# Sex Workers AC

**\*\*CW for mentions of sexual violence\*\***

## Part 1: Start Talking

#### [ROJ & Dunt] THE SEX WORK DISCUSSION HAS BEEN TABLED – it’s time to reopen it.

**Dunt:** Dunt, Ian. [Ian Dunt investigates why the debate over sex workers’ rights in the UK has become so nasty that some are afraid to join in] “Shouting out about sex (workers)” *SagePub,* JP.

IT’S NOT EVERY day you see sex workers from around the world meet in the mother of parliaments, but this autumn they arrived in their droves. They came from the Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, Swe- den, Taiwan and Thailand, but they found a debate in the UK which was much more divisive and angry than any they had back home. The argument over sex worker rights in Britain has descended into a tit-for-tat battle of no-platforming, censorship and language policing**. For years the debate around sex work was taboo because it just wasn’t something polite people talked about**. Our manners are more open now. But it is threatening to become a subject that people are uncomfortable talk- ing about once again, because few people are foolish or confident enough to brave the howls of outrage which typify the way the debate is conducted. This autumn’s symposium was intended to sidestep that vitriolic public debate and collect evidence to be placed directly in the UK at its House of Commons Library as a reference for lawmakers. **Sex workers shared their experiences and academics brought their research.** The conclusion of both was that decriminalising sex work could protect prostitutes from violence. **Something is changing in the prostitution debate.** A recent decision by Amnesty Inter- national to support decriminalisation lent campaigners momentum and recognition, but it was merely the latest in a long list of respected international organisations – in- cluding the UN and the World Health Organisation – to demand change. **Many sex workers believe it heralds a sea change in global attitudes. But the respectable political debate takes place against an angry backdrop of smears and abuse**. There are ultimately two sex work debates: one, a calm and judicious assessment of evidence among international organisations, the other a censorious and puritanical shouting match between rival feminist factions.

**Thus, the Role of the Judge is to Promote the Reclaiming of Educational Spaces**, which means they must endorse our ability to use debate for critical discourse.

#### [ROB & Matsuda] As oppression is rooted in ignorance, the **Role of the Ballot is to Interrogate the Manifestations of Violence**. We should specifically talk about marginalized groups, like women, since traditional pedagogy like util actively tells us to sit down and shut up.

Matsuda: Matsuda, Mari. [Assistant Professor of Law, University of Hawaii] “Liberal Jurisprudence and the Abstracted Visions of Human Nature: A Feminist Critique of Rawls’s Theory of Justice.” *New Mexico Law Review*, Vol. 16, Fall 1986. KK

The body of emerging scholarship known as feminist theory, as rich and diverse as it is, is characterized by some basic tenets. First is the charge of androcentrism in mainstream scholarship--the charge that traditional scholarly discourse largely ignores the lives and voices of women. Second is the charge of dualism. Dualism is the oppositional understanding of intuition, experience, and emotion as the inferior antitheses of logic, reason, and science, coupled with a tendency to equate women with the former grouping and men with the latter.3 A related dualism places men in the public domain-politics, law, paid work-and women in the private-home, absence of law, unpaid work.32 From these critiques of mainstream scholarship, feminists have derived two insights. The first is that the personal is political.33 By this it is meant that what happens in the daily lives of real people has political content in the same way as does what we normally think of as politics – the structure of economic systems and governments. That is, who makes breakfast, who gets a paycheck, who gets whistled at in the street – all the experiences of daily life are a part of the distribution of wealth and power in society. The second insight is that consciousness raising – collective focus on the particularities of real-life experience – is essential to truth-seeking.

Thus, high probability impacts come before improbable extinction scenarios – we need to *performatively invest* in issues impacting marginalized groups by prioritizing discourse about violence that’s actually happening, not just imagined.

## Part 2: The Right to Refuse

#### [Duff et al] Sex workers (abbreviated SWs) are facing exploitation beyond health risks – far beyond their work obligations.

