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PC-ness the Swedish way

From: Armin Forker
Subject: Swedish anti-prostitution law
Newsgroups: soc.culture.nordic
Date: 1 Apr 1998 15:42:31 GMT
Organization: Regional Computing Center, University of Cologne
Message-ID: <6ftn97\$bgt@news.rrz.Uni-Koeln.DE>

In the German news magazine 'Der Spiegel' I read an article about a soon to be passed Swedish law that will criminalize the customers of prostitutes.

Apparently no resistance can be expected in parliament.

Is it true that this law is generally perceived as fair in Sweden? Is there no relevant force to protect the liberal concept of free will for adults on which democracy rests?

What do the prostitutes say?

('Der Spiegel' usually makes no April 1st jokes).

From: Vesa Tuomas Sihvonen
Subject: Re: Swedish anti-prostitution law
Newsgroups: soc.culture.nordic
Date: 03 Apr 1998 01:58:33 +0200
Organization: Lysator Computer Society, Linköping University, Sweden
Message-ID: <yvvd8ezixna.fsf@tinget.lysator.liu.se>

Hi Mr. Forker.

As a resident of Sweden of nearly 12 years, I've started learning a thing or two, or three, about how the politics function in this country. In Sweden, it's not a matter of whether or not this kind of legislation - or many other kinds, for that matter - eventually will end up having any effect at all on human behavior, as prostitutes and their customers go.

The reason why these kind of ideas end up in the books (as they always inevitably do) is the combination of two deep-rooted

beliefs, both of which are daily reinforced by both the political organizations and the media; first: the idea that the majority always is right, and second; that the minority better adjust their behavior to the majority view (even if this adjustment in practice would consist of little else than lip service).

Thus, the "liberal" concept of "free" has no significance in the collective consciousness of the Swedes. You see, there are two ways to do things; the Swedish way and the Wrong way, and as soon the politicians and the press have declared one opinion or other to represent the "Swedish" set of values ("*svenska värderingar*" is the term you're fed with till you puke): Who would want to be **un**-Swedish? I seriously suspect that the phrase about there being a safety in numbers was coined up here.

To indicate, in conversation or in a written article, that you're pro-prostitution would equal to a social suicide, in the sense that one's opinions would be considered bizarre, or at least that the person lacks the capacity to understand what the prevalent "correct" opinion happens to be. And trust me, this mentality rules also regarding matters much, much more trivial than prostitution. (I was reminded of a Swedish colleague at work who, when surveyed about her opinion on the working conditions at her workplace, responded: "I don't know...how have the others answered?")

This particular law (law it will be) has come about mainly because the Social Democratic government feels compelled to achieve at least something resembling a carrot they can display in their showcase window for masses of female voters who have a good reason to be thoroughly disgusted with a government which keeps strangling the local municipal administrations with endless demands on cutbacks which in turn drain the education and the health care of financial resources (surprise! surprise! the nurses and the teachers to be, or already having gotten laid off, are mainly female; Sweden having the most sex-segregated labor market in the EU). In order to sell this to the bulk of the political parties, the frequently trusted method of "feel-sorry-for-the-victim" was put into practice. Easy as pie. First of all, a government enquiry into the low-echelon prostitution & prostitutes is conducted. Second, the average prostitute is portrayed as your well-known heroin-addicted hooker who walks the streets because some nasty pimp got her addicted in the first place.

Therefore, it is "everybody's" responsibility to help her out of her destructive behavior, and as long as the prostitutes themselves are irresponsible enough to go on selling sex, then the Society has to get involved with a firm and fatherly hand. Or something. The idea that the journalists should pay any attention to what the prostitutes themselves think is absurd. They are already "lost", marginalized, Un-Swedish and therefore a threat. The central accomplishment to be made is to, for once and all, solve the mind-boggling contradictions about prostitution and make sure the entire parish (general public) has understood what the preacher (the political/social establishment) thinks is "right".

Swedes perceive themselves as secularized in the conventional sense of the word, but the roots of Hardcore Protestantism are long and thick right beneath the thin surface of modernism. It is significant that the "debate" as a rule is a pseudo-debate; the lines divide NOT anti-prostitution forces against the PRO-prostitution forces; instead, the entire debate is conducted merely in order to give all individual debaters a fair opportunity to display their predictable opinions and after the game is over, you count the points and collect the credits. And the winner is the one whose views are most "Swedish".

To take one's responsibility, ("*att ta sitt ansvar*"), is one of the most used expressions among the Swedes. This all-pervading responsibility-taking manifests itself in millions of ways big and small; everything from setting your alarm-clock right so you won't be late to work, to calmly accepting the fact that the retail stores of alcohol will be closed during the weekends, so that other victims, in this case those of the profit-seeking breweries etc. won't be tempted to be even less Swedish than they already are, the poor bastards. This list can made very VERY long.

To try to put all this into a nutshell: prostitutes and their customers are a marginal group and present a minority view in their means of making a living, and in spending their money, respectively, and the Swedes are uncomfortable with ANY kind of behavior differing from what is perceived the generally accepted mainstream pattern. That somebody might want to live by different rules and values is intolerable to a people whose first response to just about everything is "What am I SUPPOSED to think about...?" So, to have a pattern of consensus established and confirmed by a piece of legislation serves as a form of socio-political Valium, mass-prescribed to a nation tortured by the repressed fear of that life after all might not be as predictable as they innerly wish.

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This page was last updated April 1998.

(Oh, by the way, you are guest number 8 since February 16th, and are sincerely wished **Welcome back!**)