, groups like Sex Workers Advocacy and Resistance Movement (SWARM), Decrim Now and the English Collective of Prostitutes have been advocating for the decriminalisation of sex work, so as to increase sex workers' power relative to the police, immigration enforcement, landlords, managers and clients. United Voices of the World (a small trade union) are unionising strippers and hostesses at clubs, and the 8 June Women's Strike in London centred the demand for decrim as it ended with a rally in Soho. Meanwhile, people in the movement are putting forward new frameworks for understanding sex work and how it relates to exploitation, state violence, misogyny, sexual violence and transphobia.

We propose that it's time to open the conversation in rs21 around these issues, since we have mostly remained quiet on them except for discussions amongst ourselves. We think we should because:

1. Trans issues and sex work issues are often bound up into the same conversations and the antagonists divide along similar lines. If we are against trans oppression, then it makes sense to develop our political understanding of sex work.
2. We support the right of workers to organise themselves in trade unions, which sex workers have been fighting for recently, while meeting with a lot of resistance.
3. We support and want to fight for women's liberation, and this issue can help bring out any contradictions in our ideas on women's oppression, which will help us to sharpen our feminist praxis.

Although we think it is important to start a conversation properly on this issue, we feel it would be best to do it carefully, since members of rs21 may have had different experiences, thoughts and levels of background knowledge in relation to this issue. Therefore, we propose a period of thoughtful discussion and self-education internally before we try to take any kind of public position.

We propose:

1. A series of member Skype calls based around short reading, probably starting with Molly Smith and Juno Mac's *Revolting Prostitutes* and other recent anti-capitalist feminist writing on sex work, and then moving on to look at texts by Alexandra Kollontai, Lynne Segal and so on.
2. A document could be produced out of these calls with notes that we could discuss more widely in the organisation.
3. Having discussed the politics internally, we'd then be in a better position to confidently commission pieces for the website, hold open events around sex work and work with people involved in the sex workers' rights movement.

To carry this through we may need a team of organisers who ensure the steps above happen - if we vote it through, we welcome volunteers and ask that SG tries to implement a small working group if no volunteers are found today.