**Duff et al**: Duff, P. [Department of Medicine, University of British Columbia, St. Paul's Hospital, 1081 Burrard Street, Vancouver, British Columbia V6Z 1Y6, Canada] “Poor working conditions and work stress among Canadian sex workers” *Oxford Academic,* 2017. JP

**The social sciences literature has highlighted a broad range of everyday OH&S conditions, that may be of more immediate concern to SWs than sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV risk, which have largely been the focus of epidemiological research**. Such occupational concerns include musculoskeletal disorders, violence and legal worries, the emotional burden of sex work, work-related stress and mental health issues [3]. **Mental health issues are high among SWs, with workplace factors, trauma and lifestyle suggested as contributors** [5,6]. **For example, 74% of American SWs reported symptoms of serious mental illnesses, while 47% of Australian SWs met post-traumatic stress disorder criteria [5] and in Hong Kong, 26% of SWs reported suicidal ideation or attempts [6].** The emotional burden of sex work can lead to stress and burnout [6,7]. **This literature also sheds light on the potential for OH&S processes to improve working conditions, and the health and safety of SWs**. New Zealand's 2003 Prostitution Reform Act (PRA), which decriminalized sex work, vastly improved OH&S standards, workers' rights, as well as health and safety outcomes (e.g. reduced workplace violence, improved physical and sexual health) [2]. In Sydney, Australia, the legalization of sex work has allowed OH&S agencies to regulate the work conditions of licensed work venues, resulting in higher OH&S standards, greater financial support and access to health outreach. However, while legalization has improved the OH&S standards of licensed brothels in Sydney, licensing schemes have reduced peer outreach services' access to unlicensed brothels.

#### [Breitowich] And, sex work is currently seen as dirty and immoral work

**Breitowich:** Breitowich, Andi. [POPSUGAR Contributor] “It's Time We Acknowledge the Fact That Sex Work Is Real Work” *PopSugar,* 2021. JP

Say it with me . . . sex work is real work. In fact, sex work should be respected as a line of real work that has the possibility to be enjoyable, liberating, and a lucrative line of business. **As a society, we tend to shut down around taboo topics like sex and prostitution, but as feminists, and in light of Women's History Month, it is crucial that we recognize sex workers as autonomous individuals.** Sex work has typically developed the reputation as reinforcing unequal gender relations by promoting female victimization and objectification. While I am in no way invalidating female objectification and subjugation, I want to highlight that it is also imperative we recognize sex work as a potentially empowering and pleasurable line of work for those who choose to pursue it. Of course, it must be 100 percent consensual between two adults. Sex work can allow women to creatively express their sexuality and take pride in their occupation. **Prostitution is not legal in the United States (which is an entirely different conversation), but the Netherlands and other European countries have legalized it.** Under circumstances where sex work is legalized and safe, and where sex workers have legal rights and social benefits, sex work can allow women to creatively express their sexuality and take pride in their occupation. Sex worker Felcia (last names have been omitted for privacy), who has worked in the Red Light District of Amsterdam for almost 15 years now, told POPSUGAR that she "enjoys dressing up" for her clients, "finds pleasure and excitement" in her work, and "is made to feel attractive, desired, and worthy." Felcia also made clear that she has experienced "significant personal growth" in sex work and hopes that others will view her as an independent woman who is willingly choosing sex work as her occupation. Not only does Felcia find fulfillment and take pride in her work, but she is also able to financially support herself and her son. **In the US, sex work is frequently deemed as dirty and immoral, but it is absolutely imperative that we break this narrative and recognize alternative possibilities.** When the potential positive gains of sex work are completely disregarded and only the negative aspects are discussed, we run the risk of reinforcing the notion that sex workers are solely victims who should be ashamed. **In 2021, I think we can all agree that female sexuality should be respected and appreciated, so instead of silencing and shaming women for their career choices, let's empower and support them.**

#### [Sankofa] Further, the criminalization of SW uniquely harms black women and trans people.

**Sankofa:** Sankofa, Jasmine. [AIUSA Sexual and Reproductive Rights Advocate] “FROM MARGIN TO CENTER: SEX WORK DECRIMINALIZATION IS A RACIAL JUSTICE ISSUE” *Amnesty International,* 2016. JP

