

WE
ARE
NOT
THEIR
GIRLS

Fired
Up
Stilettos
THE
UNION
STRIPPER
RESOURCE

This is a resource for any person currently working in the adult entertainment industry in Aotearoa, and anyone looking to join it.

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This resource was designed to provide support to workers entering our industry and to those who already work in it. There is a very broad spectrum of knowledge in that group. Most of us learnt from those before us, but when those before the next gen have been fired for standing up for their rights...? This is the best we have.

If you have better knowledge than what you see in this book, share it with your colleagues. Build a community of workers who can trust and support each other. We may be competing for clients sometimes, but we are not competing for safe, fair, healthy professional lives. That is something that we can only achieve together.

*Welcome to the revolution,
Margot Embargot xx*

Contents

Fired Up Stilettos

Legal and Political Context

The History of Stripping (*extremely condensed version*)
Where Contractors and Sex workers are today

Working as a Stripper

The Clubs
Etiquette & Safety
Employee VS Contractor: Key Differences
Rights and Responsibilities

The Movement

Fired Up Stilettos Resources
Aotearoa Sex Workers Collective (NZPC)
International Revolution
Stripper Strike NoHo
The Revolution and YOU

Other Stuff

Other resources
FUS contact details

Fired Up Stilettos

(Incorporated)

Fired Up Stilettos (Inc.) is an organisation and social movement working to improve the lives of strippers and sex workers in Aotearoa. We are entirely volunteer based. All of our money comes from fundraising, and is reserved for mutual aid, legal fees, and operational costs (posting, website hosting, printing this booklet ect.).

Our core team is made up of Wellington based strippers, most of whom were fired from Calendar Girls Wellington in January 2023 following attempts at negotiation.

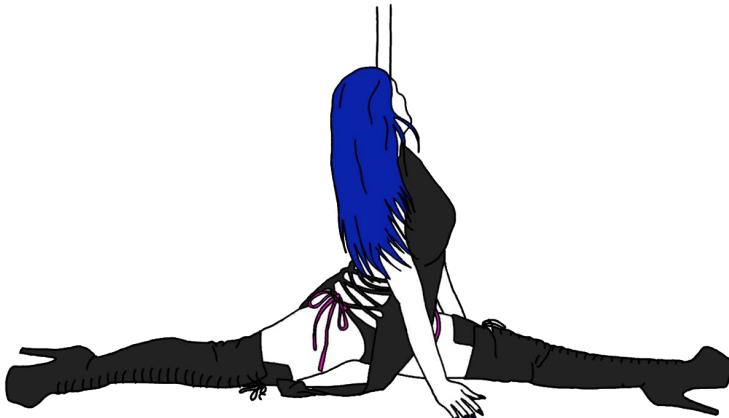
We have four major goals:

- Establish labour rights for strippers through political action.
- Unite the workforce so that we can advocate for ourselves against exploitative venues.
- Provide financial support to workers for whom the revolution is financially inaccessible.
- Dismantle social stigma and discrimination towards strippers and sex workers.



The Sexy History of Aotearoa

(extremely condensed version)



There is a much richer history of stripping in Aotearoa, before and after these dates. We have included the pieces that are absolutely essential in understanding today's fight.

1963 - The First Dedicated Strip Club

The Pink Pussy cat of Auckland was the first official strip club in Aotearoa. “Performances were not allowed to include too much moving around, bare nipples, or full nudity.”

1970 - The Courts Rule You May Show Your Nips

Completely unrelated to strippers at the time, it was the musical “Hair” that changed that game for stripping in Aotearoa. The musical featured a scene where a woman was completely naked onstage. CUE OUTRAGE!! This was escalated to the point the courts had to make a ruling on whether or not this was allowed. It was officially decided that being naked onstage for art was legal. And here we are.

2003 - Sex Work is Decriminalised!!!

On the 25th June 2003, sex work in Aotearoa was decriminalised with the passing of the PRA (Prostitution Reform Act, you can look it up). The PRA removed sex work from the crimes act and added legal protections for workers. This made us one of the first countries in the world to do so. Activists including Georgia Beyer and Catherine Healy were instrumental in this work.

Where contractors and sex workers are right now

Stripping VS Sex Work in Aotearoa Today

As you can see, the reason that we are still making the effort to distinguish between strippers and sex workers in our activism is due to the past.

Stripping was already legal before the 2003 PRA, so strippers were not included in the legislation.

Strippers have never been legally classified as anything other than entertainers, with the same legal rights and protections as say, a clown. This has meant that while our workforce faces the discrimination of being seen as sex workers by society (*I know this to be true because my dad wrote it in a letter hoping it would make me rethink my choices (nice try boi)*), we don't have any protections against the harm this stigma causes.

