

# **New law aids pimps and protection rackets**

Kathleen O'Kelly

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**It is ironic that the Act to decriminalise homosexuality also contained provisions for increased victimisation of a marginalised group.**

Tagged on to the end of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 1993 were further restrictions on prostitution. Under the new act, prostitutes are now liable to fines of up to £1,000 and up to six months in prison. In addition anybody caught soliciting sex from prostitutes or believed to be “kerb-crawling” face fines of up to £500.

Most political parties raised no objections to this attack on prostitutes’ right to earn a living. They wanted to decriminalise homosexuality with the least fuss possible. Governments since 1988 had promised — but failed to deliver — compliance with the European Court of Human Right’s decision in the case taken against the State by David Norris.

## **FIVE YEARS ON**

The Court had insisted on the decriminalisation of homosexual acts between consenting adults. Five years later the government was finally going to do something about it and politicians did not want to rock the boat on this sensitive issue.

The Council for the Status of Women welcomed the proposed legislation without raising a single objection to the sections on prostitution. These restrictions will cause further victimisation and hardship for women working as prostitutes but as suspected, the Council is only concerned with the status of some women.

The Minister for Justice argues that these restrictions will “provide further protection against the exploitation of people who feel they have no choice but to prostitute themselves”. In fact, they will have the opposite effect.

## **PIMPS AND PROTECTION RACKETS**

In the past, prostitutes could sometimes call on the police for protection. Under the new act, if a prostitute calls on the police to protect her from attack, she is liable for prosecution herself. A possible outcome of this is an increase in pimps and protection rackets.

The increased fines means prostitutes will have to work longer hours in order to cover the cost of fines. The increased penalties for keeping a brothel means that more prostitutes will be forced to work on the streets rather than in the safer conditions of a massage parlour.

As anarchists we are against all forms of exploitation. But restrictions on prostitution will not make it any less exploitative. Rather they will make it harder for a marginalised group of workers to make a living.

We believe that prostitutes have a right to earn a living. They have a right to working conditions where they can feel safe and work without fear of victimisation from the police, pimps or anybody else.

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