

# Germany: The Left's Love of prostitution - An open letter from exited women

Sunday 10 July 2016, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#), [MAU Huschke](#) (Date first published: 21 April 2016).

**Open letter to Left Youth Solid, an official youth organization of the German party The Left, regarding the position paper "Solidarity with Sex Workers - No to the new prostitute protection act - No to paternalism and other-directedness in the sexual service industry" ("Solidarität mit Sexarbeiter\*innen - Nein zum neuen Prostituiertenschutzgesetz - Nein zu Bevormundung und Fremdbestimmung im sexuellen Dienstleistungsgewerbe"). By Huschke Mau and eight other women exited from prostitution.**

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Dear People of Left Youth Solid,

I want to make it clear that I am addressing those of you who voted for the proposal "Solidarity with Sex Workers - No to the new prostitute protection act - No to paternalism and other-directedness in the sexual service industry" [1] at Left Youth Solid's federal meeting on April 8/9, 2016. I am assuming that this doesn't mean all of you, so there is hope yet.

I am a former—as you call it—"sex worker", I have read your proposal, and I would like to tell you just what I think of the "solidarity" you offer in this document.

First of all, it's great that you signed it as the Left Youth. Because when I read the phrase "sexual service industry", I was sure for a second that the [German economic liberalist party] FDP had risen from the dead.

But I did truly appreciate that you're against "other-directedness." Unfortunately, while reading the proposal, I had to discover that you haven't understood that the "other" that is "directing" those in prostitution is the john, meaning that this quality is INHERENT TO THE SYSTEM—he wants sex, I don't actually want it, I just need the money, and thus I consent to this other-directedness under coercion. Simple as that.

You write:

*"Even though sex work has long been established as a commercial service in our society and has been considered legal in the Federal Republic of Germany since 2002, sex workers are still severely stigmatized in their private and professional lives."*

I'm simply baffled that you describe the act of prostitution as a "profession" and a "service." Sexuality is the most intimate sphere of human life. Do we get to keep that at least, pretty please, or do we have to let every single part of ourselves be completely commodified and capitalized upon? Since when has the Left been the champion of the sale of all human desire? You call sex a service, as if it were possible to separate it from the Self, the Body, the Person; as if you could simply peel it

away, place it in a nice little box on the shop counter, and then some fellow shows up, hands me 50 euros and walks out with the sex. Is that how you picture it, yeah? You even speak of “poor working conditions”—do you actually believe that the abuse we have suffered and so many of us still suffer is somehow ameliorated if we’re given a nice “workplace”, as you call it? “Working conditions”? What are you even talking about? Under which conditions is the abuse that johns inflict on us acceptable to you, pray tell? Or do you simply not see it as abuse, ignoring what exited persons and trauma researchers are telling you? Sixty-eight percent of all prostituted people have post-traumatic stress disorder [2], and that’s not counting depression, addiction, borderline disorders and psychoses. Do you think these things are a result of “poor working conditions”? Every exited woman I know describes what she experienced in prostitution as sexual abuse. Our having tolerated sexual abuse or having been forced to do so does not turn it into a profession!

And then you keep going on about the stigma, saying we mustn’t be stigmatized. I agree with you on this, but I have to stress that it’s not the stigma that’s raping, abusing, and killing us. It’s the johns. Sadly you draw the wrong conclusions from the demand that prostituted persons mustn’t be stigmatized.

You write:

*“This [stigma] is expressed in a lack of recognition of their profession.”*

To be clear, what you demand is basically for the abuse of prostituted women to become normal. You want it to become a job. You want the abuse to become ACCEPTABLE. In short, you’re fighting for women’s right to call the suffering of sexual abuse a job. Or better: You’re fighting for men’s right to abuse women and minimize that abuse by calling it “work.”

Another thing I don’t get is all your talk about “self-determined sex work.” All prostituted women I know “chose” prostitution because they didn’t see any other option. How do you interpret that as self-determination? Is it because I can choose WITHIN PROSTITUTION, between only doing blowjobs with a condom and losing my income because of all the “self-determined” women from Southern Europe, and just putting every dick into my mouth without any barrier whatsoever, ‘cause that’s the standard? Some self-determination!

