

OBJECT and Fawcett Society Press Release

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Immediate Release

NEW CALLS ON GOVERNMENT TO URGENTLY TOUGHEN LICENSING OF LAP DANCING CLUBS

150 people flocked to a meeting in Parliament tonight, urging the Government to move quickly on plans to toughen the licensing of lap dancing clubs. The meeting, organised by Object (1) and the Fawcett Society (2), saw overwhelming support for closure of a licensing loophole which means that since the introduction of the Licensing Act 2003 lap dancing clubs have been licensed in the same way as cafes or restaurants (3). The number of UK lap dancing clubs has subsequently doubled since 2004, feeding what speakers at the meeting highlighted as a sexist culture of seeing women as sex objects, not human beings.

The Government has announced that it plans to give local councils greater powers to control the number of lap dancing clubs in their area (4) and speakers, ranging from cross-party MPs, leading women's rights campaigners, a licensing expert, a woman with long term experience of working in lap dancing clubs and a representative from the Local Government Association, all urged for licensing reforms to be included in the Policing and Crime Reduction Bill, due to be introduced later this month by the Home Office.

The meeting was chaired by Polly Toynbee, Guardian commentator, who said:

"Lap dancing clubs are springing up in residential areas and there is nothing we can do about it. There is no doubt at all about the urgent action that must be taken by Government."

Richard Kemp from the Local Government Association said at the meeting:

"If you can't control lap dancing clubs it affects the culture. I don't believe a proliferation of lap dancing clubs is good for the city."

Dr Katherine Rake, Director of the Fawcett Society, said at the meeting:

"There has been a normalisation of the sex industry. We've sleepwalked into a situation where sex is bought and sold like a commodity. It is time to take the power from the hands of the very few that own and run lap dancing clubs and give it back to local communities."

Dr Sasha Rakoff, Director of Object, said at the meeting:

"It's great to see so many people here making a stand against sexism. Lap dancing clubs should be licensed in the same way as sex shops and peep shows. The Government must act now and change the law in the Policing and Crime Reduction Bill."

Nadine Stavonina-de Montagnac, award-winning screenwriter and a survivor of the sex industry, said at the meeting:

“Because it gets glamourised women get tricked into the industry. The reality is horrific. It’s time to call a spade a spade and license lap dancing clubs as Sex Encounter Establishments.”

Beatrix Campbell from the Women’s National Commission said at the meeting:

“The problem isn’t sex, it’s sexism.”

All speakers (5) supported the key call that, given the current rate of expansion of UK lap dancing clubs, legislation must be introduced urgently.

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Notes to editors

(1) Object is a human rights organisation which campaigns against the objectification of women in the media and popular culture. www.object.org.uk <<http://www.object.org.uk>>

(2) The Fawcett Society is the UK’s leading campaign for women’s rights. www.fawcettsociety.org.uk <<http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk>>

(3) A loophole in the Licensing Act 2003 allows lap dancing clubs to exempt themselves from the Sex Encounter Establishment category (applicable to venues offering live visual entertainment of a sexual nature) by first purchasing a Premises Licence to retail alcohol.

(4) The Rt. Hon. Jacqui Smith MP announced at the Labour Party Conference on 21/9/08 that the Government would grant local people a greater say in stopping lap dancing clubs opening: http://www.labour.org.uk/jacqui_smith_speech,2008-09-21

(5) Speakers at the meeting were Roberta Blackman-Woods (Labour MP City of Durham), Dan Rogerson (Liberal Democrat MP North Cornwall), Justine Greening (Conservative MP Putney), Nadine Stravonia de Montagnac (Award winning screenwriter and journalist), Beatrix Campbell (Women’s National Commission), Dr Sasha Rakoff (Director of Object), Dr Katherine Rake OBE (Director of the Fawcett Society), Philip Kolvin (licensing barrister) and Richard Kemp (Local Government Association)