

Don't gloss a social evil

SIR, Your article "Sydney's Prostitutes" (November 20) was an interesting piece of journalism, but was, however, not really worthy of the reputation which the Herald has earned over the years.

My reason for this criticism is twofold:

The report was one-sided. That is to say, it viewed prostitution as an old institution which is now accepted, or acceptable in a modern community. This assumption is in total contradiction of the deepest convictions of every civilised society. Specifically, although most cities have tolerated prostitution, and many have even licensed it in an attempt to control the more sinister evils always associated with it, such tolerance or licence has invariably been part of an expression of community shame in the face of something historically recognised as degrading to women and therefore inimical to the well-being of society.

Second, the report glamorised prostitution in a way that suggested that a young woman might engage in it for a time, making big money but escaping, in this superior technological age, the ultimate personal hurt which has always been the prostitute's end-point.

But it is quite wrong to assume that anything has changed since the days when it was recognised that a prostitute had only a few years of working life ahead of her, before she was physically and otherwise unfit even for that life. The affront to personal esteem and human dignity which is involved in the business is such that no amount of "sanitation" by romantic publicity can elevate it from the depravity which it really is.

It should be seen as totally incongruous that, in a society which claims to be enlightened and compassionate, any encouragement should be given on the one hand to men with money to spend in demeaning and degrading women, and on the other to the notion that women, desperate for the wherewithal to support themselves or their children, should be obliged to have recourse to a self-destructive means of livelihood.

Prostitution should never be encouraged, either by glamorising it, or by depicting it as necessary, acceptable, or anything other than a social evil. The causes which inveigle or thrust women into prostitution should where possible be identified, and dealt with in such a way that at least some are removed.

Finally, I believe that the media would be acting more responsibly if future publicity given to the subject represented the trade for what it really is.

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REGULAR BEAT? NO. ONE IS ON SICKLEAVE
TO ENABLE THE OTHER TO WORK OVERTIME.