

The hypocrisy of condemning Epstein while supporting 'sex work'

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The legacy of socialist feminists such as Alexandra Kollontai challenges us today to confront an uncomfortable truth: framing prostitution as empowerment lets the abusers of the Epstein class off the hook..

IN CLASS-BASED society, there are huge numbers of girls who are disadvantaged almost from the moment of their conception, destined to be unloved, unwanted, poor.

Virginia Giuffre described these girls as “Nobody’s Girl.” This is the girl who is treated like she is worthless, goes on to feel worthless and that her only value lies in her body.

This is the girl who has no-one to stick up for her, to protect her or defend her and she is failed by everyone. The predatory male, disguised as a family member, friend, “boyfriend,” “protector” seizes on the vulnerability and the girl ends up in a downward spiral of abuse. She does not have the life experience, the education or resources to liberate herself from her fate. This toxic situation, combined with the demand for males to have unfettered sexual access, puts the girl on the sexual abuse to prostitution trajectory.

The public are lied to and led to believe that those trapped in the sex industry have “free choice,” can leave at any time and that they are all “consenting adults.” The voiceless and vulnerable are portrayed as greedy, money-grabbing, lazy, willing to be abused and deserving of abuse.

In Britain the state doesn't provide support for women trapped in prostitution. The welfare state, adult education or well-paid jobs for working-class people are all being torched on the bonfire of capitalism. Saying that a woman or girl can leave the sex industry any time she chooses is therefore as ignorant and bone-headed as telling a battered wife that she can leave her abuser.

Jeffrey Epstein ran a prostitution ring and he trafficked vulnerable women and girls all over the world to provide sexual services to his rich friends, some of who were sexually sadistic. He knew that his victims had nothing and were from nothing and no questions would be asked if they came to harm. Like other pimps, he utilised a combination of trickery, threats and coercion that left his victims imprisoned and reliant.

Hurting women and children, providing for the customer sex fetish, is all part and parcel of a multibillion-dollar sex industry that Epstein profited from.

It is simply staggering that politicians and many on the left are unable to see that other "Jeffrey Epsteins" operate with impunity throughout the sex industry. Instead we are told that Epstein was a "one-off," that "sex work is work" and that only "pearl-clutchers" could possibly condemn prostitution. The customer who can pay gets what he wants when he wants it, whether it's an underage child that they call "a minor sex worker" or the "right" to inflict torture.

The contradiction inherent in condemning Epstein while supporting so called "sex work" is ignored because human exploitation is big business. Calls for the full decriminalisation of prostitution puts the Epstein class even further beyond the powers of the law than they already are.

A deepening economic crisis means that increasing numbers of women, girls and minors are being brutalised within the sex industry. There are no records of how widespread prostitution is in Britain but there is a political agenda to normalise the sex industry and frame it as a "job option." The state in the form of the DWP is advertising for so called "jobs" in the sex industry.

Framing prostitution as work means accepting the premise that all work can be violent, abusive, exploitative and that health and safety protections are a pipe dream. This is the exact opposite of what the working class should be fighting for. Supporting prostitution as a job makes a mockery of any claim that a struggle for equality for women is happening.

International Women's Day should not just be a celebration — although there is much to celebrate and admire from the groundbreaking work of the socialist sisters of yesteryear. It's important to recognise that much of the serious thinking of Alexandra Kollontai and other revolutionary sisters is now lost in false and limited notions of what socialist feminism means today.

Socialist women of history did not accept that prostitution constitutes “work.” They did not fall for the lie that “bodily autonomy” means capitulating to the pornographic fantasies of men or offering men unfettered access to the bodies of women, girls, children.

Feminist campaigning that demands we “smash the patriarchy” does not challenge the roots of women's oppression which is essential for the continuation of class society. Choice feminism, the side hustle, the small-time “entrepreneur” selling the dream on TikTok, lets the capitalist class off the hook. There has been an erosion of a recognition that working-class women must be involved in the collective struggle for the right to a well-funded welfare state, unionised jobs with adequate pay, housing, health and education.

Socialist feminists must demand an end to the ideas and systems that reinforce and uphold women's oppression.

These demands must be rooted in the material interests of women and seek to end the need for any woman, girl or child to have to endure the sex industry. IWD is an opportunity for working-class women to recommit ourselves in the struggle to fundamentally challenge the way that society is set up which can only benefit all of humanity.