Guaranteed Livable Income as the way forward to Abolishing

Prostitution

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and economic security.

Asian Women Coalition Ending Prostitution

Abstract

The overwhelming reality is that women are often left out of democratic processes and pushed to the margins of society while our labour and our bodies are used to drive so-called economic development. Prostitution is one example of such an institution, which disproportionately violates the rights and freedoms of poor women of colour.

Normalizing the sex industry threatens to privatize women's safety and increase exploitation of women's poverty. The government's apparent withdrawal from enhancing women's democratic and civic participation denies women's economic security. A Guaranteed Livable Income has the potential to impact the sexualized racism of prostitution on Asian women and women of colour. We will discuss its provision as the

Re-democratizing the economy must surely include everyone in an egalitarian world.

The Asian Women Coalition Ending Prostitution was an intervenor in Canada v.

Bedford, a Supreme Court of Canada case that considered the constitutionality of some laws on prostitution. The Court decision struck down the laws and sent the issue back to

way forward to the abolition of prostitution, for the sake of advancing women's equality

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the Parliament to modernize Canada's approach to the danger that prostitution poses to women. Parliament is now considering a Bill that accurately identifies male demand as the source of danger to women, recognizing that prostitution abrogates women's equality and human dignity. Asian Women Coalition Ending Prostitution proposes that a comprehensive Guaranteed Livable Income is the necessary corollary to Bill C-36 to enhance women's full access to Charter Rights.

Introduction

The 15th Basic Income Earth Network Congress in June of 2014 afforded a valuable opportunity to advance the discourse around attaining economic security for all. There was an underlying consensus that economic rights must be recognized and upheld if we are to achieve a free and just egalitarian society. While many hurdles must be overcome in order to achieve such a society, women's inequality remains paramount in any discussion around economic rights and freedoms. The recognition that poverty is feminized is prompting increasing acceptance that income initiatives alone are an insufficient political strategy for the most disenfranchised (Young, 2010; Zelleke, 2011), and requires a feminist approach to be most effective. It is not possible to discuss the feasibility of income security through the mechanism of basic income without accounting for the pre-existing social and political disparities between men and women - factors that affect our ability to access our economic rights and freedoms.

The current social and economic conditions for women in Canada

Federal and provincial governments continue to cut funding to social programs and to independent women's groups. A Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives report on women's poverty in Canada found that income inequality between men and women has steadily increased since the 1980s (Townson, 2000). Single mothers are the most impoverished family class in the country, with a poverty rate of 38.1%, compared to 11.9% for single fathers. The poverty rates of Aboriginal women and women of colour

linger at 36% and 29% respectively (Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action, 2008). Social assistance rates remain unlivable according to the National Council of Welfare report in 2009; access to reliable childcare is meager (Cleveland et al., 2008; Friendly, 2013); unfair employment conditions persist. The poor pay the highest proportion of their income into the welfare system and reap the least benefit compared to the benefits that flow more easily to the rich (Yalnizyan, 2010).

The reality of women's inequality and male violence against women is overwhelming. Rates of wife assault and sexual assault have not changed. Over 86% of all criminal assaults in the country are committed against women (Johnson, 2006). The majority of sexual assaults (91%) are never reported to police (Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008). The need for transition houses grow, as many of these organizations operate at full capacity year round and struggle to meet the needs of raped and battered women with inadequate funding and government support (Burczycka & Cotter, 2011). Canada's increasingly discriminatory immigration policies and services are unresponsive to the vulnerability experienced by immigrant women.

Women's labour is unrecognized and undervalued. Despite being central to collective survival, women's work has not historically been considered productive work (Lakeman et al., 2004). Women are still denied economic power and provision. As Cindy L'Hirondelle (2004) writes, profits are prioritized before life-sustaining objectives, with little distinction made between work that is beneficial and work that is damaging. The beneficial labour carried out by caretakers and mothers is not recognized as profitable, while the harmful work of other industries is recognized and rewarded as such. In the

traditional workforce, the wage gap persists, with women paid 70 cents for every dollar men make (Morissette et al., 2013). In addition, women comprise the majority of minimum wage workers, and are overrepresented in all age groups (Statistics Canada, 2009).

