



OPIRG
GRiPO

Ontario Public Interest Research Group

Groupe de Recherche d'Intérêt Public d'Ontario

Dear OPIRG Board/Research Committee Member

ITEM: International Women's Day

One of the main political problems which arose out of organizing this year's IWD celebrations was over the question of pornography. As a Coalition we perceived the problem of pornography of a reflection or endorsement of violence against women. What we agreed to disagree on was the solution in the sense of the pro and con censorship/regulation debate. What we entirely missed however, was even raising the question of how we relate and/or understand the problem/question of women in the sex trade, both pornography and prostitution. It is not that we disagreed, the questions did not even come up. As a Coalition, we did not even know what the questions were.

Shortly before IWD, a number of women in the sex trade pointed this out to us, rather bitterly. We quickly saw that the questions around this could not be resolved easily. If one views pornography as violence against women, how do women support women in the sex trade? But for women in the sex trade, they are workers with many of the same problems that working women have—they work alone, are isolated, have poor working conditions and are difficult to organize.

This whole thing is very complex for feminists to questions, never mind answer but we must start. A date we should keep in mind is that next January, we will start planning IWD again, and while we won't have the answers, hopefully we will have better questions around this topic.

But this will not happen spontaneously. What is needed is a dialogue between pro and anti censorship people and women in the sex trade. From my experience, dialogue with a goal in mind can often be more productive than discussion in a vacuum. A possible goal could be a large, open forum/conference in the fall to address this topic. The goal of that would be to have enough debate and discussion amongst many people, that will enable us to more easily

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address this in next years IWD celebrations.

What does this have to do with OPIRG, you might ask? I think this whole topic is currently in the public interest. Arguements around regulating pornography are in the media daily. As action is demanded, the debate increases. There are many perspectives on the topic which need to be brought into the public forum for debate. At this point, it is not a matter of "taking sides" but rather trying to make sure all sides are heard/raised.

There are a number of facilities which could help us with organizing and offering resource people including OISE, Women's Studies Programme, Law, to name a few. I think it would also be an interesting challenge to the Engineering Society to discuss the Toike Oike in an intelligent environment.

The potential for political upheaval and reward is great but I think peaking with a number of people in the women's movement BEFORE serious planning begins, will help to avoid this.

I would like to propose this to OPIRG as a potential fall confrence on Porn and the Sex Trade (IMAGES OF WOMEN(?))--a titlt?!?! The initial step woul be for me to speak with more people and develop a more concrete proosal. BUT accepting this idea of a forum/conference would be accepting in principle that we go ahead, if all (or atleast some) of the politics and logistics can be worked out.

What do you think??

Paula