Our problem isn’t “lack of recognition of the profession”, our problem IS the “profession”! Nine out of ten prostitutes would exit immediately if they could [3]. Why on earth are you blathering about recognition of the profession?!

Your whole pamphlet sounds as if it were written by the pro-prostitution lobby, and this actually appears to be the case. You refer to BesD [Berufsverband erotische und sexuelle Dienstleistungen e.V.; “Professional association for erotic and sexual services”] as “organized sex workers”—you do realize that they only represent 0.01% of the prostituted in Germany? What kind of organization for the prostituted is this if it includes brothel owners? The exploiters start a “union” to represent the workers? That’s the strangest union I’ve ever heard of. Who did you in fact consult? Apart from brothel owners like Fricke and escort agency owners like Klee? [4] Based on whose information do you actually take your decisions? If you do something on racism next, will you consult neo-Nazis?

The next paragraph makes me doubt that you possess any ability to reflect on this or any other issue. You write:

*“In addition to these legal setbacks, there is a great deal of victimization and paternalism towards sex workers even within the social left.”*

I wonder who’s victimizing prostituted women—the johns abusing us or those who name it as abuse?

If you want to prevent us from becoming victims, abolish john-dom! Or do you perhaps merely want people to stop SAYING that harm is being done to us within and through prostitution? If this is the case, please just say that and stop pretending that people who recognize prostitution as inhumane are somehow victimizing us—THEY are not the ones doing that.

Then you write:

*“Thus parts of the left have repeatedly pushed for a ‘full ban on prostitution’ or the supposedly progressive ‘Swedish Model’, claiming that sex work/prostitution is the ultimate expression of patriarchy.”*

Let me get this straight: This sounds like you don’t think prostitution is an expression of patriarchy. If it’s not that, what is it, then? Why are 98% of all individuals in prostitution female and johns almost 100% male? Now don’t say it’s because we live in patriarchy.

Then:

*“Yes, sex work currently takes place under the circumstances of patriarchy, meaning that the question of voluntariness is unfortunately always difficult to answer.”*

So prostitution takes place outside of patriarchy too? Seriously? And which conclusions do you draw from it being difficult to answer the “question of voluntariness”?

Then:

*“It is predominantly women who work in this profession, while it is mainly men who buy the services of sex workers.”*

It’s just great how you take the perpetrators’ side and trivialize sexual violence.

Then:

*“However, the feminist response cannot be to take a paternalistic approach and try to tell sex workers what a decent life should look like.”*

I’m dying to find out where you get this from. People who see prostitution as destructive and inhumane aren’t being paternalistic, they’re expressing solidarity with us. And that’s exactly where you could do with a little practice. You need to stop flogging that stupid notion that every person who recognizes prostitution as harmful is some kind of conservative moralist trying to lecture “fallen women” [5]. Acknowledging the suffering and misery of prostitution and stating that it is violent doesn’t constitute lecturing; it means SEEING the real conditions that prostituted people live in and thus showing respect and care to those who suffer within and because of prostitution.

Then:

*“Both the Swedish Model and a full ban would endanger the agency and protection of sex workers even more dramatically than existing laws. These stricter laws would change nothing about the existence of patriarchy with its specific roles and its social power differential between women and men.”*

Why would this not change anything? Prostitution is one of patriarchy’s main pillars, just like all sexual violence is. Why wouldn’t it change anything to ban it? Why is prostitution the only sphere of life where laws suddenly have no impact whatsoever? Does prostitution take place in outer space or

something? You could just as well say that rape should not be prohibited by law because it doesn't do anything to change patriarchal roles and the social power differential! Are you saying you just want to leave everything as is? Sexual violence, patriarchal structures—this is what you're going with? Does the Left not have a vision anymore? Or is it only out of visions when it comes to prostituted women?

