



Naïveté on crack: Legalized prostitution

by Andrea Mrozek, published October 19, 2010

Good news. After the recession, things are looking up. Businesses are hiring again. Take for example, Butterfly Body Massage, in Burnaby, British Columbia. They offer “pretty and sexy, open-minded and passionate girls to satisfy your desires,” this as advertised in the *Georgia Strait* newspaper. They also recently pinned a “Hiring—no experience necessary” sign to their front door.

Now Butterfly Body Massage may do massage. But it's also clearly doing much more, and is likely a brothel. It is advertising both for new clients and new employees; that would appear to contravene the law, which currently condemns soliciting and living off the avails of prostitution.

Suffice to say, there are problems with the current legal situation. Attempting to claim otherwise would be naïve. But to counter this by fully legalizing prostitution is naïveté on crack.

There are two main reasons why advocates insist legalization is important: safety for the prostitutes, and freedom to do as one pleases. Both are fatuous. Whether legal or illegal, prostitution is not safe and it's not a choice freely made.

The best evidence comes by way of international example. Amsterdam made prostitution fully legal in 2000, prompting then mayor Job Cohen to say this: “We've realized that this is no longer about small-scale entrepreneurs, but that big crime organizations are involved here in trafficking women, drugs, killings and other criminal activities.”

In New Zealand, where prostitution became legal in 2003, a subsequent review published in 2008 reported that few prostitutes interviewed felt legalization did anything about violence on the job. And although prostitution under age 18 remains illegal, no one, says Summer Gill, a policy analyst at the New Zealand-based research group The Maxim Institute, can enforce restrictions on age, as kids don't carry ID. “The law makes it extremely difficult for these purchasers [of under age sex] to be prosecuted,” says Gill.

Former prostitutes are also available to speak out on the “safety” factor, too. Tania Fiolleau is a former madam who left prostitution and now speaks out against legalization through her web site www.savethewomen.ca. “Prostitution is multi-traumatic whether its physical location is in clubs, brothels, hotels/motels/John's homes, motor vehicles or on the streets,” writes Fiolleau. “There are women who have said that they felt safer in street prostitution compared to legal Nevada brothels, where they were not permitted to reject any customer. Others commented that on the street they could at least refuse dangerous-appearing or intoxicated customers.”

Then there's the idea that we should legalize prostitution because people should be free to make their own choices. Yet most prostitutes begin as minors, ages 14 to 16. Furthermore, experts indicate an indelible link between human trafficking, AKA, the modern slave trade, and prostitution.

It's all well and good to stand on libertarian principle. But chances are parents like Ed and Linda Smith of Regina are not quite so sanguine. Their daughter, Sherry, with whom they had a loving relationship, began acting out, eventually leaving home with a pimp in 1989 at age 17. "He was a young man she thought she loved," explained her dad in a media interview. After working as a prostitute across Western Canada, her parents received the news one year later that her body had been found outside Victoria. Sherry's diaries would later reveal she had been raped in grade nine. "Sherry wrote in her diary she felt demolished, that she wasn't worthwhile, that her whole life had been changed," recounts her mother. The trauma of rape, a secret she silently held, brought this teenager into a world that would eventually kill her.

Bad social policy, no matter how freedom-loving on paper, actually increases state coercion. Take the United Kingdom. There, street violence and drunkenness has increased so much that video surveillance is now commonplace. "The degeneration of British virtue into rampant public disorder," writes Father Raymond de Souza in a recent column, "has driven frustration to such levels that almost any measures are now acceptable to the British public...the population is constantly being filmed on the street, on public transport, in taxis, in shops, in apartment buildings—everywhere it seems, save for the lavatories."

Is this the direction Canada will choose? Peter Stockland, Director of the Cardus Centre for Cultural Renewal, a think tank that focuses on culture and civil society, remembers what happened in the 1980s, when prostitution became more visible in face of unclear laws. "Major streets in the downtown cores of Canadian cities were chock-a-bloc with prostitutes and johns. I remember walking up Georgia Street in Vancouver and for two solid blocks there were prostitutes lined up side by side," he writes. "In Edmonton, I had a number of friends who moved because they couldn't bear the toxicity of johns circling the block in their cars looking for pickups."

Butterfly Body Massage is located next to a ballet school. Girls age three to 18 go for their lessons. So it can't be long before they find their next employee—just hope it isn't your niece or your daughter. While honest citizens must protest the current situation—minors and trafficked women in "massage parlours"—it is just as important to protest the pending complete decriminalization. Greater freedom will not be the outcome. Rather, those fighting for good in our country will have fewer tools at their disposal, and possibly, the force of the law directed against them.

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