

**Deloitte.**The Cambridge Union Society
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Cambridge, CB2 1UBEmail : pressofficer@cus.org**PRESS RELEASE – 26.02.2015****“This House Would Legalise the Sex Industry”**

On Thursday 26 February, the Union held a charged debate on the legal status of the sex trade.

The debate was opened by writer and comedienne, **Miranda Kane**. Ms Kane began by making the audience aware that she herself was an independent sex worker for seven years, and that her work helped her develop a number of transferrable skills: web design, search engine optimisation and financing amongst them. She also joked that being a sex worker was more fun than working in a call centre, and, on a more serious note, explained that it had helped her out of poverty in a way she enjoyed and made her feel empowered. She discussed the agency that she had as a sex-worker, able to say no to any act - and, indeed, she has suffered more abuse as a comedienne than a sex worker. Ms Kane criticised the Nordic Model, saying that it increases stigma and leaves those in need of money more open to exploitation. She also spoke of the damaging effects of criminalisation: a prosecution traps workers in the sex industry, and also risks making whistleblowers of trafficking and child prostitution less likely to come forward for fear of being prosecuted themselves.

The case for the opposition was opened by **Inna Shevchenko**, leader of international feminist organisation FEMEN. Ms Shevchenko talked about the pervasive nature of the sex industry in her native Ukraine - even staff at universities were trying to encourage female students to go into the sex trade. She articulated a stance on the legalisation of prostitution as a lazy solution come up with by people still trapped in patriarchal ideas. She explained that legalisation would not legitimise prostitutes but rather pimps and clients - she expressed concern that women in this set up would become "invisible". Ms Shevchenko went on to argue that trafficking will be easier in an industry that is not subject to a blanket ban as it will be investigated less, and also that legalisation will increase the demand for prostitutes, pushing more people into prostitution. She also raised a concern that legalising prostitution will mean bringing up a generation of boys who see it as entirely legitimate to purchase a woman. Ms Shevchenko countered a claim made by Ms Kane that sex workers want legalisation: she said that most sex workers resist employment contracts because they worry about being forced by such a contract to accept all demands of all clients, and also do not wish prostitution to appear on their employment record. She concluded by likening legalising prostitution to legalising slavery, and termed prostitution not the oldest profession but "the oldest form of oppression".

Cambridge debater **Zoe Alipranti** furthered the case for the proposition, calling out the problem of a lack of legislation to protect prostitutes under criminalisation because the government cannot regulate an illegal industry, whereas with legalisation it is possible for the government to intervene when human trafficking and child prostitution laws are broken, and also for safe working conditions to be insured. Ms Alipranti went on to discuss the shift that would occur with legalisation from underground and drug-fuelled business to safe, clean, violence-free and protected. She also spoke of the importance of bodily autonomy, and branded a government assumption that women are not capable of making a free choice to enter the sex industry as "patronising". She closed her speech by discussing legalisation of prostitution as the first step in a slow mentality change which will result in a removal of the stigma sex workers face.

Josh Simons, a PPS student who spent the summer researching sex work and trafficking in India, then took up the case for the opposition. He attacked the proposition as only looking at a minority of cases, in which sex workers are adult and consenting, presenting evidence that worldwide, legalised prostitution shows an increase in prostitution of young girls. Mr Simons made clear that there is an enormous spectrum of personal experiences and it is important not to look at legalisation of the sex trade in polar terms. He defended Britain's system of legal sex work but not the sex industry (sex workers are not breaking the law, including in brothels, but pimps are), expressing concern over "corporations" that manage sex workers. He presented the case that an increase in legal brothels has attracted illegal prostitution in the surrounding area, and cited many examples where legalising the sex industry has failed to protect sex workers. Addressing the issue of women's

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rights, Mr Simons said that sex workers are of any and all gender identities, but the sex industry is dominated by men - men have the control, and legalising the sex industry would be giving more power to these men, who may well not be treating the sex workers appropriately.

The proposition case was concluded by **Ashish Kumar**, who ranked as the best debater in the world at the recent World Universities Debating Championship. He opened by criticising the opposition for, though claiming to support empowerment of sex workers, not wanting legislation that can protect the most vulnerable workers. He also identified the selective nature of statistics in Mr Simons' speech, saying that states in which legalisation had led to a decrease in assault and trafficking were overlooked, and also pointing out that it is only natural that statistics for rape appear to increase after legalisation - this means victims are finally able to come forward. Mr Kumar went on to discuss the dilemma sex workers face when the sex industry is illegal - if they are stopped by police, do they hand over their employer and risk having no work at all, or face a criminal conviction themselves? He attacked the Nordic Model for making it harder for sex workers to assess clients as the clients are scared and agreements are rushed. He concluded by pressing the point that a legal option for everyone must by its nature reduce trafficking, as it makes a clear divide between what is and what is not legal, so more clients will be attracted to legal workers - adults who are consenting.

Imogen Sadler, Oxford debater, ex-President and founding member of the Christ Church Feminist Society, closed the opposition's case and the debate as a whole. She underlined that the sex industry is not an abstract concept, but is rather something that goes on all around us. She went on to attack Mr Kumar's point about the dilemma sex workers face, saying that very, very few sex workers are prosecuted. Ms Sadler also attacked the argument that legislation will improve anything, highlighting that the issue is not illegality of sex work but the patriarchal attitudes that underpin legislation, and legalising the sex industry will not change this - she gave an example of a man who raped a sex worker in the USA being charged with theft as opposed to rape. She raised concerns over the impact of legalising sex work on those who need sex work - prices will be pushed down, making it harder for those who need the money to make the money, and the level of control pimps have will by no means be decreased by legalisation - it will only be made harder to convict those controlling sex workers.

Debate Result

Ayes: 36%

Noes: 43%

Abstentions: 21%

*The motion failed to carry.***By Helen Dallas**
Co-Head of Press, Lent 2015