**Sex work is criminalized throughout the United States, typically as misdemeanor offenses.** Similar to the way the Unites States treats and criminalizes drug use, the policing of sex work exacerbates stigma, compromises access to resources, justifies violence, and is steeped in racial disparities. **Women of color, especially Black cisgender and transgender women, girls, and femmes, are particularly vulnerable**. Because sex work and sex trafficking are conflated, interventions are focused on abolishing the sex industry instead of eliminating structural issues that drive exploitation. From profiling to strip searches, from discarded condoms[1] to forcible and extorted sex—law enforcement is a frequent perpetrator of violence against sex workers. As the Daniel Holtzclaw case in Oklahoma revealed, having a history of sex work and drug use increases vulnerability to police sexual violence. **Black women, who are over policed, impoverished, and live in racially segregated communities, are marked as prime targets.** Unfortunately, what the thirteen survivors in Oklahoma experienced is not an anomaly. Although sexual assault is grossly underreported, sexual violence is the second most reported form of police misconduct, after use of force. **The DC Trans Coalition found that 23% of Black transgender people were physically or sexually assaulted by police because they were perceived to be transgender and involved in the sex trade**. Another report, Meaningful Work, found that nearly 40% of Black and Black Multiracial transgender folks who have experience exchanging sex were subjected to pervasive harassment, violence, and arrest. When violence is committed against sex workers, police often refuse to investigate. In Los Angeles, Black sex workers were targeted for nearly three decades. Police officers responded by coding case files “No Human Involved.” **Sex workers remain targeted and shamed, and Black women continue to feel the brunt of it—of the 41 sex workers murdered in the United States in 2015, 17 were Black and 12 were transgender women.**

## Thus, I affirm:

#### [Women’s Strike] Resolved: A just government ought to recognize the unconditional right of sex workers to strike.

Women’s Strike: Women’s Strike [The Women’s Strike defies the idea that all women need to do is tell our stories and speak out. We are exhausted from telling the same story, over and over again. We need action.]. “Sex/Work Strike” *Womensstrike*, No Date. AC

Many workers close to the margins fear redundancy, and migrants fear losing the right to work as a result of Brexit. Low wages, benefits cuts and precarious jobs have pushed more of us into sex work. **The response of the state has not been to reduce austerity but to crack down on sex workers.** Police raid brothels, strip clubs and flats, confiscate earnings, threaten, arrest and deport us. They impose fines and prosecute those who work on the streets. Migrant sex workers are targeted as undesirable, held in detention centres and deported. **On top of that, we are told we need to be rescued for our own good and are not believed when we speak out about actual cases of violence done to us.** In the last year, strippers across the country have begun unionising their workplaces and taking on bosses and unfair exploitative conditions – and winning. We must fight with our own voices, under the (red) umbrella of labour and human rights. We strike against the idea that sex for money has to be policed and banned by the state in order to protect women. We come together to protest laws that punish us for trying to earn a living. We encourage sex workers across the globe to come together and create new ways of protesting, so that everyone can join the strike even if they can’t afford to take the day off.

## Part 3: The Demand

#### [Lister] Sex strikes bolster national support for sex workers causing tangible change – Colombia proves.

Lister: Lister, Kate [Dr Kate Lister is a university lecturer, a writer, blogger, and curates the online research project Whores of Yore - a digital public engagement project that works to make research on sexuality and the history of sex work accessible to the public. Kate is a campaigner for sex worker rights and is a board member for the sex work research hub and the Vagina Museum. In 2017, Kate won the Sexual Freedom Award, Publicist of the Year.]. “Yes, sex strikes have been successful. But not because women simply withheld sex” *iNews*, August 2020. AC

**Other sex strikes are successful because they drew media attention** to the cause, rather than because men were being denied the occasional roll in the hay. **In 2006, a group of Colombian women in the city of Pereira staged a sex strike to demand their gangster partners hand in their guns, stop shooting one another, and agree to attend vocational training programmes.** Reports estimate there were about **two dozen women taking part and the strike lasted for ten days.** Clearly, a small group of women boycotting sex for 10 days is not going to affect cultural change on its own. There was much more going on. **City authorities were already working with law enforcement to reduce gun crime, as one month before the strike, some 140,000 Pereirans had voted in favour of disarming civilians. The sex strike was symptomatic of a culture that desperately wanted change, rather than an instigator of it. The sex strike tactic drew global attention and boosted national support for their cause. By 2010, Pereira’s murder rate was reportedly** down by 26.5 per cent, but this is a result of a city wide, concentrated effort to reduce gun crime that utilised a multi-agency approach **and had international support, rather than a group of gangsters not getting any for ten days.**

#### [Grant] And the fight to strike for sex workers is larger than the strike itself – it’s a form of demanding recognition of structural issues.

