



H O O K E R S

Street Fight

*In the war between the
homeowners and the hookers,
is the real issue propriety
or property values?*

LAST DECEMBER 10, A DRAMA WAS enacted on an elegant residential street in Cabbagetown. Wearing white sweatshirts emblazoned with a red circle and oblique line slashed across the graphic image of a hooker bending to solicit a john in a car, a handful of neighbors took to the pavements. Except for their sweatshirts and the missionary gleam in their eyes, they looked like any group of upwardly mobile Torontonians you might see in a movie lineup on a Saturday night. Armed with cameras and coming on like a preppy lynch mob, they confronted a chunky, confused-looking prostitute.

"Go away. Go do what you do on someone else's street," one man snarled in disgust. The prostitute stood her ground. With a whaddaya-wanna-make-of-it tone she replied, "I'm a hooker and I work Ontario Street."

"You're suffering. You're abused by pimps," came a sermon, but its recipient remained unmoved. Then, in hysterical tones, another voice shouted: "We're sick of you. You've lowered our property values. You have no idea what you're doing to the people who have spent hun-

dreds of thousands of dollars to live on this street."

"I live here," the exasperated woman sputtered, although when grilled as to where, she could only hurl invective. Finally, she spewed venomously: "Buddy, I've lived in this area for twenty-six years. What made this *your* fucking area?"

There are a few ironies bound up in the downtown hooker wars, and the Ontario Street standoff throws them into high relief. What we have here is a clash in which the real issues have been obscured. They've been obscured because the adversaries aren't acknowledging what those issues are. What the Cabbagetown residents will admit about street soliciting is that it is a nuisance. What they won't say is that it offends their moral sensibilities and threatens their property values. This is not the first time outraged citizens have agitated to make prostitutes go away, but it is the first time that there may be nowhere else in town for them to go. What's going on, then, is a turf war. The street, a pricey chunk of real estate, is up for grabs. But

BY WENDY DENNIS

something else is also up for grabs, something that in the *mêlée* hardly anybody seems to be noticing. At stake is the future of a city. A city that, in altering its priorities and pimping its sense of community to the highest bidder, is in grave danger of losing its innocence.

There was a time when downtowners viewed prostitution as part of the *donnée* of urban life. If you chose to live downtown, you chose also to tolerate, maybe even cherish, as part of the texture of everyday experience, the loony-tunes and schlock vendors and roving packs of spiky-haired toughs who storm-trooped along Yonge. If streetwalkers belonged to that sometimes seamy world, so be it.

Since the early 1970s, a confluence of forces has conspired to radically disrupt this harmony. With the push to revitalize the downtown core, Cabbagetown's flops and rooming houses gradually vanished, transformed by the white-painters and, later, the sandblasters, who kept tenants to make the mortgage. As real estate prices spiralled, however, a more affluent group, many of them suburban refugees, moved in, grandly upgrading properties and squeezing out those tenants who once had called the neighborhood their own. Property values leaped to the point where some houses on prime streets were turning over for close to half a million dollars. Not only had the houses been transformed; so too, in some cases, had the sensibilities of their owners. With a significant investment to protect, some residents no longer viewed hookers as part of the local color.

Parallel to those developments were others. In 1977, in the wake of citizen outrage at the murder of shoeshine boy Emanuel Jaques, and increasingly eager to attract more tourist dollars, civic officials padlocked body-rub parlors and cleaned up Yonge Street. Displaced from Yonge, some of the hookers began to move eastward to Church Street, although certain corners, like Jarvis and Gloucester, Isabella and Huntley, had been active hooker turf long before. When Church Street began to sprout smart cafés in the early eighties, the hookers migrated eastward again, off familiar territory and onto neighboring streets where they began do-

ing deals under the noses of residents.

