

WOMAN

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Struggle

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RACIST MORALISM

A group of fundamentalist Christian parents have won a law suit against a school in Tennessee, USA and the court has ordered the school to pay damages to the offended parents who claimed that the school's textbooks violated their religious freedom. Among the works of literature cited as "offensive" were The Diary Of Anne Frank for implying that "all religions are equal"; the Wizard of Oz because it portrays a "good witch" and The Practical Princess because it encourages children to disobey their parents.

The attorney for the fundamentalists said the textbooks were objected to because of "the absence of strong white male role models". The ruling gives parents the right to withdraw their children from reading classes.

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STRANGE JUSTICE

US Attorney General Edwin Messe, an outspoken opponent of affirmative action, has hired no women or Black men for senior policy-making jobs at the U.S. Department of Justice since he took office 21 months ago. Of the three women and one Black man Messe inherited from his predecessor, all but one woman have resigned. There are no women or Black men in the department's 21 presidentially-appointed jobs. At Messe's senior staff meeting each morning, he is surrounded by white males.

The Justice Department is one of the three federal agencies that have refused to follow federal regulations requiring them to set minority hiring goals in reports to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Ralph Neas, executive director of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights commented:

The top echelons of the Justice Department constitute one of the most segregated workforces in the country. It provides us with a good illustration of what could result if Meese's ... brand of (voluntary) affirmative action becomes the law of the land.

Meese's hiring record ranks with his boss, President Reagan. Reagan has appointed 292 federal judges in the last six years and only 27 have been women and 17 Black or Hispanic. In filling the 93 U.S Attorney positions, Reagan has named two women and two Black men since taking office.

Info from: Washington Post in Off Our Backs Volume xvii number 1, January 1987

PROSTITUTES MEET IN BRUSSELS

The second International Whores' Congress took place in Brussels October 1 - 4, 1986. The gathering of 150 prostitutes, ex-prostitutes sex workers and prostitute advocates from sixteen(16) countries was held in the European Parliament buildings - to the horror of some delegates.

One subject on the agenda, the Alliance Between Prostitutes and Feminists, was potentially the most contentious. Pieke Biermann, a writer and former prostitute from Berlin, gave a strong speech about the division between prostitutes and feminists; this separation, she said, was "not invented by prostitutes, but by feminists." She told her own story of putting herself through the university as a prostitute and of having a woman friend literally jump back three or four feet when Biermann told her. Common stereotypes feminists have of prostitutes, Biermann said, are that prostitutes are reduced to mere sexual beings.

The prostitutes also emphasized that they knew a lot about men, much more than the average feminist, and that women could learn from them. Non-prostitutes intimated that they really didn't want to know what the prostitutes knew, especially when it came to men.

From B Wilson Off Our Backs

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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT SAYS: DECRIMINALIZE PROSTITUTION

The European Parliament recently adopted a resolution on violence against women which calls on member states "to take the necessary legal steps

- a) to decriminalize the exercise of this profession
- b) to guarantee prostitutes the rights enjoyed by other citizens
- c) to protect the independence, health and safety of those exercising their profession...
- d) to reinforce measures which may be taken against those responsible for the duress of violence to prostitutes ...
- e) to support prostitutes' self-help groups and require police and judicial authorities to provide better protection for prostitutes who wish to lodge complaints...

Off Our Backs

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ARGENTINE COURT REJECTS BILL

A bill passed by the Argentine Chamber of Deputies has been declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

The bill made marriage indissoluble, divorce illegal and remarriage after a divorce obtained in another country illegal. Many Argentines have got divorced and married in other countries.

The Catholic Church has put considerable pressure on the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate not to pass a law that would legalize divorce. However, the Senate which postponed a decision on pending divorce legislation till after Pope Jean Paul's visit in April this year may have to act now following the Argentine Supreme Court's ruling.

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CZECH PARLIAMENT LIBERALIZES ABORTION LAW

A new law giving women the right to decide to terminate a pregnancy up to twelve weeks has been passed by the parliament of Czechoslovakia. Previously, a doctor's recommendation and a pleading of the case before two doctors and a social worker were necessary before a woman could be granted an abortion. The move will lessen delays and the possibility of complications. The law was passed despite opposition from the Catholic Church.

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JOINT THAI ACTION TO COMBAT SEXISM

Thai feminists have recently stepped up their action on the government, opposition parties and trade unions. Various organisations have come together in the hope of utilising their resources to the fullest by assigning various tasks to each group.

The Women's Health Information Centre in conjunction with human rights organisations recently held talks with representatives from six political parties concerning the participation of women in the forthcoming elections this year.

The Women's Information Centre has been concentrating its efforts on confronting sexism within Thai trade unions. The centre has produced manuals encouraging women workers to take a firmer stand within existing unions or to form new ones. Cries of creating divisions within the Labour movement voiced by male trade unionists has not deterred the centre which intends to step up its campaign.

The Women's Information Centre has also joined forces with other groups to tackle the growing problem of sex tourism. The centre recently produced a report in conjunction with two German women highlighting the conditions of women in the sex industry. The study found that most 'sex tourists' came from Germany, the US and other European countries - a large proportion of which were holiday makers and sailors. Taking to the streets to experience what it is like for women who earn their daily wage from such a profession, the researchers found that the men not only verbally abused the prostitutes but also physically attacked them before leaving without paying. The organisations are putting pressure on the Thai and German governments to try and put an end to the exploitation of women in this forever growing industry.

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