These feminized conditions of poverty are worsened by globalization, compounded by our country's shifting political priorities and cooperation with state military violence overseas. Care-giving labour is outsourced to migrant workers. Women of colour often arrive through programs that replicate exploitative conditions that exist between demand and source countries at the individual level. The global trade in women's labour serves to further devalue our paid and unpaid work, while reinforcing the gendered division of labour in the Global North. The terrible 2013 disaster in Bangladesh where 1,130 people died in the collapse of a poorly-built textile factory underlines this reality ("Bangladesh factory collapse probe uncovers abuses", 2013). In the Global South and increasingly the Global North, the devastation caused to the land and resources leave the poor with few alternatives, except poverty-based migration and vulnerability to exploitation and commodification.

Re-democratizing our economy when women are pushed to the margins

Women are historically excluded from social policy. Poverty and racism exacerbate this exclusion.

In 2013, the Asian Women Coalition was invited to provide the Supreme Court of Canada with a critical race analysis on prostitution laws and the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Canada vs. Bedford was a consideration of whether the laws against solicitation, brothel-keeping, and living off the avails of prostitution were constitutional. We suggested that the Court apply an "equality lens" as well as the "anti-racism principle" because prostitution promotes racist ideas and imposes those stereotypes on all Asian women (*Bedford v. Canada*, 2013). Any step to normalize prostitution makes it much harder for Asian women, women of colour and Aboriginal women to effectively defend ourselves from racism and discrimination. The decision would have a direct and critical impact on Asian women's ability to self determine, as individuals or as a group.

Adult entertainment advertisements, pornography and mainstream media reveal the mass marketing of Asian women and blatant sexualization of racism. Analysis of approximately 1470 ads in the adult section on Craigslist revealed that over half of the advertisements market Asian women, using race and racist stereotypes of Asian women as a selling factor.

Prostitution is an industry that causes harm to women, both to the individual and to women as a class of people. The sex industry denies women's full and dignified participation in society. Unlike the caring labour carried out by mothers or nannies, prostitution is not productive, nor life sustaining. Male consumption of women as commodities is deeply connected to capitalism, patriarchy, and feeds the destructive global sex trade of women and girls (Pateman, 1999). Many women, especially women of colour, Aboriginal women and immigrant women, earn far less than they need to

survive, much less thrive or facilitate effective and meaningful participation to shape civil society. It is these women who are most vulnerable and targeted for recruitment into prostitution.

The Asian Women Coalition is comprised of recent immigrants, naturalized Canadians, permanent residents, Canadian-born offspring of Asian immigrants, and foreign students. Many of us have extensive front-line experience providing concrete aid to battered and raped women, including prostituted women. We observe that the sex trade does not create opportunity for women to participate in civil society in a way that enhances equality for women of colour. We stand with Asian survivors of sex trafficking and prostitution who have made public their call for an end to prostitution:

We unite with our sisters in the feminist movement and the labor movement who for real jobs, not prostitution; for economic programs that create local, sustainable employment, and not push women out of the country; for the socialization of the care economy while recognizing that domestic work is work; for greater budget for women and away from military expenditures (Coalition Against Trafficking in Women - Asia Pacific, 2011).

We join with the long-standing recommendation of Canadian feminists to consider a Guaranteed Livable Income (GLI), as a commitment to collective survival, and in recognition of women's labour and our rightful share of the wealth (Lakeman et al., 2004). Both locally and globally, we see that the vast majority of the poor comprise of

women, and women of colour. As Asian Canadian feminists, we argue for a GLI as a promising element to achieving sexual and racial equality.

Our Vision for a Guaranteed Livable Income

Basic Earth Income Network defines basic income as "an income unconditionally granted to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement" (Basic Income Earth Network, 2013). A variety of proposed income granting schemes can be classified as such and have been motivated by this idea. We are most optimistic of the basic income scheme called Guaranteed Livable Income, or GLI. Cindy L'Hirondelle includes "livable" as a clear and positive articulation of the need for "dignity, health, and life" (L'Hirondelle, 2012). Dr. Evelyn Forget extends the concept of income security as "the guarantee that all participants can expect a basic annual income whether or not they work, (which) gives people a longer planning horizon, allowing them to get beyond just making ends meet" (Forget, 2011).