Barry Smith is a lawyer with a let's-skip-the-pleasantries manner who, along with his wife, Judy, bought a house on Cabbagetown's Ontario Street during the real estate boom of 1981. Smith was born and raised in Toronto, but had spent the previous ten years living on a twenty-five-acre property in the bucolic environs of Stouffville. Their two daughters having grown, the Smiths decided to return to the

city. It was the charm of the downtown core, with its movie houses, theatres and lively multicultural enclaves, that seduced them back. Other than what Smith describes as a "few drunks" in the neighborhood, Ontario Street seemed the ideal place to locate.

In 1984, a year prior to the passage of Bill C-49, the country's current antisoliciting law, Barry Smith wrote the first of many letters to his alderman. It said that "prostitutes and other undesirable characters" had "begun" to appear in his neighborhood.

In fact, Barry Smith's neighborhood had for decades been in the part of town known as Track 1 (an area bordered by Church, Parliament, Isabella and Dundas streets), which was a stroll for the city's hookers and a nesting ground for many of its hoodlums and vagrants. Nevertheless, Smith was not alone in complaining that these unsavory elements were beginning to clash with the scenery. Soon Smith and several hundred other like-minded citizens met with the police, who saw Bill C-49 as a law with more enforcement clout than the legislation it was replacing. So Smith and his cohorts pestered politicians to support

it, and in December 1985, Bill C-49 was passed. What Smith soon realized was that despite what he saw as "this lovely piece of legislation," the problem seemed to be getting worse.

So, to prod the powers-that-be once again, in the summer of 1987 the South of Carlton Community Association, headed by Smith, made a conscious decision to attract press, gambling that the media would lick their chops over a gamy story. Soon *Globe*, *Star* and *Sun* readers learned that Cabbagetown residents were being greeted, after a hard day's work, by hookers and johns thrashing about on their patios. Tales emerged of streets clogged with the bumper-to-bumper traffic of cruising johns and suburban gawkers, and of residents who practically had to don hip boots to get through the debris of dildos, syringes and used condoms piling up on their properties. An October 25, 1987, *Sunday Star* piece, alliteratively headlined "Hookers haunt homes along The Track," described a scenario in which residents had become prisoners in their own



F FRONTLINERS

LIKE LAURIE EDMISTON

(ABOVE) SYMPATHIZE WITH

SANDRA JACKSON AND BARRY

SMITH, WHO ARE TROUBLED

BY HOOKERS IN THEIR

NEIGHBORHOOD. BUT THE

SOCIAL WORKERS SAY A LEGAL

CRACKDOWN WOULD ONLY

WORK AGAINST KIDS TRYING

TO BEAT THE STREET



VALERIE SCOTT
OF CORP:
"EVER SINCE I
WAS FIVE
I DREAMED OF
GETTING INTO
THE SEX
INDUSTRY"



SANDRA JACKSON AND BARRY SMITH

homes, children could no longer play outside and pimps roamed the streets with baseball bats. The situation seemed so alarming and grim it was as if, without anybody else having noticed, Cabbagetown had become the Bronx, and only Charles Bronson could set things right.

By November, the South of Carlton Community Association had swung into Phase 2 of its crusade to win the media's sympathy and the mayor's attention. The group began what Barry Smith prefers

now to refer to as neighborhood "street walks." He is somewhat touchy on this subject since some observers, including certain members of the press, have described these as vigilante tactics. In any event, wearing their sweatshirts, a small group of residents would cruise Ontario and Seaton streets three or four nights weekly and, according to Smith, "politely ask the girls to move"; over three months, he says there was only the December 10 confrontation. If they were standing on a

street corner, "the girls" would then tell the residents that they were no longer on the residents' turf. Barry Smith's tone turns incredulous at the notion that the hookers would think they had the right to share the public domain of a street corner.

