

Dear Friends of SOLWODI,

although everyday life has long taken over again, I am still excited by the birthday celebrations of the 2nd February. The feast on the occasion of my seventieth birthday was so “inspiring“ that it still lingers on (see p. 4).

Right at the beginning of this year there was another reason to rejoice: The Federal Minister for Women, Ursula von der Leyen, announced a change of trend in the prostitution policy. The 2002 Prostitution Law (ProstG), often criticized by SOLWODI, is based on the assumption that the majority of the women involved in prostitution earn their living voluntarily in this way. Von der Leyen says: “For me this is a way to cover up the situation”. She wants to see various measures through (see p. 2), above all that the customers of forced prostitutes should be punished. This would be particularly welcome. I am, however, skeptical towards the plan to licence brothels so that they can be controlled not only by the Police but also by Trade Supervision, Tax Office, and the Office for Public Security and Order. In this way the Federal Government wants to turn the “Red-light milieu” into a “Day-light” place. I rather think that forced prostitution and human trafficking will then hide themselves totally in the darkness of apartments, and thus even fewer victims would be freed. Moreover, licenced owners of brothels as well as pimps would now feel presentable in society – and also their customers. There is another viewpoint of the Federal Minister for Women which I do not agree with. The Prostitution Law, she says, would in no way hinder an “effective criminal prosecution” of human trafficking and forced prostitution. However, from the police offices, with which we cooperate, we hear the opposite. “Fostering prostitution” was punishable before the ProstG; with this suspicion, the police could quite easily justify a raid. Our experience is that after the enactment of this law, much fewer raids were carried out.

Nonetheless, according to the 2006 annual report of SOLWODI, which is issued mid April, the number of first contacts in the field of „Human Trafficking/Forced Prostitution/Victim-Witnesses“, in comparison to 2005, has increased. We too record a change of trend. Before it was mainly the police that referred first contacts to us; today it occurs increasingly through friends, colleagues and customers of prostitutes. To this has certainly contributed our well-known World-Cup Campaign “No to forced prostitution!”. I am optimistic. It seems that the idea created by the ProstG, that prostitution is a profession as any other, will finally vanish.

Yours, Sr. Lea

A Good Start in Munich

By Katja Leonhardt

On 01/01/2007 the work of the SOLWODI office in Munich began. I have already been invited to several events and talks. Also in networking with other organizations the first steps have been made. Moreover, several contacts from women in distress have already been received and dealt with by SOLWODI Munich. Since the end of January I also have a trainee as a support for our work.

I am particularly happy to see how fast the SOLWODI Working Group in Munich grows and thrives. Numerous members contribute with active knowledge and commitment. The meetings of the Working Group take place every third Tuesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. Besides the action plan also a talk or something similar is offered. Whoever wishes to collaborate in the Working Group can contact the Munich office at this number: 89/27275859 or at this email address: muenchen@solwodi.de. We gladly welcome every new member!



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Not a profession as any other

By Cornelia Filter

"Prostitution is not a profession as any other!" says the Federal Minister for Women, Ursula von der Leyen, at a press conference on 24th January in Berlin. Five years after the enactment of the red-green Prostitution Law (ProstG), the controversial Christian-Democrat announced a U-turn:

- Women who want to get out of prostitution should be facilitated in the future to enter into qualification and self-developing programs.
 - Customers who knowingly buy the service of forced prostitutes should be punished.
 - Sexual contacts with prostitutes below 18 years of age (up to now below 16) will also be punished.
 - Legally, prostitution must not be considered a reasonable option to earn a living.
 - Punishment for the various forms of exploitation of prostitutes and for pimping should be revised and eventually intensified.
 - Brothels should be licenced so as to ensure control not only through the police but also through the enforcement of laws regarding the Supervision of Catering Places, Trade and Public Security and Order.
- Reasons for the U-turn were studies and expert opinions about the ProstG, which wanted to improve the legal and social situation of the approximately 200.000 "legal" and "voluntary" prostitutes in Germany. "This has not been adequately achieved," declared the Federal Minister for Women, who at the press conference presented a report of the Federal Government on the outcome of the ProstG. This report gives also reasons why Germany does not follow the Swedish way to prohibit prostitution but prefers to control and regulate prostitution in a "constitutional way".