**Grant:** Grant, Melissa Gira. [Writer at the Pacific Standard] “Women’s Right To Refuse” *Pacific Standard,* August 2017. JP

**Women have been striking for a long time, even if the American women’s movement has not been at the lead**. Social change tactics like strikes or other forms of direct action have fallen out of mainstream feminist use, in favor of awareness-raising, calls to Congress, and the casting of a ballot every four years. “Our present situation is in some ways closer to the situation in 1908, when the first women’s strikes were led by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union,” wrote Magally A. Miranda Alcazar and Kate D. Griffiths, two of the strike organizers, in The Nation. “Was it a privilege for garment workers to strike then? Would it be a privilege for us to strike now?” As organizers met last month to plan actions for the March 8th strike, some American women writers, like Sady Doyle and Meghan Daum, claimed the strike would have relevance to only the most privileged of women. But such cautions, framed as gestures of inclusion, disregard the women who are already at the forefront of direct actions to demand dignity and rights: As part of the Fight for 15, as water protectors in North Dakota, in “Day Without an Immigrant” strikes, in the Movement for Black Lives. **There is nothing new in demands for women to strike; it’s just that when women interrupt business as usual in support of labor rights—and to challenge xenophobia and white supremacy, at that—the women’s movement has not always considered those actions as taken in the name of “women’s rights”.** **Women’s Right to Refuse - Pacific Standard Striking is about breaking with routine and stopping everyday time**. Such a break can also turn our attention to the past, to what women have risked before us. Out of a series of strikes and occupations, the international sex workers’ rights movement was born in the 1970s and ’80s, led by a group of women in Lyon, France. “We were at our wits end,” one said (in testimony available now in the radio documentary, La Revolte des Prostituees). “We were sick of going to jail, of being abused.” So they stopped work on June 2nd, 1975, and 150 of them—“the women prostitutes of Lyon,” they called themselves in a letter to the French president—occupied a church to demand police stop arresting them, fining them, jailing them, and separating them from their families and children. Their strike and occupation lasted 10 days, and they were joined by hundreds more sex workers across France, striking and occupying churches in solidarity. Though it has largely been forgotten as a landmark moment for women’s rights, that strike at the time made international headlines and sparked a movement of sex workers around the world. On March 8th, sex workers will strike again. **“Women sex workers have been part of the ‘feminism of the 99%’ since the very beginning of time,” declared the sex workers’ rights organizations Empower Foundation (Thailand) and English Collective of Prostitutes (United Kingdom)**. Sex workers are explicitly acknowledged as workers in the U.S. Women’s Strike platform (as they were, despite attempts to remove them, by the U.S. Women’s March). **“For sex workers to strike recognizes sex work as work but our call goes further,” says Laura Watson from the English Collective of Prostitutes.** “We are striking for the freedom to work and to not work in sex work. So we are striking against poverty, discrimination, and criminalization that institutionalizes us in sex work. We are striking against the low wages and exploitation in other jobs that means sex work is our best option. We are striking alongside other women because we are the same women—mothers, domestic workers, farm workers, factory workers—our struggles are the same.” **Like other women workers in the service sector, particularly in the informal and criminalized economy, sex workers who will strike are far from “privileged.” As Watson explains, “sex work is often irregular and precarious with no sick pay, strike pay, or other benefits, which is why the strike call takes into consideration women’s circumstances.** Some women will go on strike, others will charge double, others will take action for however long they can and in different ways—putting a broom outside their premises [a symbol adopted by the U.K. women’s strike href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/03/wear-red-down-tools-and- buy-local-for-international-womens-day"]; or joining the international call to wear black clothes, ribbon, a hat.”

#### [Shure] AND legalizing sex work DOESN’T SOLVE THE AFF – the right to strike represents a unique form of activism.

Shure: Shure, Natalie. [TV producer and writer whose work has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Slate*, *Pacific Standard*, and elsewhere] “Sex Workers’ Rights Are Workers’ Rights.” May 1, 2019. <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/05/sex-workers-rights-are-workers-rights> CH

Clients may be hesitant to provide personal information for screening purposes, or expect to meet in secluded, dangerous areas to minimize the risk of being caught. Sex workers may worry about being evicted by landlords who don’t want to face charges of harboring brothels, making it more difficult to work together (and more safely) at home. Even in legalized and regulated jurisdictions like parts of the Netherlands and Nevada, harsh criminal penalties threaten those who work outside the sanctioned confines of legalized sex work, impacting those ineligible for work within legal brothels, such as people with criminal records, drug dependency, or HIV. Finally, immigration and border enforcement creates a situation where undocumented migrants incur large debts traveling abroad, are shut out of most workplaces, and face severe risks including detention and deportation. This power imbalance means not only that sex work is among the few limited options for undocumented migrants, but that they pay an extraordinarily high price when they’re snatched up the police. As such, these workers are particularly vulnerable to abuses by handlers, clients, and law enforcement.