On a cold Saturday afternoon at the end of that month, about 200 residents sweatshirted up again, blocked traffic at the corner of Ontario and Carlton streets, milled about eating hot dogs that were being cooked on the terrace of Melanie's res-

restaurant nearby, and handed out leaflets declaring the area "no-go" for prostitutes, pimps and johns. There would be teams, the leaflets said, to call the police when prostitutes appeared, foot patrols to picket them, and twenty-four-hour-a-day photographic surveillance squads to record the licence plate numbers of *prospective* [my italics] johns. Whether the other 36,800 residents in the Track 1 area were completely unaware that their neighborhood had turned into an armed camp, or were so twisted with fear they had barricaded themselves in their homes, afraid even to venture forth for a hot dog, is not altogether clear. As it was, their voices were not needed. On the following Monday, the South of Carlton Community Association got a call from the mayor.

The city installed high-intensity lights and established traffic mazes to stymie cruising johns. The cops showed up more, although their increased presence did not always have its intended effect. Once when an officer trotted through the neighborhood on horseback, the hookers scampered home to grab their cameras. By mid-November, the police were already conducting massive sweeps for johns, during which undercover cops posed as decoy hookers to entrap unsuspecting customers. If police did the sweeps by day, however, the hookers returned at night. But the intense campaign did have the effect, for the moment, of drying up the demand. Many of the hookers, one of whom was heard to complain bitterly that there was "no fucking money" around, eventually moved on to neighboring streets.

In December provincial court judge Lorenzo Di Cecco got into the act too. In what was an original and controversial sentence, Judge Di Cecco ordered eighteen men who had pleaded guilty to communicating for the purpose of prostitution to perform between five and seventy hours of community work for the South of Carlton Community Association. Under the supervision of Sandra Jackson, a highly vocal activist with the association and a real estate agent with Darrell Kent, a firm that had first prospered turning over Cabbagetown properties, the johns set out with green garbage bags to clean up litter on private property. Association members

were jubilant about the sentence, although Di Cecco took flak elsewhere. When an assistant Crown attorney requested that the judge levy \$1,000 fines against first-time offenders (the maximum Criminal Code penalty is \$2,000 or six months in jail, or both), Di Cecco asked sarcastically whether he was then supposed to hang the repeaters. But in what must be one of the more bizarre offshoots of what by now was becoming a media free-for-all, Leslie Kovacs, presi-

dent of Local 43 of the Metropolitan Toronto Civic Employees Union, thinking the johns had been sentenced to sweep the pavements, told the *Globe* that Di Cecco had deprived 200 of his laid-off street cleaners of the chance to work. "Before you know it," sniped an indignant Kovacs, "the whole city will be maintained by convict labor."

By May Sandra Jackson was gloating to the press that the Di Cecco sentence had educated "John Q. Public" and had curbed prostitution in the neighborhood. That pronouncement, in turn, provoked the ire of Valerie Scott, spokesperson for a group called CORP, the Canadian Organization for the Rights of Prostitutes. Scott told a *Globe* reporter that Sandra Jackson was kidding herself if she thought Di Cecco's sentence would keep prostitution in check. The numbers were down, she insisted, only because the weather had got colder. Then, demonstrating that any smart hooker at least knows a hustle when she sees it, Scott volleyed back that the Di Cecco sentence had "very little to do with justice and everything to do with manipulation. It's really awful and really disgusting that our justice system

will play into the hands of a few rich yuppies. Sex and money are very powerful. They are more powerful than the South of Carlton Community Association."