Starting from the need to shift resources from criminalizing women to protecting and advancing women's equal participation, we call for a GLI. We join feminists in arguing that GLI is a crucial component to a legislative strategy known as "the Nordic Model". The model roughly consists of government recognizing the harms and dangers of prostitution, and therefore decriminalizes the women, and criminalizes the johns and the pimps. Under this model, there is an understanding of the context and causes that put women in prostitution. In addition to the criminal law aspect, the model provides for prostitution exit services and prevention, including bolstering the social welfare system

through provision of income assistance, universal childcare, accessible education and employment opportunities. The Nordic Model was created to prevent and abolish prostitution as practice that threatens the physical and economic security of women at the hands of men. We consider this strategy to be a compatible starting point toward integrating GLI into the fight for women's full sexual and economic autonomy.

How GLI will help end prostitution and advance women's equality

1. A Public Initiative: As increasingly more of our natural resources are passed from public control to the private sector, so too is our social responsibility to protect and advance women's equality, including our economic security. While all Canadians suffer from government withdrawal of responsibility to the public's welfare, women have historically lived with a lesser share of the wealth as compared to men. Moreover, in the neo-liberal economy, women are being told we must fend for ourselves. The onus is placed on single mothers to provide childcare and find employment, or try to live on inadequate welfare. The burden of healthcare and legal aid lies with impoverished refugee and immigrant women facing sexism compounded by racist anti-immigration policies in Canada. The prostitute woman is told to hire a bodyguard, purchase a security camera or install a panic button because she can no longer rely on public law enforcement for her safety. A strong social security system would allow a woman to avoid prostitution in the first place. We believe in a publicly funded GLI because women's economic security is a public responsibility.

2. **Universality:** A basic income must be maximally universal in order for it to work for women and affect those who are the most vulnerable to violence and to being recruited into the sex industry. Forget argues also that "universality promotes social cohesion; a universal guaranteed annual income becomes a shared social experience rather than simply an individual benefit" (Forget, 2011). The time and funds invested into meanstesting and policing of those on welfare demonstrates a reluctance to provide social assistance to those deemed "undeserving", when the overwhelming reality of poverty and specifically, women's poverty, is well-established and indisputable. Reallocation of these resources into a GLI would far better serve the needs of the poor and disenfranchised, and may very well save money in the long run by supplementing or replacing current income assistance programs such as Canada's Old Age Security Pension and Employment Insurance.

We support a GLI that allocates the grant to the individual, as opposed to the family. Funds transferred directly to women offer some degree of financial independence and control from male partners and other family members, but also has the potential to guarantee a certain level of economic security to enable women and their children to leave battering husbands or incesting fathers.

Our vision also includes those who may not have citizenship such as permanent residents, landed immigrants, refugees, and those who have been trafficked. Canada is recognized as a "source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to sex trafficking" (Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, U.S. Department of State, 2014). In 2004, the RCMP estimated over 600 people are

trafficked into the country from abroad every year as well as an additional 1,500-2,200 people trafficked through Canada into the United States, and yet there have only been 35 successful human trafficking convictions in Canada since the 2005 trafficking laws came into effect (Public Safety Canada, 2014).

In regards to Canadian immigration law, the introduction of the Conditional Permanent Residence status for sponsored spouses in 2012 allows the state to revoke status and deport a sponsored woman who does not stay with her sponsor (which is often her husband) for at least two years (Canadian Council of Refugees, 2014). The legislation increases the power of husbands over wives, especially women solicited by men as mail-order brides, and adds to the already incredible leverage that pimps and brothel owners have over the women they recruit into massage parlours and brothels.

