



Prostitution is one of the worst forms of human exploitation and although some men and boys are exploited in this way it remains the case that the vast majority of those trapped in the sex trade are women and girls. The existence of prostitution is not a form of work, it is a social ill and research has consistently shown that prostitution increases in societies that have high levels of inequality and where

Helen O'Connor
PROSTITUTION

TUC POLICY affirms that prostitution is inherently exploitative. This echoes the views of the majority of workers who instinctively hate and fear the idea of themselves or their families being forced into prostitution via economic necessity. However those with a commercial interest in the sexual exploitation of women and girls are running campaigns inside and outside the labour

and trade union movement to get prostitution badged as 'work'.

This dangerous view that 'sex work is work' is gaining traction in the labour and trade union movement. And it gives a message to young women and girls that if they want an income they can live on, they don't fight for it at work, they can seek it by prostituting themselves.

Trade union campaigners who involve themselves in 'organising sex workers' come up against multiple obstacles. In the strip clubs, the legalised part of the sex industry, many of the women consider themselves to be 'entrepreneurs', not workers and they don't want to join trade unions. The 'campaigning' where it has occurred, has been limited to keeping sexual entertainment venues open – exactly what the profiteers and exploiters want.

Those of us who oppose prostitution are often falsely accused of not talking to prostitutes or lacking empathy with the women trapped in commercial sexual exploitation.

However, many labour movement pioneers and especially those women comrades who sacrificed so much, did so because of their empathy and solidarity with working class women and girls who were forced to sell their bodies so that their families could eat.

From the beginning communists saw prostitution as a social ill to be eradicated and not to be encouraged or excused. *'...for the rest it is self evident that the abolition of the present system of production must bring with it the abolition of the community of women springing from the system ie of prostitution both public and private'*

Karl Marx *The Communist Manifesto*

When I was an NHS nurse I worked with prostitutes. I listened to their harrowing stories and observed the brutal conditions of their lives. You would never see any of the women I met on social media platforms or in the media telling you that prostitution is a career choice for women. Those women were forced into prostitution through poverty and lack of choice.

I learnt that the existence of prostitution has far reaching consequences not just for prostitutes themselves, for the children born out of this activity and for society. For example, one prostitute I met was on her seventh pregnancy by her early 30's – all of her other children had been removed and taken into care and were scattered across London and the south east. Prostitution is rife with similar examples.

The voices of the prostitutes I met have informed my view that prostitution is not a form

of work. Trade unionists should be arguing for well paid, safe and secure jobs for women too. Any trade unionist worth their salt should reject any idea that extreme violence, rape and murder, which are integral parts of prostitution, can be seriously described as work. Research shows that prostitutes face a particularly high level of violence- In a Sheffield study 76% of prostitutes reported that they suffer violence at least once a week. Prostitution is the oppression of women and girls in one of its most violent and damaging forms.

There are of course jobs in which workers are exposed to danger and it is the job of trade unions to work for and campaign for adequate health and safety. Women and girls in the sex trade are beaten up, raped, tortured and murdered with alarming regularity and these crimes are notoriously hard to investigate. The idea that adequate health and safety measures could ever be applicable in prostitution which is entirely in itself based on the exploitation and subjugation of women is delusional.

Along with high levels of substance abuse prostitutes also suffer severe and enduring mental health impacts too, the severity of which should never be tolerated in the world of work.

Research on prostitution requires far more rigorous scrutiny. For example the hypothesis that prostitutes are less likely to be victimised in countries where the sex industry is legal should be questioned. This idea is based upon tiny samples of qualitative research conducted in countries where prostitution is 'illegal' and 'not legal'. It is therefore incorrect to reach a conclusion that prostitution is 'safer' and better for the women in countries where it is legalised.

A lie has taken hold that feminists who are opposed to prostitution are uptight puritanical moralists when nothing could be further from the truth. Our opposition to prostitution is not a moral question, it's a class issue and a human rights issue. Trade union and socialist feminists stand in opposition to all neo liberal objectification and consumerization of women's bodies. We absolutely reject the false framing that this objectification and consumerization of women is some kind of civil liberty issue.

