

PROSTITUTES PROTEST SCAPEGOATING AT MONTREAL CONFERENCE

June 6, 1989
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Prostitutes from Sidney & Victoria, Australia, California, USA, and Toronto, Ontario met on Monday, June 5th to discuss the representation of prostitutes by presenters at the conference.

'This conference is one big whore bashing session,' said Cheryl Overs from Victoria, Australia (a conference presenter with Prostitutes Collective of Australia.)

Ms Overs succinctly captured the reaction of other international prostitute activists present this week. Offenses against prostitutes include:

1) Many studies (most notably one presented by Robert W. Ryder (MA035) simply indicated that prostitutes in developing (I hate that euphemism)) nations are testing positive. These studies seem to imply that extramarital sex is dangerous in these countries (no kidding) and they pave the way for stricter enforcement of laws and taboos against prostitutes in these countries. These stigmas curb the ability to reach prostitutes for safe sex education and result in numerous violations of the rights of women. Scientists and sociologists have been dispassionate in their presentations of statistics, which are often obtained in coercive and mandatory situations with registered prostitutes. Basically, prostitutes are being used as sociological guinea pigs, with a de-emphasis on their human rights (to say the least.)

2) Prostitutes have developed education and outreach programs. An abstract submitted by one of us received no response (although many of us are presenters) We must be included on a wider basis through affirmative action by conference organizers.

3) Jonathan Mann's opening address was particularly offensive, mentioning human rights violations, but leaving out one of the most severe international violations, that is, the fact that women and men who provide sexual services are locked in prisons throughout the world! A certain comment made by him about saving boy, girl and man and woman in regard to prostitution was infused with moral biases which are responsible for the imprisonment and government control (and government pimping) of prostitutes internationally. In addition, in the context of a video, a young person announced his desire not to make love for money, and that sex should be for love. This reinforced prejudice against the sexual expert and professional, and increases prejudice against prostitutes (although it is of great importance in countries where most prostitution is forced.) Such a statement should at least be balanced by a recognition of the right of women to work as prostitutes which is denied us in violation of our right to control our bodies. This insensitivity on the part of the organizers was a sore thumb in light of the way prostitutes have been used by the presenters at this conference.

4) Activists sensitive to other populations are often not sensitive to prostitutes rights. Prostitutes spoke of being offended by a video portraying an action in New York regarding women AIDS and stigma. We urge affirmative communication among activists.

SUMMARY

Prostitutes rights and violations of our rights on an international basis in regard to testing and legislation must be prioritized by scientists, sociologists and activists to end the hypocrisy inherent in the present approach to the scientific and sociological study of AIDS.