

Is 'red light' district the answer?

by Nathaniel Scott

North Portland residents have declared war on the "world's oldest profession": prostitution.

Two North/Northeast neighborhood leaders, Sharon McCormack, North Portland's crime coordinator, and Edna M. Robertson, Northeast neighborhood office coordinator, say legalizing is the answer to Portland's prostitution problem.

To dramatize the influx of prostitutes in the North area, specifically in the vicinity of Union Avenue, residents marched and held a rally to demonstrate their "moral outrage" for what North Portland considers a "lack of police protection."

Several months ago citizens in the Albina area hung street-wide banners decrying prostitution and named the recipients of their services — "Johns" — in an attempt to shamefully drive away the unsavory practices. But, if there is any truth to the saying that "Prostitution is the world's oldest profession," it lingers on.

Because of the outcry generated and the eroding effects of prostitution, particularly in residential areas, the *Observer* interviewed neighborhood leaders, individuals from the Portland Police Bureau, prostitutes, and both professionals and non-professional citizens who live in the greater Portland area.

Ms. McCormack and Ms. Robertson contend that prostitution needs to be legal and that designated areas, "red light districts," should be set aside for those of legal age who wish to be prostitutes.

They rationalize that a "red light district" would be removed from residential areas; that the police could better prevent teenagers from engaging in prostitution; and that the atmosphere would be far better than what exists.

"There have been (and still are) designated areas where prostitution is common knowledge as far as people knowing where to go," says Robert Tobin, captain of the drugs and vice department. He added that he is against legalizing prostitution with designated "red light districts" because that would create a barrage of criminal acts: muggings, thefts, vandalism from cars and so forth.

The idea of a "red light district," similar to some in Nevada, "Mustang Ranch" for instance, which Captain Tobin said hasn't worked, was overwhelmingly embraced by prostitutes.

"I would love it. I wouldn't object to it being police patrolled," says one prostitute, adding that "two good things would happen. The girls wouldn't have to worry about those nuts and things and the guys

wouldn't have to worry about getting ripped off."

The position of the Police Bureau, dramatized by Chief Ron Still's march participation several weeks ago, is more "jail bed space."

Dave Simpson, public information officer with the Police Bureau, said, "We will have to have more jail space or the community will have to accept this (prostitution)." He adds that "we are making more arrests for prostitution than ever before." Captain Tobin said the "vast majority of those arrests were made in the North and Northeast."



The Police Bureau stat sheet on prostitution shows a constant increase: 493 arrests in 1979; 701 in 1980; 1206 in 1981, and thus far into 1982, 837 arrests with a projected total of 1592 arrests by year's end.

Simpson claims that the county commissioners, led by Commissioner Caroline Miller, who has advocated for alternative programs since taking office, are in part to blame for not adhering to the many pleas for more jail space at Claire Argow. This, in the police's point of view, leaves them lacking in the area of threat. Moreover, he says, the prostitutes are given minimum fines to ensure that they can pay. Otherwise, the women's detention center would be taxed to a greater degree than what it is now, which is full or above capacity.

Ms. McCormack and Ms. Robertson say shelters and diversion programs are needed, especially for teenage prostitutes, but they recount

tales that are much more acute than some would suspect.

One story recounted by Ms. McCormack concerns one prostitute who repeatedly takes her "Johns" to the same street and quite often parks in front of the same house. There, she engages in oral sex while waving children away and, when the pay-for-sex act has been committed, she spits as they drive away.

On the other hand, Ms. Robertson recounts a self-experience situation. While weeding her flower garden, assisted by her teenage daughter, a "John" driving a car with Washington license plates accosted her daughter. She said, "the 'Johns' should be fined . . . starting with fines of anywhere from \$1,000 and above."

Ms. Robertson claims that "every city deals where the money is." She makes reference to when prostitution was flourishing during daylight hours in the downtown and South Block area, "When those business people began to scream, the police got busy and cleaned it out."

Ms. McCormack contends that they did not think the march and rally would stop prostitution, but rather that it would increase awareness. The response, thus far, she says, "has been good." She adds that the pressure on prostitutes, pimps and "Johns" will continue. Some community minded people, she continued, have been involved in ridding the neighborhood of prostitutes for up to five years and a petition drive which has already been started will gather signatures to be presented to the City Council, the County Commissioners, judges and the police department.

In addition, the two agencies, North Portland Neighborhoods Against Crime and the Northeast Neighborhood Office, are soliciting other neighborhood agencies throughout the city to join them in what they consider to be a "city problem."

One such group, the Burnside Community Council, said Chairman Michael Stoops, "is going to encourage the officials not to evade the problem." He added that the level of discussion seems to be naive, and offers by way of explanation that they are now talking about "locking up pimps and 'Johns' as well as prostitutes."