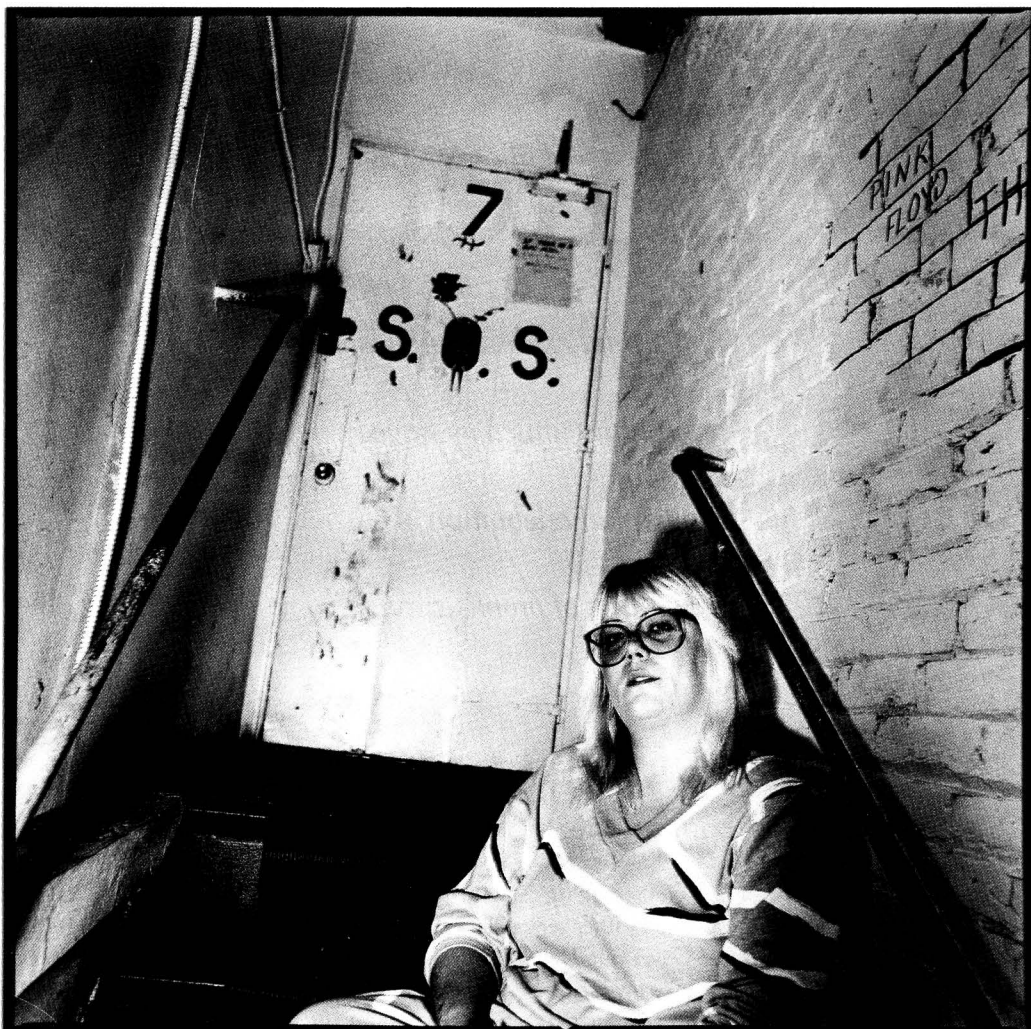
Sandra Jackson was well aware that Cabbagetown had been a red-light district before she moved into it three years ago. Since the residents' increasing hostility had scattered some of the other roadside attractions, however, she saw no reason to think that the hookers (who, she argued, no longer lived there, didn't pay property taxes and had no right to conduct business in a residential area not zoned for commercial trade) couldn't be banished too. It was not, she told herself, like buying beside a glue factory. It was a movable problem. But movable to *where* remained an unanswered question.

