

SISTER OUTSIDERS

what you won't hear inside the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry

Oct. 17, 2011

DAY 3: LOWMAN 'THE EXPERT' – PATRIARCHY AT WORK

By Lee Lakeman

Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter
Thursday, October 13, 2011

John Lowman, geographer self-promoting expert on social control and the displacement of crime through law, was handed the crown today by Art Vertlieb, counsel for the Inquiry. "No one in Canada has worked on the question longer" they agreed with each other and no man in the room challenged that; nor did the lawyer for the federal government, a woman.

How easily they dismissed the forty years of feminist work on this issue demanding the decriminalization of the women and the criminalization of pimps and johns and bawdy house owners, going back to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. How quickly they erased women's groups like Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter granted standing through the Women's Equality and Security Coalition. No lawyer no influence. How breezily they defined the universe as the sum of the institutional fortresses in the control of men: it doesn't make them correct but it makes them so comfortable and they will fool each other.

Never mind that Lowman has been whistling the same tune for legalization since he first convinced a lawyer in the Department of Justice to accept his geography work as the criminology baseline against which further statistics should be judged. Never mind that the research he now-a-day quotes is usually of his students and of course fulfils his profess-y.

Lowman passes as a progressive by referring to race and class and gender but wins little applause from anti-racists, the poor, much less feminists. His "safety" solutions today – ranging from friendlier relationships between cops and the dispossessed, to street lights in the industrial areas, to drive-in prostitution lots – are not the version of safety or liberation most of us seek.

Lowman the great expert claimed today that Pickton was not a john because he premeditated his abuse. "A john" he claims "contracts for sex and pays for it as he said he would" and because Pickton intended harm even to murder he is disqualified as a john.

Pickton committed murder by picking up women in Vancouver with that intent so, according to Lowman, we can all stop talking about prostitution and the fact that the Vancouver police let him commit prostitution. Or maybe the message is that we have nothing to fear from an ordinary john.

This sleight of hand, trick of phrase, ideological advocacy on the part of the great Lowman served the other men in the room very well.

They could use it to say that the crime (murder) was arguably in the jurisdiction of Vancouver therefore indicting the Vancouver Police Department not just the Coquitlam RCMP (where the murders took place).

They remained willfully blind to facts that the Pickton crime of prostitution, sexual exploitation, abuse having gone for years unchecked if not institutionalized in Vancouver allowed if not facilitated the crime of murder in Coquitlam.

That men jumped to wrangle over whose marble hit whose marble in which circle with no mind to either the sleight of hand or to the propaganda promoting prostitution at the base of the trick or to the likelihood of more abused and dead women was stunning. It made one grateful for the absence of the NGO's who have withdrawn. That absence laid bare the patriarchy at work.

For Lowman to say that Pickton was just "pretending to be a john" in order to do whatever he wanted with prostitutes up to and including murder is like saying that a wife killer was just pretending to be a husband in order to get away with the abuse of "his" wife or that a wall street thief was pretending to be a capitalist in order to steal. It is exactly what the institution promises.



Support NWAC's call for a National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Aboriginal women and girls

Vancouver, BC (28 July 2011) – Jeannette Corbiere Lavell, President of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) is calling for a National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Aboriginal women and girls.

"The Government of British Columbia has shut us out of the British Columbia Missing Women Commission of Inquiry," President Corbiere Lavell said, "and now we have no confidence that it will be able to produce a fair and balanced report. The decision of the BC government to restrict funding for counsel primarily to police and government agencies demonstrates how flawed and one sided this process has become."

Funding for counsel outside the justice system has been restricted to one lawyer representing a fraction of the families affected by the tragedies of Vancouver's DTES. The thirteen groups granted standing at the Inquiry by Commissioner Oppal have been denied funding to participate by the BC government.

President Corbiere Lavell said, "The Commissioner made it very clear that he considered our participation throughout the hearing process to be vital to a fair and full examination of the issues. I am deeply

disappointed that we are unable to bring forward the voices and concerns of Aboriginal women and girls to this Inquiry as we had planned."

NWAC was initially concerned about the limited scope of the BC Commission of Inquiry, but chose to participate to bring forward the knowledge and expertise developed through the Sisters In Spirit initiative. NWAC is now calling for a National Inquiry to focus on the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls across Canada. President Corbiere Lavell indicated that NWAC is interested in finding ways to work closely with the federal government to develop the scope and organization of such an inquiry, and to ensure that NWAC's expertise and knowledge is brought forward to assist in it's deliberations.