Union organisers should be leaving no stone unturned to assist women to get organised in workplaces in order to fight for decent pay and health and safety protections at work. We should roundly reject the 'sex work is work' line and demand safe, fully funded exit routes out of the sex industry as advocated by Nordic Model now.

It is in the interest of the exploiting class,

every bit as much as it was in the times of Karl Marx to give an ideological justification for the exploitation of women and for prostitution itself. In our age the worst type of reaction has been expressed in terms of liberal identity politics which seeks to reframe prostitution, into which working class women enter, as a free and liberating choice. For socialists this is not some niche issue and part of women's debate, nor is it an issue for feminists alone, it is an issue that affects every single worker, male or female as the presence of such exploitation degrades, weakens and divides the entire working class.

The struggle to fundamentally change society for the common good should never include an acceptance that the commercial sexual exploitation of women's bodies is suitable alternative work for the daughters of the working class. The battle for the liberation of women from all forms of exploitation including prostitution is intrinsically linked to the struggle to liberate working class people as a whole.

What is the Nordic Model?

The Nordic Model (sometimes known as the Sex Buyer Law, or the Swedish, Abolitionist, or Equality Model) is an approach to prostitution that has been adopted in Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Northern Ireland, Canada, France, Ireland and Israel. It has several elements:

- 1 Decriminalisation of those who are prostituted
Prostitution is . Women should not be criminalised for the exploitation and abuse they endure.
- 2 Buying sex becomes a criminal offence
Buying human beings for sex is harmful, exploitative and can never be safe. We need to reduce the demand that drives sex trafficking.
- 3 Support and exit services
 - High quality, non-judgemental services to support those in prostitution and help them build a new life outside it, including: access to safe affordable housing; training and further education; child care; legal, debt and benefit advice; emotional and psychological support.
 - A holistic approach
 - A public information campaign; training for police and CPS; tackling the inequality and poverty that drive people into prostitution; effective laws against pimping and sex trafficking, with penalties that reflect the enormous damage they cause.

HELEN O'CONNOR IS VICE-CHAIR OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

Carol Stavris reports

THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S new executive committee met in January 2024. I am really pleased that, of the 35 members of the EC, 13 are women and that six of us have been elected onto the political committee of eleven.

Ruth Styles continues as the Communist Party chair and Helen O'Connor is now one of the two vice-chairs. Women comrades involved in the labour movement feature strongly in the team looking at the Party's Industrial Strategy which will include preparing for the Women's TUC taking place 6-8 March, and the convenors of several of the Party Commissions are women.

The Survey of women comrades into attitudes and behaviours within the Party towards women and women's issues is currently being assessed by three women executive committee members and a report will be prepared in time for its March meeting.

I urge you to join the National Assembly of Women if you are not already a member. Campaigning, amongst other things, for women's equality and women's rights, for an end to wars, racism and sexism, NAW is a key organisation for progressive women. Its publication, Sisters, is an important and essential read.

Membership of NAW isn't essential for attending its events but I highly recommend it.

If you have any concerns, please contact me through Party Centre – meetings of the Women's Commission are usually held monthly and each District/Nation has a representative.

CAROL STAVRIS IS THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S WOMEN'S ORGANISER



Judith Cazola
TRADE UNION TRAINING

When women sewing machinists working at Ford Dagenham above (and later at Ford's Halewood plant) walked out in June 1968 in a fight for equal pay, they contributed to the struggle against sex discrimination at work.

The women made car seat covers and, as stock ran out because of the strike, all car production came to a stop.

The women set an example which ultimately resulted in the passing of the Equal Pay Act 1970, entering into force in 1975

Trade union membership was down by 200,000 in 2022. Women working in the private sector account for a stunning two-thirds of this reduction (129,000), according to

Department of Business and Trade figures.