While women are trafficked into Canada by organized crime, women often arrive with entirely legitimate paperwork - as sponsored spouses, on student visas, or through temporary foreign worker programs such as the Live-in Caregiver Program. Similarly, employers are granted immense authority to control and exploit migrant workers allocated to these positions. Without equality-seeking directives, both in law enforcement and in the social programs targeted at alleviating poverty, women in these situations are left with little recourse upon arrival. GLI is a just and responsive initiative to address the global pressures that push women and children into prostitution and other exploitative work. We have a first-world obligation to protect women here who are experiencing violence and poverty, and hold Canada to the highest international standards of human rights.

3. **Non-conditionality:** Many economic support systems fasten obligations to income grants, which individuals must fulfill in order to receive the money. We considered the great strides in poverty reduction achieved by conditional cash transfer programs in other countries, which provide limited cash incentives to certain people that fall below the poverty line. Conditions for such programs vary in nature and the level of responsibility placed on the individual - from strict adherence to medical appointments, to ensuring children attend school (Schüring, 2010). However, we do not believe that placing behavioral constraints on the poor will aid or guide individuals out of poverty.

A basic income must be completely non-conditional in order for such a program to work for women escaping prostitution. The women who are recruited into prostitution already face huge barriers to achieving physical and economic security, and these barriers are compounded by racist sexism for women of colour and Aboriginal women. Imposing additional burdens on the already heavily burdened would limit eligibility for GLI, and further punish women for poverty.

At the 2014 Basic Income Earth Network Congress, we learned of the women in India unable to fulfill the requirement of taking their child to a medical appointment due to lack of access to healthcare in the first place (Jhabvala & Standing, 2014). We repudiate the policies that deny women and their families their rightful income grants based on factors like low school attendance of their children, when there are many largely poverty-driven factors that keep their children out of school. "Non-compliance" with state social programs is not wholly a function of parental irresponsibility or neglect - the blame for

which is most often placed on mothers. Rather, the harsh social, political, and economic conditions prohibit individual compliance with these programs, and prohibit meaningful participation and contribution to society in general.

Secondly, a GLI scheme must be unconditional as to how women spend the grant they receive. Women know best how to use these funds to best meet our needs and our family's needs. In fact, requirements on how welfare is to be spent have been used against the poor, and keep people poor. For example, many landlords in Vancouver raise rental rates to meet or exceed the full housing allowance set by welfare.

4. **Livable:** We also call for a basic income that is provided at an adequate amount to enable people to live with dignity. We reject the current insufficient welfare rates that bear no relation to the costs of living (Pasma & Sears, 2010), keep women and their families in poverty, and have failed to keep pace with inflation (National Council of Welfare, 2009). Denying continued assistance to those who begin at minimum wage jobs already below what is needed to survive perpetuates below-subsistence conditions, and does little to lift anyone out of poverty. Meanwhile, providing an amount that is inadequate to the rising costs of living acts as a barrier for women trying to leave abusive relationships and conditions – including prostitution.

While conditional cash transfers are a step in the right direction, the amounts granted to households are typically inadequate to the total cost of living, and supplements to existing income are inadequate to the objective of achieving economic security. In Canada, existing income supplements are in fact, being eroded. For example, the

introduction of the Universal Child Care Benefit, which replaced the choice in Child Care Allowance as well as the Canada Child Tax Benefit, reduced an already inadequate income top-up for women with young children (Battle et al., 2006).

5. Necessary, but not sufficient: Lastly, while GLI is a necessary measure for women's economic security, it is certainly not sufficient to achieve it, much less women's equality. Income is a key ingredient to creating the basis for dignified living and enabling people to have meaningful participation in society, but does not comprise the entire recipe. We call for an end to violence against women and women's inequality. Adequate housing, health care, immigration laws consistent with international human rights standards, fully universal child care, access to education, strengthening of labour rights and opportunities are all pieces that must be improved and transformed in combination with the income provisions that will bring us closer to a life-promoting egalitarian society.