In Sweden there is no distinction between "voluntary" and "involuntary" prostitution; any "purchase of sexual services" is forbidden. The customers who do it all the same must reckon with fines or imprisonment. Behind the Swedish anti-customers law is the idea that prostitution is always associated with violence and it is a violation of the human dignity. Some experts in Germany see it in the same way, e.g. Detlef Ubben, head of the Hamburg Police, Section Human Trafficking: "That a woman chooses willingly to practice prostitution, is in 95% of the cases not true. When the women want to get out of it, they are mostly threatened with violence." In spite of that, the Federal Government follows as far as possible the arguments of the Law Professor Joachim Renzikowski, who in his legal opinion regarding ProstG writes:

According to the concept of human being in the Constitution, the human being appears as a "person

endowed with freedom and responsibility". Therefore, "the voluntary practice of prostitution as an autonomous decision should be recognized by the Law". In the face of the "ubiquity" (omnipresence) of this ancient phenomenon in all societies", the statement that "prostitution contributes to a general moral decline", seems hardly plausible. "It can be argued if and how far prostitution is an expression of a gender-hierarchical society structure."

However, for the Federal Government this is not an argument. The Federal Government sees it as one of its urgent tasks "to counteract those implications of prostitution which, from the point of view of a gender-equality policy, are problematic" (see box).

The sensitized Federal Government

The report of the Federal Government on the outcome of the ProstG clearly indicates the following:

"Prostitution is prevalently a physical and psychical strain, a risky and dangerous activity, that is often practiced by particularly vulnerable groups. This was strongly confirmed by a poll with a segment of prostitutes in the framework of a research on life conditions, security and helth of women in Germany. This group clearly presented more exposure to violence in their childhood, sexual violence, violence in relationships and at work. Furthermore, it is a social reality that many prostitutes find themselves in a situation, in which it is questionable if they are really free and autonomous to be able to choose pro or against this activity. In light of this background, the goal of the gender equality policy should be to open up other options and forms of life.

Moreover, it is the task of all forces of society to take into consideration the problematic effects of the commercialization of sexuality on the society's gender-role images and its negative effects on the goal of an emancipated partnership. It is also a task of society to sensitize, in the framework of a value-oriented discussion, boys and men regarding their responsibility."



To be customer of prostitutes is always a violation of human rights

By Susanne Hagemann

Susanne Hagemann from Schleswig is actively involved with Amnesty International and is since many years member of ver.di. In EMMA 2/07 appeared her strong critique against the trade union that wants to recognize prostitution as “sex work” and prostitutes as women offering “sexual services”. Hereby follows a guest commentary by this committed fighter for women rights.

Today, prostitution is mostly discussed in terms of “outdated moral values”. The experiences of violence by the so-called “voluntarily” involved girls and women are totally ignored – about 90 % are affected by sexual violence during childhood, about 80 % prostitute themselves under pressure of their “partners”. What is emphasized is the right to “freely” prostitute oneself. But in which cultural context?

Supporters of prostitution like to give as an example of a “morally open” society, in which women prostitutes were highly recognized, the Ancient Greece, “cradle of democracy”. Let us remain realistic: we speak of a society in which slavery was highly practiced and in which the major part of the population was excluded from democratic decisionmaking – among them all the women!

The feminist historical research connects prostitution with the origin of patriarchy, about 5000 years ago, as well as with slavery which came into being at the same time; consequently with the depreciation of human beings as “living tools”. This concept was coined by Aristotele who was in favour of slavery. Which consequences does this bear on a modern appraisal of prostitution?

After 5000 years of patriarchy, still many “thinking”-traditions are to be overcome. This is perhaps the reason why, in the 21st century, it is so difficult to think of a “sexuality”, which accepts that only man experiences pleasure, as a form of violence which has been handed down. Women prostitutes protect themselves through so-called tabu areas (e.g. the head, but not the intimate parts). Their definition is an admission of the damaging violence of customers’ attacks on the bodies of the concerned girls and women. In any other context, such a split would be acknowledged as a severe interference into the health and spiritual-physical integrity of a person.

Only *one* approach can therefore be modern: the urgent demand to have the right over one’s *whole* body and true sexual freedom. That means: real feminine pleasure – instead of the pseudo-sexual tradition of female availability.

Focusing on the causes, prostitution should be called “*Freiertum*”¹. The question must be addressed, why in the 21st century a democracy based on gender equality tolerates that for women sex without pleasure is

acceptable and that it is plausible for a man to use the woman as a living tool.