They add: Shure, Natalie. [TV producer and writer whose work has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Slate*, *Pacific Standard*, and elsewhere] “Sex Workers’ Rights Are Workers’ Rights.” May 1, 2019. <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/05/sex-workers-rights-are-workers-rights> CH

For Bailey, the solidarity on display in Washington Square Park last year evoked the events in 1975 that later gave International Whore’s Day its name and which activists pinpoint as the advent of the modern movement for sex workers’ rights. Hundreds of sex workers in Lyon, France occupied a network of churches to demand an end to the brutal criminalization of their livelihoods, railing against police harassment, anti-pimping statutes, and hotel closures that made it all but impossible to build stable, dignified lives. For eight days, sex workers across the country went on strike. That the sex worker-led actions in both 1975 and 2018 erupted as fierce protests against criminalization is no surprise, and as authors, activists, and sex workers Juno Mac and Molly Smith lay out in their new book Revolting Prostitutes: The Fight for Sex Workers’ Rights, decriminalizing the sex trade is an essential demand made by people who sell sex throughout the world. Not only are carceral measures ineffective, they argue, but oppressive, further marginalizing and impoverishing the very people they pretend to protect. Justice won’t be found in locking up sex workers, ending demand for commercial sex, or “exiting” sex workers into low-wage jobs in sweat shops. It will come from these workers themselves building power to gain control over their working conditions, and challenging the broader political context that pushes many of them to sell sex in the first place. Mac and Smith provide a robust economic analysis of the sex trade, arguing that people sell sex for a very simple reason: they need money or resources, and sex work is the best option they have for getting it. If that sounds familiar, it should — it’s the same reason that anyone sells their labor to survive under capitalism. For higher-status workers, sex work is unlikely to be the most attractive professional option (although those for whom it is tend to advance the bourgeois “I choose to be an escort because it’s empowering!” argument that Mac and Smith skillfully push back against). Genuinely loving one’s job is a rare privilege, and most people do not.

#### [Kurbanoglu] Further, other alts don’t solve – sex workers need strikes because they’ve exhausted all other methods.

Kurbanoglu**:** Kurbanoglu, Elcin. [International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology] "What makes sex workers strike: A comparative analysis of France (1975) and the UK (1982)", International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology Vol. 3(6) pp. 163-179, June, 2011. EM

**The main argument in the paper regarding the cases, France and the UK, is that what makes sex workers strike, taking into account short-run considerations, is grievances, existence of internal and external resources, repression, sex workers’ framing of their identities, and in the second case, the UK, the existence of political organisation.** We see that this argument itself is derived from an amalgamation of theories of collective action. Increased police repression, prohibitionist legislation that criminalises sex work without literally stating in the law, the hypocrisy of politicians in this sense, the alliance between the police, organised crime, politicians and pimps, and the emphasis sex workers put on (single) motherhood appear as the most important reasons of the strikes in both cases despite the differences between the political input structures of France and the UK; that is, the former having a more closed and the latter a more open political input structure. Apparently, sex workers in the two cases have major problems and confrontations with various state institutions, basically the law and the police. The identification of the reasons of sex workers’ strikes has required tracing the post-war political economic developments in the two countries and in Western Europe in general. It also showed that the two cases are by no means deviant, but only parts of the strike waves in Europe in the late 1960s and 1970s in general. The wave, it has been argued, continued in the UK in the 1980s as well. One of the more modest claims of this paper, however, has been that there are more structural factors underlying sex workers strikes. Historical continuities accumulating from the nation-state building process, the criminalisation of sex work onwards have to be closely examined in order to understand why sex workers strike. **Keeping in mind that strike as a form of action is in the memories of the working-class in general, sex workers’ strikes should be examined parallel to workers’ strikes. Peculiarities of the occupation and the non-material interests involved do not undermine material interests of sex workers, and the fact that sex work is work; sex workers are workers.** There are basically two differences between the two cases. Sex workers had different allies in the two countries, and the sex workers in the UK had already organised under a collective. However, taking into account the time lag between the two cases, we may argue that the reasons why sex workers struck were significantly similar despite the differences in the political regimes of the two countries. Further arguments such as the exhaustion of the available repertoire of collective action, the choice of the mode of action, church occupation, primarily to check for police action and as an inspiration from other movements will not be repeated in the conclusion. Rather, it may be possible to discuss the factors that should be taken into account before adopting strike as a mode of action for the recognition of sex workers’ rights.