As stories go, the hooker wars have all the right stuff: sex, sin and smut. That the press would be onto it like flies to flypaper was a safe bet. Morality plays sell. But morality plays have one drawback: the



CHERYL (ABOVE),

A RESIDENT OF COVENANT
HOUSE, IS ONE OF THE LUCKY
ONES: SHE'S NEVER WORKED
THE STREETS AND NOW IS
IN A JOB-TRAINING PROGRAM.
FOR CHRISTINE FEMIA-
WISEMAN OF SOS, HELPING
STREET KIDS IS A SECOND
CAREER; SHE USED TO
BE A HOOKER



CHRISTINE FEMIA-WISEMAN

players are caricatures. Here were, depending on whose side was being championed, a bunch of rich villains who had stolen homes from the poor, or a bunch of scummy whores who were trashing a neighborhood. In fact, each group had a little truth on its side. The Cabbagetown residents had invested in property, property whose value they were clearly entitled to protect. What's more, not all the activists were property owners, nor were they all Johnnies-come-lately to the

neighborhood. Even if some of the stories *had* been stretched, there had been nuances, they appeared to be worsening, and the complaining citizens were entitled to be shielded from them.


On the other hand, the prostitutes had the legal right to earn a living. And they had the right to earn that living *somewhere* in town. Regardless of one's moral stance on prostitution, regardless of whether one thought selling a sexual service should be called an honest day's work

or a revolting practice, the crux of the issue was how to balance those rights. And that was where the law was supposed to help. But the law only added to the confusion.


The Tories enacted Bill C-49 in the wake of the Trudeau-commissioned Fraser committee's report, *Pornography and Prostitution in Canada*. Its intent was to rid the streets of what had become, in Justice Minister John Crosbie's words, "a national dis-/Continued on page 128

grace." Prior to Bill C-49, a prostitute had to be "pressing and persistent" about closing the deal, which meant, in practice, she had to drag a john off by his fly in order to be charged.

While the Fraser committee recognized that street soliciting was a nuisance and had recommended real penalties to control it, it also knew that prostitution wasn't exactly a fad of the eighties, so it envisioned allowing hookers to work in pairs out of their homes, and proposed that the feds consider making legal the licensing, by provincial governments, of



THE NEW BILL
STEADFASTLY
IGNORED THE
MORE LIBERAL
RECOMMENDATIONS
OF THE FRASER
COMMITTEE ON
PROSTITUTION



brothels. However, the Fraser committee had maintained an embarrassed silence on the one uncomfortable but crucial question nobody in power wanted to address: was prostitution a threat to the moral fabric of society?

The legislators were in an unenviable position (as one lawyer commented, writing a workable soliciting law is a little like ending hunger in Africa or finding a solution to world peace), but Bill C-49 was a particularly cynical piece of work. It remained silent on the issue of whether prostitution itself was to be legal, but made the practice illegal in all its manifestations. What became a Criminal Code offence, then, was to propose prostitution in a public place (although nobody bothered to define exactly what a public place was). Bill C-49 also steadfastly ignored the more liberal recommendations of the Fraser committee, so that living off the avails of prostitution or keeping an establishment for the purpose of conducting it continued to be crimes.

The Tories, who were at the same time hacking away at social welfare programs, undoubtedly had a hunch that what they were doing was a little like what the civic officials satirized in a Doonesbury comic

strip did to deal with the problem of the homeless: instead of building houses and creating jobs to get the homeless off the streets, the politicians made it illegal to sleep in public. It was no secret that the legislation would cost millions to enforce, would clog the courts, would provide hookers, many of whom were street waifs, no survival options, and would turn police into Keystone Kops, fruitlessly chasing them hither and yon, but no matter. Cleaning up prostitution was a little like cleaning up dog poop. And cleaning up dog poop was a municipal matter.

Since Bill C-49's turn of the legal screws, the Metropolitan Toronto Police have laid approximately 8,000 charges against prostitutes, johns and pimps. Last year they hired an additional ninety constables to increase patrols in the various tracks (Cabbagetown, the Lakeshore strip and Parkdale), resulting in the number of charges laid increasing by 150 per cent over the previous year. The police would like to get on to more pressing matters. In 1988 alone, the city will have spent \$6.3 million to keep prostitutes out of work. Despite more patrols, dramatically higher conviction rates, and the ongoing, massive sweeps (something no other Canadian

city had tried before), the police acknowledge that unless there is a raging blizzard the hookers will be out on the street corners tomorrow.

