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Opinion: Rhoda Grant and the Sacrificial Sex Worker

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Former Deviance editor of *The Skinny*, *Nine*, explains Rhoda Grant's proposal to criminalise the purchase of sex in Scotland.

BLOG POST BY NINE.

PUBLISHED 06 NOVEMBER 2012

What springs to mind when you think of the sex industry? If you get your information from mainstream media coverage, you might say drugs, pimping and trafficking, even though these aspects relate to a minority of cases. If you move in feminist circles – especially in the UK, where inclusion of sex workers is rarely high on the agenda – harrowing narratives of abuse and exploitation are generally linked into an analysis of sex work as inherently harmful to women and to society as a whole. When you subscribe to such a perspective, it becomes easy to shut out all claims to the contrary, painting any disagreement as approval of people being 'bought and sold,' hyperbole that bears no resemblance to consensual sexual transactions.

Against this backdrop of misinformation and propaganda, Rhoda Grant MSP is the latest public figure to have jumped on the criminalisation bandwagon. This 'new,' 'caring' approach to prostitution focuses on criminalising the clients of sex workers – though it's worth noting that sex workers themselves are already adversely affected by existing legislation, which Grant has no intention of changing. Her idea is that 'demand' for prostitution will fall and that this will lead to its eradication.

In 2012, if an MSP put forward a bill affecting LGBT communities but refused to include any LGBT voices, there would rightly be an outcry. But the demonisation of everyone involved in the sex industry (with the exception of former sex workers who share Grant's views) means



RHODALAWS

IMAGE: KAZIMIR LEE ISKANDER
([HTTP://KAZROCKS.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://KAZROCKS.BLOGSPOT.COM))

MORE INFO

Rhoda Grant's proposal is open for consultation until 14 December and anyone in Scotland or beyond is welcome to respond to it. For more information visit <http://scot-pep.org.uk/having-voice/scot-pep-campaigns/criminalisation-purchase-sex> www.scot-pep.org.uk/having-voice/scot-pep-campaigns/criminalisation-purchase-sex

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that the sex worker community could seriously use a bit of help from allies.

The only sex worker quoted in Grant's entire proposal was a caller to a radio show, who complained that she had been charged by police while her clients hadn't. It's entirely likely that she would find it more helpful if neither party were charged – it's not as if criminalising clients would reduce the hassle and stigma of her own charge. Grant dismissed the concerns of a Glasgow sex worker at the Scottish Parliament by telling her she was "not representative", but is nonetheless seeking to implement legislation which would affect sex workers as a whole. The proposal, based on a lack of understanding of what the sex industry is actually like, has been put together by someone who doesn't want to learn about it. The consultation paper draws from unethical research and selectively uses small-scale studies on specific sectors of the sex industry to define sex work as a whole. Talk about 'not representative.'

Having worked with sex workers in Scotland for six and a half years, I know that the industry is diverse. But one unifying feature of it is – surprise! – that sex work earns people money. This means that unless your proposal is to give every sex worker in Scotland enough cash to retire, sex work is not going away. As with abortion, the law doesn't affect whether or not it happens: it simply affects the conditions under which it takes place. The question is, do you care about those conditions?

Alarminglly, Grant's absence of interest in sex workers' real experiences matches her absence of interest in their well-being. Reports from Sweden and Norway show that sex workers have been extremely negatively impacted by the criminalisation of their clients, and Scotland's 2007 kerb-crawling legislation reproduced these effects on the street scene. Though some clients have been scared off by the change in law, the result is a higher proportion of aggressive and violent clients, clients who haggle for lower prices, and clients who press sex workers to provide services they would previously have refused.

In fact, when sex workers are increasingly desperate to make money, these assholes find it all the easier to prey on them. Add to this the need to avoid attention from the authorities, and you've got disrupted support networks, with sex workers becoming isolated from their peers and from outreach services. The safety repercussions should be obvious, and such legislation slams the door on those who are already vulnerable to exploitation – the only ones Grant supposedly cares about anyway. Good intentions don't excuse wilful ignorance – what's really criminal here is the absence of harm reduction considerations.

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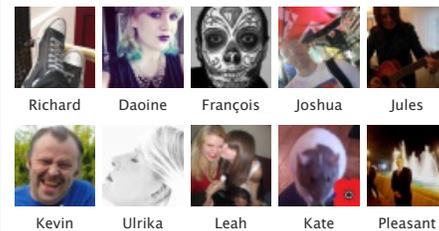
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Bravo!

POSTED BY SOPHIE | WEDNESDAY 07 NOVEMBER 2012 @ 19:17 REPORT TO MODERATOR

Thanks so much for writing this, it's brilliant. I'm sharing as we speak.

POSTED BY **KATE** | THURSDAY 08 NOVEMBER 2012 @ 22:00
REPORT TO MODERATOR

The proposals put forward by Grant and Godman are grounded in dangerous authoritarian, stereotyped, thinking and would, if implemented, have seriously detrimental consequences for the promotion of the feminist cause, those the proposers ostensibly seek to protect, those who purchase the services of sex workers, and society in general.

The proposals reveal a gross ignorance of the issues involved and a lack of awareness of that ignorance.

They reveal a contempt for the lives and livelihoods of those who would be affected, including much of the valuable work done by sex workers.

The proposals are illogical in that they seek to deal with important issues (namely people trafficking, violence, exploitation, and images of women) by mounting a crusade around a very different issue, namely one specific form of prostitution.

POSTED BY **QUESTER67** | FRIDAY 09 NOVEMBER 2012 @ 09:21
REPORT TO MODERATOR