**They add:** Kurbanoglu, Elcin. [International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology] "What makes sex workers strike: A comparative analysis of France (1975) and the UK (1982)", International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology Vol. 3(6) pp. 163-179, June, 2011. EM

**Secondly, “the disastrous method” was not the first form of action that sex workers of both Saint-Nizier and King’s Cross had decided to adopt. The first half of the 1970s witnessed many forms of action on the part of sex workers** in Lyon: preparation of collective texts with the collaboration of several journalists and lawyers to be sent to the decision-makers, breaking the windows of police vans in which sex workers were being taken to a reception centre, establishing action committees together with lawyers, appearing on the TV and demanding audience with the *Garde des Sceaux* (Keeper of Seals, indicating the Minister of Justice in the case of France) (Corbin, 1990: 360-361), street demonstrations (Mathieu, 2007: 110**)... The available repertoire had been exhaus- ted in France before going on strike. The same applies to the UK case. Sex workers in the UK had already established a collective in 1975, held campaigns for the legal rights of sex workers, created national networks, published newsletters, won court cases (English Collective of Prostitutes, 1997: 83-87), established a women’s centre, made civil rights meetings (Roberts, 1992: 347) ...** In short, sex workers, both in Saint-Nizier and King’s Cross had exhausted the available repertoire of action before going on strike. In both the short-run and the long-run logics of collective action, Tilly argues, organisers seek to display the numbers, commitment and internal discipline of the people behind a particular set of claims on some powerful body, in this case primarily the nation-state13 (Tilly, 1979: 20). Keeping in mind Luxemburg’s words, one of the reasons why sex workers resorted to strike was the exhaustion of the “less disastrous” forms of action, such as speech, and display primarily to the state the numbers, commitment and internal discipline of sex workers in order to earn back their right to organise in “less disastrous” forms.

#### [Mgbako] Sex worker’s strikes demonstrate collective organizing around rights movements.

**Mgbako:** Mgbako, Chi Adanna. [Fordham University School of Law] “The Mainstreaming of Sex Workers' Rights as Human Rights” *Fordham Law School,* 2020. JP

**The year 1973 marked the founding of COYOTE, the first organization in the United States dedicated primarily to sex workers’ rights.21 Founded by former sex worker Margo St. James,** **COYOTE was one of the earliest examples of sex workers formally mobilizing as political agents. With a focus on state and police violence against sex workers, they sought to change both laws and social mores around sex work**.22 COYOTE’s political demands in- cluded the decriminalization of sex work; they also provided legal, medical, and financial assistance to sex workers.23 The COYOTE advocacy newslet- ter, which ran from 1974 to 1979, highlighted both national and international events occurring in the nascent sex workers’ rights movement.24 **The famous June, 1975 occupation of Saint-Nizier church by striking French sex workers in Lyon, France, was an international event that marked an important milestone in the early years of the sex workers’ rights movement and helped spark the movement in Europe**. Like the previous decade’s uprisings at Compton’s Cafeteria and Stonewall, the French sex workers’ strike was largely driven by grievances regarding police violence.25 Inspired by the Lyon political action, French sex workers in Grenoble, Marseille, Montpellier, and Paris joined the protest and occupied churches in their cit- ies.26 **The French sex workers’ strike presented sex workers as political actors capable of collectively organizing on a scale that could capture sustained international media attention.**

#### [Scott] STRIKES WORK – they have a spillover effect that impacts other labor movements.

**Scott:** Scott, James. [Writer at the Austin Chronicle] “Want to Strike? Ask a Sex Worker for Advice” *The Chronicle,* 2021. JP