"Legalizing prostitution might be one solution," Stoops added, but "let's focus on the crimes related to prostitution: rapes, robberies and so on. And he said that "prostitution is not harming people; it's the crimes associated with prostitution."

Numerous other people share similar viewpoints about prostitution,

such as that of Katherine White, a "young modern working woman" who holds a college degree and has had experience in journalism. Ms. White said, "I don't really understand why it's illegal. It's just like 'pot,' people are going to do it anyway."

Most of the interviewees were also concerned about the health factor, especially venereal diseases (VD).

Jane Burg, director of District 1 with Multnomah County's Health Department, said, "Our rate for both gonorrhea and syphilis are a little bit higher than the national range." Multnomah's VD clinic's herpes count from June of '81 to June of '82, stands at 326 reported cases.

One other factor that seems to be of paramount concern, is the how's and why's that people become prostitutes.

According to one prostitute, "It's easy and lucrative." The viewpoint was shared by another who added mystically, that, "it's a catch game also."

A recount of her story illuminates a picture of "pimps" spewing mumbo jumbo that in a sense "spellbinds the girls," thus setting up a way of life.

As a whole, the prostitute's cry is "Reaganomics" and "economic conditions." They say, in rank, that as long as "Mister so and so" drives through with his wife and children on a Sunday morning while leaving church, then doubles back almost immediately as "John" so and so," prostitution will continue.

The continuation in neighborhoods throughout the city is what not only Ms. McCormack and Ms. Robertson, but a growing number of coalition groups and citizens, are concerned about. One North Portland home owner wants "equal protection for equal tax dollars."

The gist of that matter can be summed up in what Michael Stoops says: "If the prostitutes were selling their bodies out in front of Mayor Frank Ivancie's and District Attorney Michael Shrunck's homes, their hands would be untied in a hurry."

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Civil Rights advisory committee favors police audit commission

PORTLAND, OR—The Oregon State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights released a statement last Thursday on the ordinance creating a Police Internal Investigations Auditing Committee. The chair of that committee, Thomas J. Sloan, urged that careful consideration be given to the Advisory Committee's analysis of the Ordinance, which will be decided by a citywide referendum (Measure 51) on November 2, 1982. Because of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' extensive research in the area of police-community relations, the Advisory Committee believes that the statement would benefit local officials, police and law enforcement personnel, residents of the city, and other interested parties as they consider the proposal.

The Advisory Committee believes that the Auditing Committee Ordinance coupled with the complaint procedures of the Police Bureau's Internal Investigations Division represent a positive step toward improving police-community relations in Portland. Specifically, the Advisory Committee concludes that:

- The Auditing Committee Ordinance is a viable approach to providing citizen input into the internal complaint process.

- The Ordinance overcomes the flaws of citizen review boards cited by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

- The Ordinance includes all of the minimum requirements that the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights believes should be present in any civilian review mechanism.

- The Ordinance is one of the best civilian review structures designed to date and should be allowed a chance to work.

The Advisory Committee further believes that the police would benefit from the existence of an Auditing Committee because it would help restore public confidence in the police, since the complaint process will not be viewed as biased toward the police; those Internal Investigations Division findings exonerating police and affirmed by the Auditing Committee would be less likely seen as a "whitewash"; and public meetings of the Auditing Committee would result in removing the perceptions of the Police Bureau as a closed and secretive department.

The Advisory Committee recognizes that the major factor contributing to the effort to establish the Auditing Committee is the perception of the citizenry that the police are not adequately policing themselves. The Advisory Committee notes that regardless of whether the perception is based on fact, the perception is very real and cannot be ignored, since it can have significant impact on the community. The Ad-

visory Committee believes that the Auditing Committee Ordinance will only serve to improve police-community relations.

Copies of the statement are free and available to the public from: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Northwestern Regional Office, 2854 Federal Building, 915 Second Avenue, Seattle, WA 98174.

The Oregon State Advisory Committee is one of 51 such committees appointed by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights to assist in determining the current status of civil rights in the nation. The chair of the Advisory Committee is Thomas Sloan of Portland. Vice-Chairs are Jerry Haggin of Portland and Mary Wendy Roberts of Salem. Other members of the Advisory Committee are: Ronald Halfmoon, Adams; Margie Hendriksen, Eugene; Ann Lindh, Klamath Falls; Lydia Aragon; George Azumano; David Gonzales; H.J. Belton Hamilton; Gretchen Kafoury; Campbell Richardson; and Ethel Simon-McWilliams, Portland; and Clair D. Silver, West Linn. Members of the advisory committees to the Commission serve without compensation.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan, factfinding agency of the federal government concerned with the rights of minorities and women, the handicapped and aged. Clarence M. Pendleton is Chairman, Mary Louise Smith is vice-Chairman. Other Commissioners are Mary Frances Berry, Murray Saltzman, Jill S. Ruckelhaus, and Blandina C. Ramirez. John Hope, III is Acting Staff Director.

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