What the police conclude from looking at these numbers is that the law is not working as a deterrent. Consequently, they, along with the residents and a May-

■

DESPITE MASSIVE
POLICE SWEEPS,
THE HOOKERS ARE
ON THE STREETS
AS USUAL

■

or Eggleton-led delegation at city hall, are vigorously lobbying Ottawa to muscle it up even further. Police want the right to fingerprint and photograph every suspect (a tool needed, they say, to keep track of juvenile offenders, many of whom change their identities), minimum fines for repeat offenders, and automatic incarceration after the third offence. A national study of

Bill C-49's impact is almost completed, there is a federal election coming, and the law is slated for review. In the meantime, the Metropolitan Toronto Board of Commissioners of Police has agreed to release to the media, beginning November 1, the names of convicted prostitutes and johns.

As the spokesperson for CORP, Valerie Scott does not have regular meetings with Art Eggleton, Attorney General Ian Scott or Justice Minister Ray Hnatyshyn. There are no lawyers in CORP. In fact, there are only eight active members and a number of "peripheral" people. Prostitutes, it seems, aren't joiners.


Scott is a petite, well-groomed woman with the gift of the gab and a nobody's-fool air about her. She is well past the age of majority, although how far past she will not say. While she holds a certificate in electronic technology ("I passed with an A") and another in oxyacetylene welding, these were just something to fall back on. When other little girls were pirouetting around their living rooms practising to become ballerinas, Valerie Scott had other fantasies. "Ever since I was five, I dreamed of getting into the sex industry. I used to watch westerns as a kid, and as far as I was concerned, the cowboys had no fun at all. The only interesting people in

westerns were the saloon girls. They knew what was going down in the town. And they had great clothes.”


Scott is a single working mother whose work happens to be prostitution. She has a 13-year-old son who lives part of the year with her sister in Regina. Scott supports him on her earnings; under the current law, he could be charged with living off the avails of a prostitute. Scott has never been charged with soliciting. She has, however, been charged with causing mischief to private property (the charge was later withdrawn). “I was putting up a poster on a lamppost that informed prostitutes of their rights. The cops did a strip search as if I had posters up my ass.”

In Scott’s version of Utopia, adult prostitutes like herself, those who have consciously chosen their work and who resent the notion that they would all prefer another career, would be left alone to work out of their homes. They could advertise in publications such as this one, take purchase orders over computer terminals and write off condoms. They would have dental plans, pension plans and they’d fork over taxes just like everybody else. Escort services would operate openly and brothels would locate in commercial districts. Nuisance bylaws would handle disturbances.

Scott is weary of listening to residents such as Sandra Jackson screaming about having to pick up condoms. “Yes, there are condoms in Sandra Jackson’s neighborhood, and there will continue to be condoms so long as people are forced to have sex outside. If residents live near a school and there are half-finished lunches



**HOOKERS RESENT
THE NOTION THAT
THEY SHOULD
ALL PREFER
ANOTHER CAREER**



strewn across their driveways, nobody lobbies to close down the school. Cabbage-town has been a stroll for over one hundred years. It will continue to be a stroll until the public accepts that it’s not worth prosecuting someone who wants to sell sex to someone else who wants to buy it.”

While Scott would like to see prostitution decriminalized for adults, she is ada-


mant about distinguishing them from the “bunch of babies out there who are turning tricks because of the housing crunch.” Teenagers, she believes, do not belong on the street. “What we have here are kids with a whole litany of problems. Why don’t we look at why they’re on the street? Why don’t we have decent grass-roots and apprenticeship programs for them? Why is it that everywhere they go they’re told they’re bad? Those years are for education, maybe not straight school but alternative school. Perhaps some of the millions spent on processing them through the criminal justice system could go toward the establishment of some of those programs.”