**Out of the pandemic and protests, a new class consciousness has emerged. Leading the way in the labor rights movement is a group of workers who have for a long while gone unrecognized. Yet these workers are skilled in developing social bonds, creating engaging activism, and pointing out the ways in which the state seeks to oppress its citizens. Now able to work in the virtual space, sex workers are using their experience and well-honed skills to ignite awareness as well as action on crucial labor and feminist issues.** Lena Chen, organizer of South by Southwest panel "No Justice, No Booty: Sex Work, Art, & Activism" and a sex worker and artist herself, finds that sex worker art and activism intersect quite a bit. "It's really about how do you use creative approaches to activism," she says, citing last year's Haymarket Pole Collective stripper strikes in response to local clubs' racist hiring practices. During their protest marches, the activists wore their strip club work clothes and also performed pole work. "You have something that is recognizable as a protest," Chen explains, "because it's a march, there are people chanting, there's movement in a public space. But then, at the same time, there's this other element of performance happening, entertainment." The founder of the HPC, Cat Hollis, is also a participant on the panel and will speak on how the strikes connect not just with workers' rights but also the racial justice movement. **Another example of sex worker and labor union crossover is the group Cybertease, a virtual strip club organized by unionized workers**. Their work has specifically blown up during the pandemic, when in-person club work is more precarious. **Bringing the art of stripping online not only allows the group to continue to support themselves, but also to contribute to mutual aid funds of those most in need**. Support from within the sex work community is crucial, Chen says, since sex work is often dangerously stigmatized, especially when undertaken by marginalized groups like people of color and queer people. "Those are the types of communities that have really fallen through the gaps, and haven't had access to [government benefits] like stimulus checks."

#### [Smith] And striking is key to decriminalizing the industry.

**Smith**: Smith, Molly. [Molly Smith is a sex worker and activist with the Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement] “On March 8th - WE STRIKE!” *VERSO,* 2019. JP

**A women’s strike is necessary**. A women’s strike is impossible. **In organising for a women’s strike, we want bring these contradictions into the foreground, to make them unignorable**. On March 8th, we strike. **The women’s strike builds solidarity across difference**. We work to draw links between all the ways in which women’s work is exploited or taken for granted; all the ways in which resources and autonomy are withheld from us. That means naming work in all it’s forms: our work on shopfloors, our work cleaning offices, our work in brothels, our work in marriage, our work in care homes and our work caring for and raising the next generation of workers. It means the work we must put in to access healthcare – the work of resisting attacks on our reproductive autonomy; the work of accessing trans healthcare. It means the work we must put in to attempt to avoid criminalisation. It means naming our reproductive and domestic work as work alongside our work outside the home. **In naming all this as work, we struggle together to make visible ‘all the work we do as women’ and to resist the exploitative conditions we are offered**. We work to transform the conditions of our work and of our world. The women’s strike brings together organisers for reproductive justice, for the decriminalisation of sex work, for an end to violence against women; for worker’s rights and for trans healthcare. We demand bread, roses and hormones for all. We demand an end to racist border policing. Each of these struggles are bound up with the rest. Last year, the women’s strike shut down Soho to demand the decriminalisation of sex work. On the street, sex workers are criminalised for loitering and soliciting; they are issued with ‘section 21s’ and prostitute cautions, and their clients are criminalised for kerb-crawling. **The effect of criminalisation is to push sex workers into the shadows, force them to rush negotiations with clients, and send a clear message to violent people that sex workers are ‘less important’ and in many ways treated by the state as ‘legitimate’ targets for violence.** To make matters worse criminal records trap women in prostitution. Indoors, sex workers are criminalised for brothel-keeping if they work with a friend for safety, and the criminalisation of managers means sex workers are unable to access labour law. Sex workers are subject to aggressive immigration policing, and migrant sex workers are routinely deported. The women’s strike stands with sex workers in their demand for decriminalisation, safety and rights: the criminalisation of prostitution is key to how patriarchy denies all women their rights, by dividing us into categories of good and bad. **We reject the violence and exploitation that is at the heart of global capitalism, imperialism and criminalisation. When we strike we connect these huge structures to the ‘small’, daily ways in which women’s lives are exploited and constrained.**  **This March 8th, the women’s strike will once again shut down Soho in solidarity with sex workers: we will collectively refuse to work in order make both our labour and demands visible.**