

STRASS NEWSLETTER

number 3



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EDITORIAL : STRASS would like to send you best wishes for this New Year. We hope that, in 2013, we can at last celebrate the repeal of the law against soliciting, after ten long years. During the next year, more than ever, we need to mobilise: recently the government has set up a major working group into equality between women and men, led by Daniele Bousquet (originator of the project on the law to penalise clients), and consisting of, among other members, Roselyne Bachelot (ex-health minister who declared, notably, that no prostitute was free). Magali de Haas (Osez le féminisme – Dare to be feminist) also Gregoire Thery (Mouvement du nid – Movement of the Hearth): faced with government abolitionist attacks, we are counting on you to make 2013 a year of struggle.

STRASS NEWS

Important announcement: The Monday meetings that we have had up till now, will be moved to **Thursday** still between 17 and 21 hrs at the Act Up Paris office. These meetings enable us to meet together, to discuss our regular problems (if you have any questions or particular problems there are two legal experts there to advise you and answer questions), and to exchange ideas on how best to organise. We are very happy to see these meetings attract more and more sex workers, whatever their sphere of activity (Street, internet, porno....) and whatever their type or personal circumstances. Carry on spreading the word! Together we are stronger.

Demonstration: To mark the tenth anniversary of the internal security legislation which created the offence of public soliciting, we are organising a demonstration to protest about this dangerous and discriminatory law.



Protest against the offence of public soliciting
Meet up Saturday 16th March 2013, Place Pigalle at 14.30hr
As many as possible come

Since the trial of three people who attacked a sex worker in her home, **the right of STRASS to represent the victim has been accepted.** This legal decision is a new step in the official recognition of our union. Above all this decision means that the courts have recognised the discriminatory nature of the attack; because the crimes that we suffer too often go unpunished, because our vulnerable situation often prevents us from complaining, we are the main targets. That is why it is so important that you should inform us if you are a victim.

Actions – Demonstrations

17th September: We have learned, with great sadness, that Karima – member of the Limoges federation and spokesperson for Les Myriades Trans association – left us a few months ago. She was asking, without success, for the change in her civil status

and was angry that the authorities refused to consider her complaints about the attacks that she had suffered.

21st September: When Najat Vallaud-Belkacem came to Limoges, the Limoges STRASS federation and the Myriades Trans association organised a gathering to denounce the minister for the rights of women's intention to abolish sex work.

12th October: The feminist collective "8th March for all women" organised a public meeting "Feminists against the penalisation of clients" at Tolbiac (Paris). There were many interventions, and those of Carine Favier, President of Family Planning, and Giovanna Rincon from Acceptess, were followed by an open discussion: mostly about the situation of sex workers in Sweden; the consequences of the current legislation in France; and about ways that militant feminists could support our struggles.

26th October : Members of STRASS and of the association Griselidis organised a demonstration and gave out leaflets outside the Socialist Party Congress in Toulouse to the people of Toulouse to make them aware of our struggle.

10th November: At La Mutinerie (a feminist bar in Paris) Luca Stevenson gave us a presentation about the model of legislation on sex work in New Zealand. In New Zealand, prostitution is completely decriminalised, which allows sex workers to organise themselves in a SOOB (Small Owner-Operated Brothel). Small "brothels" where one to four people work, without a boss, so that everyone can manage their own income and clients. These SOOBs do not have to be licensed by the local authority, unlike brothels with over four people which are run by a manager and have to be licensed.

21st November: On this date a proposition to repeal the law on the offence of soliciting, should have been debated, as proposed by Esther Benbassa, Ecology and Green European senator. However the government asked Mme Benbassa to withdraw her proposal so that the offence of public soliciting would be repealed in favour of penalisation of clients. In order to mark the date, all the same, a dozen militants "solicited" in front of the Senate while giving out leaflets: "Left to die far from their windows, we will at least have worked beneath them."

25th November: On the International day of struggle against violence against women, STRASS marched with the "8th March for all women" group. Last year we were violently ejected from this demonstration. Since then a lot of hard work with the officers of the collective "8th March for all Women" allowed us to have a big contingent of around one hundred people with placards saying: "We are feminist whores", "Clients penalised, whores assassinated, Belkacem complicit" and even "Wherever, whenever, however, how much I earn, the choice is mine, my body belongs to me." It is also worth noting that on this occasion a tribune of militant trade unionists and university feminists attended to oppose the penalisation of clients. Even though up until now the abolitionists seemed to have a monopoly on feminism, we are currently beginning to



get attention for the idea that a feminism that respects sex workers is equally possible.

30th November: Three police officers, after being acquitted in the first instance, were found guilty on appeal of the rape of a Nice sex worker. Their light sentences (3 – 5 years with remission), only go to remind us that the rape of sex workers is not always taken seriously by the courts.

1st December: STRASS took part in a demonstration on the international day of the struggle against AIDS and a speaker reminded people of the dangers of an epidemic of HIV/STD that could be caused by the non-recognition of the rights of sex workers.

17th December: We organised a conference on the international day against violence to sex workers, so that we could present our dossier on violence (the dossier is available on the internet, or a paper version is available on request). In the evening, we organised an assembly at Pigalle to commemorate our disappeared colleagues and to shout about how fed-up we are with violence and stigmatisation of which we, as sex workers are victims.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

16th – 18th November in Frankfurt, the Dona Carmen association organised 3 days of discussion and debates on the German situation. Two members of STRASS went there and made a presentation about the union. In Germany sex work is legal at the national level, but many local laws attempt to repress it, notably by forbidding street work. The government intention seems to be to gradually push independent workers into working in a brothel, which confirms our total opposition to the so-called “regulated” model.



4th December at the European Parliament, a conference took place organised by the European Women’s Lobby, The Movement of the Hearth, and the Scelles foundation. Supported by 200 NGOs, the conference launched a “call for a Europe free from prostitution”. The next day, Transgender Europe, which represents nearly 60 organisations for the rights of transgender people in Europe, condemned this call and demanded the recognition of sex work as work and to have proper campaigns against transphobia and discrimination. Likewise, ICRSE (The International Committee for the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe), and SWAN (The Network of Sex Workers in Central and Eastern Europe, and central Asia) published a joint statement condemning the sexism, racism and transphobia of the European Women’s Lobby”.

The fight in Europe against the Swedish model continues. **Denmark** has recently rejected a proposal for a law criminalising clients, after receiving many reports showing the increase in violence towards sex workers caused by this measure.

In **Scotland,** likewise sex workers and their supporters have mobilised against the proposal for this law.

Red Umbrella Fund (Fonds Parapluie Rouge) : STRASS is delighted by the creation of the Red Umbrella Fund – the first fund which gives grants exclusively to organisations run by sex workers. During its first year, the Red Umbrella Fund awarded grants to 20 organisations globally, fighting for sex workers’ rights. Even though STRASS was not chosen amongst these 20 projects, we are confident that the funds will be used to bring to light and combat the violence and abuse which sex workers suffer throughout the world.