The Women's Commission of the Communist Party and the Young Communist League have organised a *Women and Trade Unionism/Train the trainers* course which will discuss the essential role of women in the trade union movement. It will take place on Tuesday 21 May and on Saturday 25 May.

The course will be geared at comrades who have prior knowledge and experience in trade unions. We will discuss the history of women in trade unions, including the Matchgirls Strike and Dagenham with workshops and training on public speaking, organising, and how to get active in your union.

Communist Party Districts and Nations will be asked to appoint two delegates each to attend the course with a view to share the training with women comrades in branches

within their District/Nation. The Young Communist League is invited to attend under the same conditions. The session on 21 May will take place online. The session on Saturday 25 May, will take place in Birmingham.

Any comrade interested should contact comrades Carol Stavris, women's organiser for the Communist Party, and Micaela Tracey-Ramos, industrial organiser for the Young Communist League.
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"From when we are young, women are told by society to conform and to keep our mouths shut; the trade union movement at its best has always said the opposite."

JUDITH CAZOLA RODENAS IS THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S CENTRAL ORGANISER

Mysogyny and sexism are institutionalised



Metropolitan Police spending on human resources and on, contracted out services and consultants:

The estimated cost of in-house and contracted HR services nearly doubled from £35.4m in 2015-16 to £68.5m in 2021-22. Spending on contracted services more than doubled from £24m in 2017-18 to £54.5 million in 2021-22. Spending on consultants, excluding HR, finance, and commercial services, more than tripled from £10.4 million in 2015-16 to £32.1 million in 2021-22.

For the years 2017-18 to 2020-21 it was spending circa £50 million each year on consultants.

Over the last decade, significant changes to the Met's budgets and workforce and organisational structure, appear to have been imposed upon them, "driven primarily by a significant period of austerity, by financial uncertainty and political targets."

Helen Field
SEXISM

IT'S OFFICIAL Sexism is widely covered in the media including sexual assault and harassment on public transport; in the Red Arrows; in parliament; Downing Street; MacDonalds and the armed forces. And trade unions are not immune.

Karon Monaghan's 2020 report investigated sexual harassment complaints within the GMB union; there are Fire Brigades Union reports from 2022 and 2023, and a survey by the National Education Union into sexism in schools entitled *It's Just Everywhere*. They make shocking reading. The information is invaluable for anyone committed to challenging sexism and misogyny.

A recent 2023 report, published in the wake of the rape and murder of Sarah Everard is by a serving Metropolitan Police officer. An independent review by Baroness Casey into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Met concluded that:

- *The Met is failing women and children*
- **After a decade of austerity**, frontline policing has been deprioritised and degraded
- *There is institutional racism, sexism and homophobia within the force itself, and how communities are policed.*

Georgina Andrews
YOUTH

Young working-class women in Britain cannot escape violence and discrimination. They are subjected to misogyny at work, in their homes, communities and in every matter of life. Women are more than twice as likely as men to miss out on statutory sick pay with black and other ethnic minority women disproportionately affected. This particularly affects young women, who are more likely to be in zero-hour contracts with nearly a third of workers on zero-hour contracts earning less than £123 a week – the minimum threshold for statutory sick pay. It's appalling that in one of the richest countries in the world, young women are having to go to work unwell to pay their necessities rather than face increasing financial burdens for resting.

Young working-class women today face an onslaught of issues related to class politics that the Young Communist League must be equipped to challenge head-on. In a capitalist society that doesn't value women, our Marxist-feminist outlook is a call to action for all working women in struggle and later this year the YCL will be holding its second Women's Conference to discuss theoretical and practical topics to progress the Women's Liberation movement in Britain. The first conference was a massive success, resulting in comrades across Britain motivated and eager to deliver fantastic initiatives and campaigns. Join the Young Communist League at our Women's Conference to build the struggle for women's emancipation!

GEORGINA ANDREWS IS YCL GENERAL SECRETARY

What we know about sexual offences from the Casey Report.