Yes, I accuse you of meaning well. But if you advocate for decriminalization of prostitution on the john's side (I believe we all agree that it should not be criminalized on the prostituted person's side), then this is equivalent to saying: "Women affected by partner violence are stigmatized. In order to get rid of this stigma, we will decriminalize domestic violence on the perpetrator's side. This way, the woman will no longer have anything to be ashamed of." Is any of this getting through to you?

What your pamphlet doesn't mention at all is the john—as usual.

Just do me a favor and read a few random posts on johns' message boards, and then tell me how on earth you can support the legalization of something like that. How you can support men doing such things to women. I cannot wait to hear your arguments.

Then:

*"Those who want to illegalize self-determined sex workers criminalize the entire industry and force it underground, where no protection whatsoever may be provided. In order to be better protected, sex workers require more self-determination and the social and legal recognition of their profession. Only in this way and recognized as workers can they publicly organize as part of the working class and advocate for their own interests, better working conditions and social security. A ban on sex work or the criminalization of johns (as in Sweden) would only cause sex work to become invisible and less safe."*

And then there's the fairy tale of the underground. Please read some texts explaining the Swedish Model [6], which criminalizes the john and decriminalizes the prostituted. And read evaluations of this law where it has been applied, e.g. Norway. No, prostitution is not a clearly defined entity. Yes, it can be reduced. No, the Swedish Model does not shift it underground. Yes, it changes a society's views on women when one sex can no longer buy the other. No, we do not need "recognition as a profession", we need for prostitution to be recognized as ABUSE. And NO, we are not part of the working class, we are first and foremost people harmed by sexual abuse through prostitution! We do NOT organize as part of the working class, but in victims' associations (e.g. sisters e.V., SPACE International [7])—which you refuse to listen to, though. We don't need you to organize us or talk about us; we organize ourselves, thank you very much.

Then:

*"Those who truly advocate for an emancipated society must also advocate for physical and sexual self-determination."*

Prostitution is the exact opposite of sexual self-determination. One party wants sex, the other doesn't. Money is supposed to bridge that gap. Prostitution has NOTHING to do with physical and sexual self-determination because everything I do, the john decides—thus it is other-directed. I am so incredibly fed up of all your talk of sexual liberation when you mention prostitution as a path to that liberation in the same breath. Don't drag us into it; we will not be instrumentalized in this way! Do your own sexual liberation, but you will not be permitted to use and gloss over our abuse to get there.

Furthermore I would like you to do a little bit of research; you will quickly discover that forced

prostitution and prostitution cannot be seen separately, as you prefer. For one, the lines between the two are blurred, and secondly there will never be enough women who do this “voluntarily”; a large percentage will always have to be forced to meet the demand. This means that you cannot want prostitution without agreeing with forced prostitution; one does not exist without the other [8]. And by the way, if you support the full decriminalization and legalization of prostitution, you support the market being the sole regulating force, which means: the demand grows, the supply grows, the demand grows more because men see it as perfectly normal to be a john, the supply keeps growing, and so on. It’s an upward spiral. Have you ever actually read anything about the basic mechanisms of capitalism, seeing as you’re so eager to see capitalist value extracted from women as goods?

Then:

*“Asylum law must also be reformed so that migrant forced prostitutes no longer face the threat of deportation but instead receive residence and work permits. However, our intention behind this decision is to place the focus on those sex workers who are currently restricted in their physical self-determination, their health and their rights in their professional life as sex workers—on those who made the conscious and self-determined choice to provide sexual and erotic services.”*

Oh, and how many is that? One in ten at the very most. And that’s who you want to go by when determining things that affect the situation of ALL prostituted women in Germany? Do you not care about the rest or what? Who at BesD, that organization of brothel owners, did you listen to? You certainly didn’t listen to the 90 percent in this country who are migrant women, because they’re not part of that organization. And you’re actually happy to collude with this racist bullshit! The majority out there are NOT the brothel owners, high-class escorts, dominatrixes—the majority doesn’t even speak German! How ignorant can you get? Prostitution is classist and racist, or why do you think there are so many indigenous women in prostitution in other countries, and so many Romani women in Germany? How do you explain that?

And then you go and post stuff about anti-racist demonstrations on Facebook? You really make me laugh.