NWAC will now seek the support of all Canadian governments, and all Canadians, for a National Inquiry that can effectively examine violence against Aboriginal women and girls, and do so with the full participation of Aboriginal women.

NWAC statement July 28, 2011
<http://www.nwac.ca>

shut out ... but not shut up

DAY 1 – AND THE ROOM IS EMPTY OF WOMEN’S GROUPS

By Lee Lakeman

Vancouver Rape Relief and Women’s Shelter

October 11, 2011

Earlier, when Gordon Campbell was still premier, Vancouver Rape Relief women staged a little media moment outside his office. Four women from our collective held closed boxes labeled with different authorities: the province and the city that depends on it, the various police, the federal government and the sex industry. Out of those story boxes hung bits of evidence about which we already knew as well as paper dolls representing the lives of women we knew, about whom we had still been given no accounting. We called this the closed box version of truth telling: crudely closed boxes that regardless of their size and number were designed to satisfy some story telling need other than ending the violence against these women. That design determined that they did not and could not contain all the facts that mattered about Vancouver’s Missing and Murdered Women.

The list goes on and on: the 170 prostituted women who had called on VRRWS for help in those five years, the women who were not prostituted, the women who were mentally ill and/or on social assistance, the women who tried to report Pickton, the one third of the women who were racialized as Aboriginal women, the two thirds who were not, the handcuffs, the regularity of his prostituting sites, the harm reduction centers where he sought and found new prey, the possible co-conspirators, the Hell’s Angel’s site across the road, the Hell’s Angel’s connection to the strip club across from the police station, the Piggy’s Palace booze can, Pickton’s family and the failure to arrest, to charge, to warn, or even to suspect, the police idiocy and of course the possibility of police collusion...

That action was a little part of our pressure for some public process which might include a legal inquiry. We were preparing for a carefully leaked Vancouver Police Department report written by Doug Lepard that apologizes profusely while failing to accept responsibility or tell the whole story. Then for the RCMP that denies all responsibility and counters with the jurisdictional wrangling that sets us up for



August 23, 2010: Rape Relief visits Gordon Campbell's office

the call for a regional police force as if coordinated idiocy and sexism will be an improvement.

We were preparing for the Vancouver City hall report tabled last week that tells us right up front that prostitution is always “gendered” and always “dangerous”, highly “racist”, does often involve “trafficking”, often involves “children”, involves women who “want out”, usually involves “desperate women”. And then, after careful thought, the councilors agree what we must do is licence massage parlours so that we can tell the difference between the legal and the illegal prostitution and somehow that will create safety. No new inspectors or money for the much touted harm reduction strategies nor any instructions to law enforcement to arrest johns, pimps and bawdy house owners.

We were preparing for the federal government intervention in the Bedford case in which they argued for the status quo based on conservative ideology. They could have conceded that prostitution is a gendered crime and that police forces could and should protect victims. They could have decriminalized the women and children, the transgendered, and the few men prostituted and enforced laws against their aggressors. But instead they clung to the de-gendered neoliberal refusal to recognize the systemic abuse of sexism and racism and therefore to recognize within Canada the forced migrations of women and kids and the international need for

protections. They could have admitted that the poverty being entrenched in the lives of women by federal economic policies – from taxation to immigration – drives the availability of women to be selected for prostitution and the refusal to enforce the laws against johns and pimps and bawdy house owners encourages the growth of the demand.

We were preparing for the end of the Pickton trial and the beginning of the refutation of what had possibly been learned about prostitution as violence against women. And today we have it: the room is empty of women’s groups. Women were denied legal fees and or any other resource to equip ourselves in this biased venue. No equality seeking women’s group has been left standing.

Only male centered law practice will prevail here. The men will be the experts in the telling and analyzing of sexist violence: two failed police departments and one failed male police profiling expert, one male sort of failed “criminologist”, a room full of men representing each other, one male judge post failed politician, one male lawyer as chief counsel. Oh you can bet they will have rough and tumble disagreements with each other over the location of the crime, over the name of the crime, over the money owned, over those to be sued, over the number of the dead, but all nicely within the existing patriarchal frame: their count, their expertise, their inquiry and their truth. And you can bet there will be a few bits data, of factual bits and of many women’s stories that will not fit, just as in our little street drama, but with much higher consequences. They will be left hanging out of these air tight boxes of male serving ideology.



PRODUCED ON BEHALF OF THE COLLECTIVE OF VANCOUVER RAPE RELIEF AND WOMEN’S SHELTER

Vancouver Rape Relief & Women’s Shelter
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