Dealing with prostitution the Nordic way appeals to both left and right — but it could cause more harm than good

RISKY BUSINESS

By Peter MacKay

PETER MacKay has a tough job ahead, one that could alter the fate of hundreds of Winnipeg's most vulnerable women.

Before the end of the year, the federal justice minister must untangle Canada's bewildering array of ineffective prostitution laws, key parts of which the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional in December.

Just recently, Manitoba's Andrew Swan became the first provincial justice minister to call on Ottawa to craft new prostitution legislation based on the Nordic model. It's a model in effect in Sweden and Norway that seeks to rout prostitution by stamping it out, demand. The law bans buying sex but does not criminalize the prostitutes themselves or the selling of sex. It's a model that has spurred unlikely bipartisan alliances in Canada between some feminist and evangelical groups, a coalition that extends to Manitoba, where Swan has forged a partnership with Conservative MP Joy Smith, a relentless opponent of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

If Joy Smith and Andrew Swan — a seldom-right and an inner-city lefty — can agree on anything, it's probably a cowardly and thin, and not unlike Canaian. I'm inclined toward the social policies contained in Nordic countries, which truly be more equitable, more compassionate and more progressive.

The Nordic model could Canada's Canadian colleagues out of their current push-pull over the role of sexual services for society. The model crystallizes what many consider the true value of the services for men who are being asked to do the right thing by the first place: not moral, not economic, child-free or in some many other ways, the same thing that many other people who have sex as a way of life.

The Nordic model in its simplest form would be to sell for sex in a state-regulated fashion. Women would be trained to perform their services, and the majority of them would be allowed to work on their own. For the women, it sounds like a good idea, but for the men, it could be just the opposite.

Some support for the sex trade, including Winnipeg's Spa Ferris and To-Te, agree that the model could make prostitution more lucrative for customers. Fewer of the female women see their business as a source of income, and the people who use the services see them as a source of income, and the people who use the services.

Because becoming sex illegal, the Nordic model would allow cross-border prostitution and legal sex work in neighboring states. And it makes a job existing a woman in hotel room or her home likely give a false name, making it more difficult to track a culprit if a woman is assaulted, raped or robbed.

In fact, the Nordic model has proven to be successful in Sweden and Norway, where it has been in place for over a decade. The Nordic model is a good model for Canada to follow. It is a model that could make prostitution more lucrative for customers, and it could make the lives of the women who work in the sex trade better.

But the Nordic model has its critics. Some say it could lead to an increase in trafficking and exploitation. Others worry that the Nordic model would lead to an increase in violence against women.

In reality, the Nordic model has proven to be successful in Canada and other countries. It has been in place for over a decade, and it has been successful in reducing the number of women who work in the sex trade and increasing the number of women who leave the sex trade.

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