(While this data refers to London, the patterns and outcomes of recorded sexual offences are similar across the UK.)

There were over 9,000 reported rapes in 2022-23, up 244% from 2012-13, and nearly 16,000 other sexual offences reported, rising 152% over the same period.

The volume of domestic abuse crimes rose to over 95,000 in 2021-22, having doubled since 2012-13 with additional evidence suggesting that domestic abuse incidents were not treated with the same seriousness in the Met as in other forces.

Government policies of austerity have profoundly affected all our public services and the Met is no exception. In real-terms, the Casey Report has calculated that the Met now has £0.7 billion – that's £700 m - less than at the start of the previous decade, meaning its budget is 18% smaller. It has lost 21% of its civilian staff and two thirds of its Special Constables while the number of Police Community Support Officers has halved. Between 2010 and 2022 it closed 126 police stations.

The effect of reducing civilian staff.

The number of full time equivalent civilian staff has fallen by almost a quarter, from 13,033 a decade ago to 9,934 in 2022-23. These reductions have created higher administrative burdens for warranted officers and reduced levels of specialist support. For example, there are fewer analysts to assist in dealing with rape and sexual offences.

Susan Galloway
CRIME



IN 1987, 121 children, from toddlers to teenagers, were taken from their parents by social workers in Cleveland, after local paediatricians identified physical evidence of rape and buggery. Bea Campbell's latest book, *Secrets and Silence*, reveals the legacy of the resulting Cleveland Inquiry. Following up her 1989 book, *Official Secrets*, it is essential background for understanding where we are today.

The scandal of Cleveland was not the "official" one – the breaching of parental rights, the arrogance of all-powerful professionals – but the fact that the Thatcher Government, on Treasury advice, decided that "it was more important to save money than to save children." An independent medical assessment validated the paediatricians' findings in at least 80% of cases, the Inquiry found. And yet 98 of the 121 children were returned to their abusers, and even more shocking, never

Training changes and reorganisation since 2017 mean less experienced detectives being employed on rape and sexual offence cases. Combined with a national shortage of detectives, this has led to seriously depleted teams with huge caseloads. Officers are exhausted and overwhelmed.

Examples:

Of respondents 83% reported "Detectives regularly work extended hours and on weekends and rest days to try to keep up with their workloads, but were still not able to."

"I've got 40 rapes; one of my colleagues is on 57. I went to therapy...I had 65 victims [caseload]. (The optimum caseload was set at 13 cases per officer)."

Officers gave examples of trying to cope by starting work an hour early, finishing an hour later and working on rest days, unpaid. This reminds me of Education where teachers and support staff too work extra unpaid hours. Many NHS staff at the end of a shift report staying on, unpaid, and similarly across other public services.

Examples given too of overtime being used to plug the gaps where there are not enough officers. "constant ping of requests to come in on rest days."

There was clear pressure to close cases as early as possible. Detectives were constantly making difficult decisions about which cases to prioritise, focusing their limited resources where the chances of a court outcome were higher - "The incentive is get it NFA'd [no further action] because we have to do so much work and then the CPS [Crown Prosecution Service] will NFA anyway."

"Due to the volume of cases, officers told us that they didn't have the time to use protective measures such as Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Orders, Sexual Risk Orders and Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme, or 'Clare's Law'. Clare's Law enables the police to reveal information about a domestic abuser's history on request or to protect victims."

Following on from this, on 12 January 2024 BBC news reported that Wiltshire Police have confirmed that two women suffered physical harm after unsuccessful attempts to check with police that their partners had a history of violent behaviour. The force said 25 such failings have occurred over the past nine years.

There is more evidence that good service was hampered by a lack of training, resources and facilities. Austerity measures are listed again as leading directly to a lack of analytical service, and delays from essential services, like forensics and toxicology.

followed up.

In the mid-1980s, familial sexual abuse of children was still a relatively new "discovery." The setting up of Rape Crisis and Women's Aid services in the 1970s by feminist activists played a key role in this. Social workers and health professionals began developing ways of detecting, identifying and responding to child sexual abuse, in what was an emerging priority area for action.