Implementing a guaranteed livable income as a necessary step towards women's equality

In Canada, we have not seen a major political commitment to gender equality; instead, governments have been adopting policies of austerity that effectively reduce social services and lead to high costs of living and unemployment, all of which disproportionately affect women of colour and Aboriginal women. Adding to this, Asian women are facing an onslaught of sexualized racism through the expansion and growth of the sex industry, which has a real impact on our full social and political participation in

Canadian society. A GLI would be an equality-seeking measure that would be a first step in addressing racial, gender and class inequality.

Providing a GLI has been tried and met with success in Canada and around the world.

Researcher Evelyn Forget analyzed historical health data during the Mincome experiment in Manitoba, where between 1974-1979 all 10 000 residents in the town of Dauphin were provided with a Guaranteed Annual Income (GAI).

Her study found remarkable health findings in light of the Mincome experiment.

Adolescents were more likely to stay in school; the rate of hospitalization for accidents and injuries decreased; and mental health diagnoses decreased (Forget, 2011). A similar experiment was conducted in India in 2010, where 9 villages in the state of Madhya Pradesh received cash grants for almost 2 years. Every woman, man and child were the recipients of monthly cash payments and an evaluation of the program in 2013 showed impressive findings - recipients reported improvements in their daily living conditions, a greater quality of life and health care access, higher school enrolment and improved school performance among children, and an increase in work and productivity (Vanderborght, 2013).

Presently, seniors in Canada are entitled to a Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) if they fall below the poverty line. While not adequate enough, the GIS has had an impact in reducing poverty among seniors in Canada, particularly among women (Andersen, 2010).

Some Asian countries have also implemented a GLI-like scheme as part of their efforts to address the sex trade and women's inequality. In South Korea, anti-prostitution laws passed in 2010 are similar in character to the Nordic model, in which there is not only a zero-tolerance for the buying and selling of sex, but also a major emphasis on the provision of exit services (Raymond, 2013). The government in South Korea offers an assistance package to women in prostitution, which includes legal support, counselling, medical treatment, and a stipend. The impact on the sex trade has been impressive - a 40% decrease in the sex industry, and 56% decrease in prostituted women (Raymond, 2013).

During the Maoist period in China, all women were provided with universal childcare, jobs, education, housing and a pension. Prostitution was condemned as it was seen as undermining relations of solidarity and equality between men and women, and through major government campaigns and efforts it was reportedly wiped out throughout China up until the 1980s (Liu, 2011).

These examples provide a glimpse into the potential positive impact of a GLI for all.

From reduced poverty rates to healthier lives, a GLI would also provide women with the economic independence and power to escape the conditions that force many into prostitution.

Presently, Canada has no exit program for women in prostitution. The result of Bedford v. Canada has led the government to propose new legislation on prostitution, known as Bill C-36. This bill recognizes the inherent violence and harms of prostitution and thus,

holds the potential to mandate government support programs for women in prostitution and that could create the conditions necessary for the abolition of prostitution. However, Bill C-36 must be amended to decriminalize the women in prostitution in order to effectively counter the systemic sexual, racial and economic inequality that presses and traps women into prostitution and denies women our Charter rights. Furthermore, it must place a stronger emphasis on allocating resources to promote women's equality, with a GLI as a core component of the legislation.

A GLI is ultimately a social determinant of women's health, along with universal public education, healthcare, childcare, and housing. As the World Health Organization states:

The social determinants of health are the circumstances in which people are born, grow up, live, work and age, and the systems put in place to deal with illness. These circumstances are in turn shaped by a wider set of forces: economics, social policies, and politics (WHO, 2013).

Addressing the unequal circumstances under which women experience social, economic and political inequality and unpaid labour, women will begin to gain the power and freedom for self-determination and to participate meaningfully in society.

Implementing a GLI to all would require a fundamental political and economic structural change. Such a program would effectively counter the neoliberal practice and ideology of privatization by redistributing public resources, although we understand that such a

measure would not completely eradicate poverty in Canada. Furthermore, there is strong evidence in the literature suggesting that the distribution of income and wealth in a given society is a key indicator of quality of life - the greater the gap between the rich and the poor, the greater the negative health consequences and social inequalities (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010).

To struggle against prostitution means to struggle against these conditions of inequality, and it means to support policies that aim to improve quality of life and human dignity.

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