

Germany has become Europe's brothel, says politician Leni Breymaier of the Social Democrats. She wants to introduce penalties for everyone who purchases sexual services.

That wouldn't help the women at all, counters prostitute Kristina Marlen. It would be a disaster.

**Kristina Marlen** is a sex worker based in Berlin. After studying law for several semesters and training as a physical therapist, she switched to prostitution. At her studio, she also offers workshops on creative sexuality, sexual communication, and bondage. Kristina Marlen is her professional name.

**Leni Breymaier** from Stuttgart is a member of parliament for the SPD (Social Democrats) and is a founder of the parliamentary committee "Prostitution - wohin" ("prostitution - where is it going?"), together with a fellow MP for the CDU (Christian Democrats). She is on the board of the "Sisters" society, which helps women opt out of prostitution.

**DIE ZEIT:** Ms. Breymaier, Kristina Marlen, is there such a thing as a right to prostitution?

**Kristina Marlen:** Yes. Everyone has a right to choose their profession freely.

**Leni Breymaier:** No. There is definitely no such thing as a right to prostitution.

**DIE ZEIT:** Not even if someone chooses it freely?

**Breymaier:** Just this afternoon, a social worker from the scene of a major south German city was telling me that at least 95 percent of the women in his environment were being forced into prostitution. Of course, there are also some prostitutes who are in the public eye - eloquent, self-confident, good-looking - who say: I like doing this job and am doing it voluntarily. But those few don't justify the suffering of many others, the forced prostitutes, those coming from poverty, the victims of "loverboys" and human trafficking. That is why I am calling for a ban on purchasing sexual services in Germany, as it is practiced in Sweden, for instance.

**Marlen:** Where did that 95 percent number come from? Fantasy statistics like that are used to try and play us sex workers against each other, and divide us into the privileged ones like myself, and colleagues working precariously on the other side. A ban on purchasing sexual services, like the one you're calling for, would force precisely those marginalized sex workers that you want to protect further into illegality. They would have even fewer protections than they do now. It's so hypocritical!

**Breymaier:** I don't protect "sex workers", I protect women in prostitution. The things that happen in prostitution have nothing to do with sexuality. It's predominantly about violence, humiliation, abuse of human rights.

**Marlen:** You're pretending to want to help people - but everyone working on human trafficking, whether it's Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the German Aids Society, the German Institute for Human Rights, have found in their studies that prohibiting the purchase of sexual services does not help against human trafficking. And it hasn't led to a decrease of prostitution.

**Breymaier:** There's a whole milieu living off of prostitution: pimps, brothel owners, and certain real estate owners. Everyone except the women. The Swedes say that environment, which is heavily criminal, has diminished since the ban on purchasing sexual services. And come to Germany.

**Marlen:** A ban on purchasing sex only reduces the visibility of prostitution and drives it into semi-darkness, where you have even less control over it. Sex workers become even more vulnerable to violence, blackmail, and threats - and can't report them anymore. And clients won't be able to either, by the way. You always act as if the client were always the aggressor. But he is often the one who reports it, if he has the feeling something's wrong.

**Breymaier:** How many reports do you know of? And as to your point, that prostitution was driven into a dark corner: if a client can find a prostitute, then the police can find her as well.

**Marlen:** Ms. Breymaier, do you actually have any idea how important it is for women like me to have an exchange with each other, about certain clients we shouldn't let in? A ban would turn that networking into a risk. You are withdrawing your support of everyone who doesn't follow your theory.

**Breymaier:** I'm not withdrawing my support of you. You've never had my support.

**Marlen:** Your ignorance is negating the struggles we've been fighting globally since the seventies. Even on continents where sex work is happening under far worse conditions than here, our movement is calling for the decriminalization of sex work. Only through strengthening the rights of women, particularly marginalized ones, can living and working conditions be improved.

**Breymaier:** I think what we have here is a problem of racism.

**Marlen:** You're saying I have a racism problem?

**Breymaier:** Not you. But society does. An overwhelming percentage of women who work in Germany come from abroad: from Nigeria, from southeast Europe, many are Roma. They are lured here or are sent by their families - and then none of the money remains for them. You know the prices: you get to use a woman, do whatever you want to her...

**Marlen:** ... use a woman? What disrespectful language...

**Breymaier:** ... in Stuttgart, it costs 30 euros. The women pay 120 to 160 euros a day for a room in Germany. So they need to service five or six clients, that means they've only paid for their room - but still haven't eaten anything, haven't sent money to their families, haven't paid off any of the debt for their alleged emigration fee. The woman isn't earning a cent. What is fair about that work?