In light of this, the distinction between “voluntary” and forced prostitution becomes absurd. To be customer of prostitutes is *always* a violation of human rights. Any kind of regulation is therefore as questionable as for instance a “pragmatic” approach to torture: accepted, only mitigated through by-laws? Unthinkable!

But in the case of “*Freiertum*” we only speak about human rights for women. Is the time for this finally ripe?

Getting out of prostitution is difficult

In North Rine-Westphalia since 2006, within the framework of the nationwide unique model test ProFridA sponsored by *Diakonisches Werk*, “voluntary” prostitutes are trained in the fields of geriatric care and marketing. Up to now, 63 women took or are taking part in it. 92 % of all German “sex workers” would like to get out of prostitution, was said at the beginning of March in a TV transmission by ARD about ProFridA. However, publicly sponsored projects to help women to get out of prostitution are (still) rare. Often the women concerned also feel ashamed to be subsidized by the state. A SOLWODI counsellor reports about the following case:

"In spite of the strong desire of the woman to get out of prostitution, the financial aspect remained the centre of her fears and blocked her for months. It was difficult for her to refer to herself as a prostitute in public offices; she spoke of “accompanying services” and that she was also “doing these things”. Also for her self-esteem it was absolutely important never to have been dependant on the state. On the other hand, she had no savings to finance the new start. After some violent attacks from the milieu we finally succeeded to relocate the woman and, in spite of a temporary public financial help in view of her relocation, to make serious steps towards her professional integration. This example proves also that the women concerned are not interested to be a financial burden to others.”

¹ *Freiertum* is the German word for the ‘institution’ of being a customer of prostitutes.

A successful birthday celebration

On the 2nd February Sister Lea turned 70. The birthday celebrations began at 10 a.m. in the Hirzenach Church with the presentation of the new book "Über Gott und die Welt" ("About God and the world") and ended late at night in the parish hall: after musical and cabaret performances, after humorous memories of an adventurous life, after a moving evening religious service, after a rich consumption of food and drink, after much laughter and singing.

The entertainer Bea Nyga from Köln conducted the events throughout the day with music and humour – and free of charge. Numerous people contributed gratuitously to the success: collaborators and volunteers from SOLWODI, men and women from Hirzenach, the journalist Inge Bell and the choir from Emmelshausen. The Bruns couple from the Hotel-Restaurant Hirsch in Hirzenach provided free of charge soup for lunch and the Jockwig family from Parkhotel in Bad Salzig a rich evening buffet for 80 people. Sr. Lea had expressed the desire to receive offerings for SOLWODI instead of gifts for herself: the phenomenal amount of more than 27.000 Euro was collected.

"Happy birthday, dear Lea!"

... is written on the cover sheet of an album with photos and texts created by women and children of the safe accommodation in Bad Kissingen. A woman writes: "With the help of SOLWODI I have learned to see the positive sides of life." Another one thanks, "because SOLWODI is for me a sheet-anchor: My husband has thrown me out together with my son. In the safe accommodation I feel protected. SOLWODI does not abandon me to my fate." A third one says: "SOLWODI is for me a light in the darkness. Through SOLWODI, I am able today to communicate, to study and to feel free." A fourth one asks herself: "What could one wish to someone like her?" The answer: "The best would be, that one day SOLWODI would not be necessary any more, that children would be happy and women could live without danger."

Some internal information:

- The 23rd April is World Book Day. A beautiful occasion to make bookworms happy. Why not with "Über Gott und die Welt. Gespräche am Küchentisch" („About God and the World: Talks at the Kitchen Table“) by Lea Ackermann and Fritz Köster (just published)? Or with Sister Lea's autobiography "Um Gottes willen, Lea!" ("For God's Sake, Lea!") [2005]? Information about these and other titles can be found under www.solwodi.de. If you want to make a present on the occasion of World Book Day, specify it on the order, so that you will receive it on time! If you wish, Sr. Lea Ackermann is happy to sign your book. Orders in writing or per email to: see below "Contact".
- Every now and then we receive transfers of offerings with incomplete data or double names, so that it is difficult to allocate them properly. Should it have happened that you did not receive a receipt for your donation (above 50 Euro; for smaller amounts the tax office accepts a copy of the money transfer or the bank statement), please contact Silke Albrecht so that it can be rectified! Tel. 06741-2232 or fax 06741-2310 or per email: albrecht@solwodi.de.

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