



END VIOLENCE AGAINST SEX WORKERS

First observed in 2003, the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers was created to call attention to hate crimes committed against sex workers and highlight the need to remove the stigma that surrounds sex work. This stigma is why we accept laws that prevent these workers from being protected under legislation such as the Employment Standards Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act and leaves them unable to organize or effectively address exploitation or safety.

If the labour movement is a movement that truly fights for the rights of all workers we need to acknowledge that sex work is work, by supporting the full decriminalization of sex work.

In 2013, there appeared to be the real possibility that sex work would finally be decriminalized when the Canadian Supreme Court voted 9-0 to strike down Canada's Prostitution laws in the case of *Canada [AG] v Bedford*. In their decision the court wrote that "the harms identified by the court below are grossly disproportionate to the deterrence to the community disruption that is the object of the law. Parliament has the power to regulate against nuisances, but not at the cost of the health, safety and lives of prostitutes."

The then Conservative-led Parliament responded with Bill C36 which did not share any of the court's concern for the safety of sex workers or the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In fact, this law which came into effect on December 6, 2014 brought back everything the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional and pushed sex work even further into the shadows.

While the law around sex work in this country remains dangerous and dire, increasingly labour, social justice groups and politicians have begun to acknowledge that sex work is work. Amnesty International, one of the world's leading human rights organizations, voted in their Policy to Protect the Human Rights of Sex Workers to endorse the decriminalization of sex work based on the evidence that criminalization makes these workers less safe.

Simply, sex workers are workers who cannot organize to improve their working conditions while their work remains illegal. If the labour movement is truly dedicated to improving the lives of all workers, then that means standing in solidarity with sex workers. It is for this reason that the Women's Committee and

Executive Board recommends that the Labour Council:

1. Recognize December 17th as the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers.
2. Stand in solidarity with sex workers and other sex worker advocates by supporting the full decriminalization of sex work.

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