

Sex Workers Against Work

Other Weapons Distro

2019

Right now, we are a handful of whores attempting to put our position into words and our words into action. During our time in the sex trade we have seen and learned a lot. We have witnessed the shift towards a strong identification with the term “sex worker” and even pride in the labor of selling sex. We have seen platforms for sex workers to find work or to find each other and develop communities flourish. We have seen less shaming and less fear of being judged in radical circles, and the development of a niche popularity that celebrates sex work as a more desirable option amongst relatively few or less desirable options.

Although many of these changes are beneficial, they are not without criticism: whorephobia is still the pervasive view of sex work within society, especially if you are poor, working class, Black or brown, or trans. The whorearchy amongst sex workers continues to reinforce this trend, as stripper chic and other forms of non-sex service providers place themselves above other workers who fuck for a living. We see white cis women who have built marketable personas with relative ease as high-class escorts or sugar babies take the spotlight, acting as voices for the sex worker movement with open admission about their lives, while others are left concealing their every move, leading high-risk double lives. We have seen an expansive activist and online community turn into a demand for recognition and protection by the state – that is, for legislation and elections to lead the way to “liberation”. We do not believe our liberation will be reached through a permanent position within capital that can be exploited in more efficient ways. We do not want to be legalized. The regulating role of the state will always include policing workers on the job and off-work, and prosecuting criminal activity in all aspects of workers’ lives. Work is not something that solely confines us as we labor in a building or room. Work orders the rest of our lives: our mornings, our vacations, our purchases, what we read, our care, our sex and pleasure, our home, our nights. The more our labor becomes legitimized by the state and capital, the more we are forced to work. We want an end to criminalization, an end to work, and an end to capitalism altogether.

We cannot wager on the acceptance of sex work, or for those who are obsessed with our condition, to change our realities. The anti-human-trafficking movement – a multi-million-dollar industry – is a macro aggression waged by every arm of the state and its collaborators: NGOs, religious organizations, racist and authoritarian feminists, ignorant or opportunistic do-gooders. It thrives off modernity’s humanitarian lust to save the young and vulnerable, shaped by decades of unearthing – and consequential sensationalizing – of global capitalist horrors. We think of its

lethal predecessor, the War on Drugs. In these spectacular wars, we witness the unification of both the left and right wings of the capitalist state that, together, design these mechanisms of control in order to extract wealth from vulnerable populations who are simply finding ways to get by. These so-called savior brigades – the Drug Enforcement Agency, the whole carceral system – negate the possibility within informal economies to escape poverty and degradation.

The complex conflicts of sex work and trafficking are used to further agendas of governance and control, by taking stigma informed public ideas of what sex work is, in order to further the projects of incarceration, border defense, and gentrification. Sensationalist headlines serve to illuminate prejudices through a narrowed and flattened lens by claiming, “Eight foreign nationals freed from sex-ring-massage-parlors in Berkeley”. Due to such a framing, it can only illuminate what one is already able to understand of the complex components of this “sex ring” and the conditions of living for those who are found within it.

Immigration, racism and misogyny are all factors at play in governances’ so-called victories against human trafficking. Raided strip clubs and massage parlors turn into Airbnbs. Every strip club’s “If you see something say something” anti-trafficking posters suggest dialling 1-XXX-DHS-X-ICE. These are not heroic efforts to save “vulnerable women”, but methodical avenues of gentrification, capital development and ultimately, violence against sex workers and their loved ones.

If the challenge were to force our representatives to recognize our humanity, we would be front row at all the city council meetings. But we know their wealth depends on controlling us. Their role is to bring us back into their world when we have spent our lives creating our own against all odds. To wait until our suffering is recognized through the construction of digestible narratives for our enemy’s consumption is to take away the power that already exists in the history of our struggle.

We are against both economic exploitation and state regulation of economic exploitation. Because of this, we are necessarily for our own autonomy. This is something we must develop together. We would like to begin a conversation about how sex workers, marginalized yet certainly not marginal, can organize material solidarity and care networks that build community and also undermine the state’s ability to hold us hostage in its many ways. We want to evaluate the limits of reform and assimilation, moving beyond comparatively institutionalized sex worker activism while still honoring the legacies of sex worker struggles. We believe that being a sex worker is a powerful shared experience wherein our natural inclinations to survive outside of the state’s control and oversight have the potential to manifest incredibly powerful networks of care, as well as confrontational responses to those who harm us.

We believe it is crucial to criticize our subjectivity as sex workers and acknowledge that not all who sell sex identify in the same way. We maintain that our unique experiences, as those with the experience of sex for survival, leave us – and us alone – capable of recognizing our limitations, traumas, tendencies, and sensibilities toward liberatory relations. Beyond misrepresentation, false glamorization and weaponized stigma, the wisdom and navigation of those who sell sex to live provide a critical perspective for the many more who are fighting for freedom from work and from the state.

We acknowledge and honor the hard work, risks, and death endured by many over the past century in order to create a framework for the sex worker specific organizing and political analysis we use today. The struggle of sex workers and the longevity of our struggle relies on our ability to continue the militant practices of the Black radical tradition, to stand in solidarity with those

defending their Indigenous land from pipeline development and other state-sanctioned colonial genocidal expansions, and to remember that the hope for queer liberation was born in struggle against the police during a riot at Stonewall by Black and brown trans women, prostitutes, queens, dykes, and other gender traitors. We refuse to let these daring, courageous moments of our legacies be distorted and rewritten into playbooks for passive resistance. **Today solidarity means: Fight back.**

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