Then:

*“Thus it is our view that feminism that is serious about its concern for women’s self-determination and sexual self-determination must also fight for the rights and demands of sex workers’ associations. The Bremen regional association of Left Youth Solid stands for such a feminism and will advocate for the legal empowerment of sex workers and show solidarity in their struggles.”*

You are most certainly not showing solidarity to us in our struggles by labeling sexual violence a profession [9], ignoring the majority of us, and calling prostitution sexual and physical self-determination!

What the hell are you even talking about? You need to find your way back to reality. And if you can’t show us solidarity because you’re too busy listening to brothel owners, at least leave us in peace and don’t presume to speak for us! You have never had to bend over; you aren’t in prostitution—a privilege, as I’d like to remind you—and then you sit there in your Bremen regional association and at the federal meeting and blather about recognition as a profession? Get a grip.

At least once a week here at Sisters e.V., we are visited by a woman who is already exited (not to mention those who contact us because they still want out!) and who tells us she’s taken this long to break her silence because society only ever tells her it’s a PROFESSION and it’s WORK and it’s a JOB; it’s all happy, joyful sex work—and so all the injuries she suffered in prostitution indicate that

there must be something wrong with HER. And this is precisely the political climate people like YOU create. All your talk is causing exited women to remain silent. I too was speechless for years because of texts like yours—because as a prostitute reading something like that, you don't even know where to START.

Prostitution is sexist, racist and classist, and then you come along, having listened to owners of brothels and escort agencies, and want to tell us about sexual liberation? And you call that leftist? You can't be serious. Never, ever can it be about getting as comfortable as possible within a sexist, classist and racist system such as prostitution. Who is it you expect to put up with this? Such a system must be ABOLISHED. You need to understand that supporting women in prostitution is NOT the same as supporting the system of prostitution! This system must be overcome and not further established and "recognized as a profession!" The only praiseworthy thing about your document is how exceedingly well you've copied and pasted from the pimp lobby—well done, indeed.

Seriously, is this what your solidarity looks like? Shame on you, and no thanks!

**Huschke Mau** (@huschkemau)

**Signed also on behalf of the exited women of Sisters e.V.**

Annalena, exited woman

Sonja, exited woman

Sandra, exited woman

Sunna, exited woman

NaDia, exited woman

Andra, exited woman

Esther Martina, exited woman

Eva, exited woman

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**P.S.**

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<https://survivormegaphone.wordpress.com/2016/05/10/the-lefts-love-of-prostitution-an-open-letter-from-exited-women/>

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\* Translator's note: All personal nouns in Left Youth Solid's German-language document—'sex worker', 'john', 'woman'—had both the female and male form, to indicate gender-neutrality (as German is a highly gendered language). The asterisk that accompanied the 'male\*female' form of the gender-neutral nouns was also placed after the noun 'women' despite there being no male form of the word and no known suffix. The only noun where the asterisk was absent was 'men.'

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**Footnotes**

[1] <https://linksjugendsolidhb.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/beschluss-sexarbeit.pdf>

- [2] <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/pdf/Prostitutionin9Countries.pdf>
- [3] <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/pdf/Prostitutionin9Countries.pdf>
- [4] <http://www.dielinke-bremen.de/nc/politik/aktuell/detail/zurueck/bremennews/artikel/kaeuflieh-liebe-ausbeutung-oder-ganz-normaler-job/>
- [5] [http://www.uib.no/sites/w3.uib.no/files/blatter\\_bestraft\\_die\\_freier\\_februar2016\\_0.pdf](http://www.uib.no/sites/w3.uib.no/files/blatter_bestraft_die_freier_februar2016_0.pdf)
- [6] <http://abolition2014.blogspot.com/2014/06/das-schwedische-modell-des.html>
- [7] <http://spaceinternational.ie>
- [8] <http://frauensindkeineware.de/natuerlich-bin-ich-gegen-menschenhandel-aber-normale-prostitution-ist-etwas-anderes/>
- [9] <http://jungle-world.com/artikel/2011/22/43318.html>