**Marlen:** As far as that goes, I'm with you: the sector has horrendous working conditions. But those also exist elsewhere. Why is no one getting upset about all the Eastern Europeans being scandalously exploited in the meat industry? We need to address the root of the problem: the fact that inequality and social difficulties are so great in Europe that people need to enter into exploitative relationships.

**Breymaier:** I'm also upset about conditions in the meat industry. But the difference between a butcher and a prostitute is that the women are being physically and mentally destroyed. If they manage to get out, they need decades to rebuild their personal boundaries and their dignity through difficult trauma therapy.

**Marlen:** Sex work is not only exploitation. There are also people like me who consider it their calling. I love the intimacy, the closeness and warmth. I give people the possibility of being a way they cannot be anywhere else, including their relationships...

**Breymaier:** ...but those are myths and legends...

**Marlen:** ...and there is a wide range of sex workers in the middle who, for economic reasons, for example, will say: that's the best way I can make ends meet with my child, as a single parent. That takes place right in the midst of mainstream society.

**Breymaier:** Oh, come on! If women have to work 16 hours at once in the mega-brothel Paradise in Stuttgart, and are there until 4 a.m., that has nothing to do with closeness and warmth. And those aren't single mothers who have brought their child to bed at 6!

**DIE ZEIT:** Ms. Breymaier, it was Gerhard Schröder's red-green government that contributed to Germany's current liberal legislation by opening the prostitution laws. Why are the calls for a ban on purchasing sexual services coming now from the Social Democrats, of all people?

**Breymaier:** The liberalization of 2002 had good intentions – by the way, that had been a campaign promise of our Green coalition partners: the women should have the chance to get health insurance, social security, and a pension plan. They should be able to sue for their salaries and be destigmatized. But the whole thing led us to becoming the brothel of Europe we are today. Nevertheless, the majority of the party still supports a prostitution-friendly point of view such as yours, Ms. Marlen. I am currently representing a minority opinion within my party.

**Marlen:** Thankfully. We currently already have criminal laws against rape, against coercion, against unlawful detention, and against human trafficking for sexual exploitation. It's enough if they are enforced. I wish you would be more interested in the advantages of working with sexuality, and not banishing it to domestic beds. We are currently experiencing a sexually repressive wave, stigmatizing everything that doesn't happen within a relationship, preferably within a monogamous, heterosexual context, capped off by marriage. Even tantric massages now fall under "sexual services". Each kind of sexual assistance for sick and disabled people. That's a massive limitation of our culture!

**DIE ZEIT:** You describe your work as "feminist".

**Marlen:** Of course! I'm one of the sex-positive feminists who know that the goal of every sort of taboo, in the end, is the control of female sexuality. The stigma of the whore and the slut would become even more intense through a ban on purchasing sexual services. All women would end up suffering from it. In countries with similar bans such as Sweden, you even become suspicious by carrying condoms. We're falling into an era of denunciation and suspicion, when every woman is a potential whore. A ban on the purchase of sexual services carries with it a social mandate: everyone shall condemn prostitution.

**DIE ZEIT:** Ms. Marlen, have you ever met a forced prostitute?

**Marlen:** I know many colleagues from Eastern Europe who decided to migrate for economic reasons. They tell me that if they would work at the job they trained for in their home countries, they would be earning ten times less than as a prostitute in Germany. That's an understandable decision. Of course, victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation exist. And prostitution driven by poverty exists, too. But there are also many women who say: rather than spending my time dragging kitty litter up to the fifth floor as an underpaid package delivery person, I prefer to go to the whorehouse twice a week. You want to take away all those women's livelihoods.

**Breymaier:** Entire graduating high school classes go to brothels, use women for 30 euros there, and think that's normal. I want this society to take a stand on that. Here in Berlin, 13-year-old Romanian girls are streetwalking.

**Marlen:** Yes, that's terrible. But what good does it do the 13-year-old, if she can't stand on the street out in the open, but is being hidden somewhere?

**Breymaier:** It helps that the client knows he's doing something illegal.

**Marlen:** My clients - and by the way, 40 percent of them are female - aren't doing anything illegal.

**Breymaier:** I don't think it's right that one sex can buy the other. If my colleague can go out at lunchtime and do whatever he wants with a woman around the corner - what kind of image does he have of women when he comes back to the office?

**Marlen:** What you're saying is so disdainful: buying a woman.

**Breymaier:** Just last week, a social worker in Berlin told me about a woman who was streetwalking a few hours before going into labor. She gave birth at 8:55a.m. - and at 1p.m. on the same day, she was back out on the street. I don't want to have those kinds of conditions.

**Marlen:** Neither do I. That's why we're demanding rights instead of prohibitions.

*Moderation:*

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