The events at Cleveland reversed all this. Child sexual abuse within the family was put back in the box and the lid closed. As Campbell shows, the climate created then has had a "chilling effect" on child protection practice ever since.

By drawing together the threads of the history of child sexual abuse and exploitation cases and inquiries since Cleveland, Campbell shows that what happened there was not an "event" but part of a historical pattern of behaviour in which those who speak out about child sexual abuse or take action for sexually abused children are first ignored and then, if they persist, not just silenced, but vilified, ostracised, professionally discredited and attacked by male dominated institutions. In 1987 it was Marietta Higgs and Sue Richardson. Thirty years later, Maggie Oliver and Sara Rowbotham in Greater Manchester (with a long list of others). The unbearable result of this is the prolonged suffering of thousands of children over the decades, failed by systems and institutions meant to protect them.

The official lie about Cleveland helps keep a secret that society does not wish to

Examples were given of freezers crammed full of evidence samples, which were overflowing, frosted over and taped shut and of year-long waits for toxicology results and forensic examination of phones. This has undoubtedly led to huge waits for court cases – often as long as three years.

What an utterly damning indictment on government policy and austerity.

Finally, some information detailing the treatment of women.

15 victims of a broad range of crimes including rape, stalking and domestic abuse took part in a listening event for the Casey Report. In all cases, the victims felt grossly let down by the service they received.

There were 14 case studies given in the report of female police officers being abused by male colleagues either in relationships with other officers or in their working life. Dreadful situations were given of women not being believed or being ignored, and their abusers not being dealt with.

The everyday experience for many women ranged from patronising comments and downplaying of women's achievements, to overt inappropriate sexual comments, unwanted attention, harassment and violence.

"We have seen that structurally, women remain underrepresented in the Met, particularly ethnic minority women, with deficits in supervisory ranks and the majority at lower ranks. The 'boys club' culture, particularly in the specialist commands, creates a vicious cycle. The more male-dominated the command, the less women seem to be able to break through. However, it was the day-to-day experience of sexism, bias, bullying and misogyny against women employees that the Review Team found concerning."

"The failure to see violence against women and girls in the same category as 'serious violence' means it has not been treated as seriously. We have not witnessed a 'violence against women taskforce' or 'violence against women suppression unit' in London in the way we have for other forms of serious violence."

HELEN FIELD IS THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S SOUTHERN DISTRICT WOMEN'S ORGANISER.

References

- ★ Casey Report: One recommendation is that the Met needs a dedicated women's protection service <http://tinyurl.com/yc84jpuz>
- ★ NEU: <http://tinyurl.com/mu463esw>
- ★ UK Army – Woman's Hour <http://tinyurl.com/yfm7ck3z>

confront about this highly gendered crime: that while most men do not rape or assault children, male sexual interest in children is not rare. In the age of digital pornography and child abuse images this fact is much harder to conceal. Sexual offences reported to the police are the tip of the iceberg and 40% of all recorded offences including rape are committed against children.

The "resource consequences" of better detection and prevention were too great for a Tory government in 1987, intent on public spending cuts. No change in 2023. The implications of the recommendations from the 8-year long Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse proved too much for the current Tory government. Its chairwoman, Professor Alexis Jay, condemned the government's response as weak and disingenuous, saying it would allow "the scourge of CSA to increase unabated."

Sexual violence and abuse against women and children are preventable social problems rooted in sex inequality and the power imbalance between adults and children. That these atrocities continue, in Bea Campbell's words, to be simultaneously condemned and 'condoned', tells us how fundamental that inequality is to preserve the status quo in our society.

SUSAN GALLOWAY IS THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S WOMEN'S ORGANISER IN SCOTLAND.

Secrets and Silence
Uncovering the Legacy of the Cleveland Child Sexual Abuse Case
Beatrix Campbell
Virago 2023