SOS is a street outreach service founded three years ago as a support program for street kids who were in, or were drifting toward, prostitution. It’s located in a cheerfully ragged hole-in-the-wall office on St. Nicholas Street. On a blast furnace of a day during the July heat wave when I visited, only a cranky fan whirred by the window in the reception area, but it seemed to offer welcome respite to the kids who had come inside to escape the torched pavements. About a half-dozen teenagers lounged around on the prettily upholstered couches bumming cigarettes,


discussing the rock group Wham!, drinking Cup-a-Soup and eating saltines. An elfin, tomboyish girl with the word "Heartbreaker" on her T-shirt sat coiled in the corner of a couch writing intently in a journal. Quietly chatting with the workers at the reception desk was a soft-spoken boy who told me he had grown up in Forest Hill. Another kid was on the phone trying to line up a house-painting job. With Roots sweatshirts and better haircuts, the teenagers there would look no different from the ones who stroll down Bloor Street on a Saturday afternoon. I saw some of them again later that night when I walked the Track with the SOS workers. Some, soliciting the night's business, were dolled up as Lolitas. Others roamed in volcanic packs down Yonge, wired on God knows what.

The SOS program director, Christine Femia-Wiseman, is an ample, engaging woman with an ebullient laugh and a lopsided ponytail. Social work is a second career. She used to be a hooker. Because it was under the wing of a psychiatrist at St. Michael's Hospital that Femia-Wiseman managed to kick a nasty drug habit, unload a pimp and earn a degree at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, she has a particu-

lar interest in a multidisciplinary social-service approach for the casualties who land on her doorstep. Even so, she has no illusions that she and her workers, who stroll the tracks each night offering condoms, "lube," legal advice and an empathic ear for stories so gruesome it's hard



ALMOST EVERY
STREET KID HAS
BEEN SEXUALLY
ABUSED BY
TRUSTED PEOPLE



to imagine how they report for work the next day, are doing anything but keeping their fingers in the dike of what has become a staggeringly awful situation. There is so little money around or political will to support social programs these days. Everybody's operating on a shoestring. The mood of the times is such that this summer, when social activist and writer June Callwood took the podium at


Midland collegiate to ask for residents' approval for a Scarborough youth shelter, she was heckled and booed. If it were built, one man threatened, he would personally blow it up. Callwood had not seen such hatred, she said, since Yorkville hippie days. Femia-Wiseman, who lives in Scarborough, attended that meeting. Now when she goes to the grocery store people stare at her and point and shout, "You're the woman who wants prostitutes in Scarborough." Yet there are between 10,000 and 12,000 kids on the street and almost 4,000 new ones each year, most of them so damaged that sometimes Femia-Wiseman thinks the only solution to this monstrous problem is to "upheave all of society and start again."

Almost every kid Femia-Wiseman and her colleagues see has been raped or in some other way sexually abused by "take your pick—their parents, stepparents, foster parents, ministers, cub leaders—all the people you're supposed to trust." This has happened to them usually before they have reached age 12. Most have been brutalized physically, and some have only the foggiest memory of who their natural parents are. They have lived, in many cases, in "homes" where drug addiction and drunken brawls are the norm. By some miracle, the majority of them make it to


Grade 9, but with learning disabilities so acute they have trouble filling out job application forms or reading the notices tacked to the SOS bulletin board. More than half of them have either considered or attempted suicide. In one recent study done by Covenant House, a street kids' crisis shelter, the abuse figures compiled on youths in Toronto surpassed by "significant margins" those in Manhattan.

While many of them are what social workers refer to as "systems" kids, those who have been ground through the mill of the Children's Aid, group and foster homes, by no means are all the kids hardcore institutional rejects. Some are simply ordinary, albeit confused, middle-class kids the mainstream public tends to ignore. Some workers, for instance, have encountered girls in private-school skirts doing trade on their lunch hours or suburban mall rats pedalling hand-jobs to boost their allowances. Rock concerts and leather jackets cost too. Half the kids seen by Inner City Youth Programme, another downtown street outreach service, are, according to its program manager, Laurie Edmiston, middle-class kids. It is Edmiston's perception that rejection of kids by middle-class families is increasing. Partly because expectations are high and life is frenetic, there seems to be less tolerance

for the ones who aren't university material, "the ones who aren't going to make the big jobs with the big salaries. We get the kids of a fourth-generation welfare cycle, but we get the kids of some hotshot corpo-



LAW-AND-ORDER
SOLUTIONS END
UP WORKING
AGAINST THOSE
KIDS WHO ARE
TRYING TO
LEAVE THE GAME



rate businessman whose name you see in the papers too."

Certain grim themes echo. First, because of what it costs to live in Toronto, it is tougher to get off the street than it once was. And second, because there is simply nowhere even vaguely affordable for them to live, many of these kids' lives begin to

spiral downward. "Street kids just need a little guidance, a secure place to live and a job where the boss doesn't try to screw them in the back room," says Edmiston. "If people have stable housing, it's far easier to kick an addiction. A lot of them are making minimum wage, living in an awful place. They have one true friend. If their true friend splits or doesn't put up his share of the rent, kaput, they're back into prostitution. Maybe they manage to get the job part under control, but then the landlord throws them out. One thing screws up and their whole life screws up."

While social workers empathize with the residents' hostilities toward some of the more unpalatable-to-them aspects of these kids' livelihoods, they fear that a strict law-and-order approach to control street prostitution is a spectacular exercise in tunnel vision. It winds up working against those kids who are trying, against all odds, to leave the game. Moreover, it pushes them underground and into the arms of a rougher element or further and further into the subculture of the street. "The first time these kids get hauled in," says Femia-Wiseman, "they get fined. But how are they going to get the money to pay the fine except to work the street again? The second time, they get a harsher fine, court and a jail sentence.

Then a fail-to-appear. Then jail and custody. By then they need a lawyer. But a lot of lawyers won't take legal aid. So they need the money to pay the lawyer and they wind up rolling people, getting into drug deals, B & Es. If you want to know who's really pimping these kids, it's the system. The system pimps."

The palpable anger on downtown streets is a sobering reminder that a beastly hangover awaits a city that has grown intoxicated with its own prosperity. Meanwhile, the merrymaking continues. Parkdale has begun to take on a nattier look, and developers are poised to have their way with the Lakeshore strip. Quickly vanishing is the reality of a mixed downtown neighborhood where citizens of varying social and economic backgrounds live peaceably together. In the process, the precious sense of community that once made Toronto the envy of every North American metropolis is being squandered.

There will be no easy answers. Even if brothels were to proliferate in commercial districts, there is still the nagging question of the street kids. The demand out there is for the chiquitas and the pretty boys, and for that demand there seems to be an endless supply. A brass-knuckled law-and-order approach might work in the short term, but it fails to address a couple of questions too. Bringing the hammer down on offenders will require that more of them be packed off to jail. But almost half of them have already spent time in jail; eventually, they drift back to the streets. What's more, if the death sentence of AIDS hasn't worked as a deterrent, why on earth would the threat of incarceration? And finally, even if it were possible to move everybody off the street, would they go? There is an anonymity and speed to street transactions that a certain segment of the population seems to want and need. Surely Prohibition had a few lessons to impart on how people will behave when they are told they cannot have something they crave.

In the course of researching this story, I met one woman who had devised what she considered to be a practical way to deal with the nuisance of hookers. She kept a spray can of ammonia on hand, and a few short blasts would do the trick. While it may be tempting for some to reach for a quick-fix solution to the quandary of street prostitution in Toronto, that kind of thinking will only work to keep the pavements pristine for a while. Sooner or later we will all be faced with the task of cleaning up a nastier and far more insidious mess. ■