A Note on Whorearchy

Perhaps the ugliest discrimination of all is that which comes from inside the house. Fired Up Stilettos is firmly PRO ALL SEX WORKERS RIGHTS.

Historically there have been (and still are) attitudes by workers on both sides of this Sex Worker/Stripper divide disrespecting and scapegoating the other. Or,

in the brothel/indie/street worker, divide. Or the online/in person worker divide. If you'd like more information on this, ask someone else.

The point I'd like to make is this: You do what works for you, and you don't hate on someone else for doing it differently. We have the power to be each others strongest allies. Many of us work in several different areas of the industry. Hold hands babes we have bigger fish to fry.

The Current Political Climate

There are now numerous strip clubs, brothels and massage parlours all across Aoatearoa. Our work is not illegal, unless you are a migrant. Oh no, more problems.

Migrant Stripping and Sex Work

When the 2003 PRA was passed it included stipulations against migratory sex work in attempts to safeguard against trafficking.

This has resulted in our workforce containing migratory workers who have absolutely nowhere to turn if they are being exploited... Which makes them more likely to be exploited.

The same holds true for strippers, with the difference that it has nothing to do with the PRA and everything to do with the fact that you can't work as an independent contractor on a working visa.

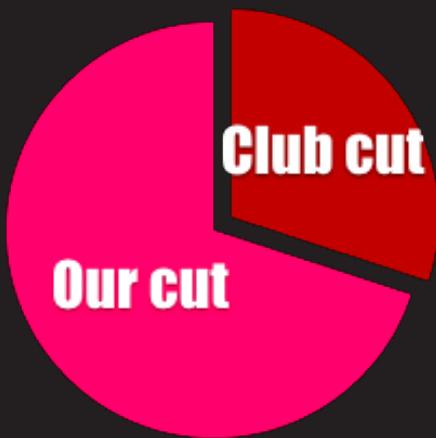
You can imagine this makes standing up for your rights very, very difficult. It is already difficult, with clubs making decisions that stifle workers' incomes, leaving little room for taking risks (such as taking a day off, or going home sick).

Collective action being illegal for contractors is another problem. If you're at risk of being deported as well... I'm sure you get my point by now. If you are a migrant stripper/ worker in need of support, please contact Fired Up Stilettos.

2015



2017



2021



2023



Working as a Stripper

Where are the clubs in all of this?

The ugliest discrimination comes from inside the house. Misogyny, whorephobia, and capitalism have come together and created a monster... *strip club management.*

Anyone who has worked in the industry has either experienced or witnessed the abuse of a strip club manager. Imagine that you can hate women and whores but also... see the money they are making and want some for yourself. Here we have the real villain of the story.

Abuse from management can manifest in many ways: insults about appearance, minimising your negative experiences, refusing to pay you out, unpredictable anger followed by favouritism (if you're 'lucky').

The rules are always changing, but the common factor is that they NEVER want your opinion. Unless your opinion is a criticism of another worker.

Abuse from management

Psychological abuse is a very common tactic used by managers in the industry to control workers and make us easier to exploit. It can be very difficult to spot, which is part of the reason it is so effective. It is also heavily normalised in our industry as being ‘the way things are’ which simply won’t do.

Here is a list of things to watch out for:

- **Unpredictable management.** You’re never sure if the manager is going to treat you like their best friend or scream insults at you.
- **Fear.** You or other workers are scared to bring up concerns or issues at work.
- **Isolation and gaslighting.** Being told that you’re the only one with this problem, everyone hates you, you’re making things difficult, or you’re crazy!
- **Pitting workers against each other.** Don’t trust anyone who’s saying things that make you doubt other dancers!! This is a union busting tactic and a way for managers to make you feel like they have your back.

- **Threats.** Threatening to fire or fine you, or any other kind of threat.
- **Verbal Abuse.** Yelling/ screaming at you. Insulting you, making you feel shit about yourself. This will generally be followed by the abuser either ignoring you for a while or being unusually reasonable and kind. The impact of this can make you feel like you deserved it or were in the wrong, or it wasn't as bad as you remember.

Physical abuse is easier to spot and a more obvious red flag. It's also just straight up illegal. Let us know if this is happening in your club.

Social stigma really enhances the effect of psychological abuse in our industry. It's very important to remember that you DON'T deserve to be treated like shit. Even if society has decided you do.

When working in a stigmatised industry the common solution people offer to any problem is 'get a different job'. This is ridiculous and takes all the responsibility off the abuser and puts it on you (hello victim blaming). You don't need a different job, you need to be treated like a human being.

Sexual Assault

IT IS NOT STANDARD PRACTICE TO STRIP NAKED FOR YOUR MANAGER IN AN AUDITION!!

Sexual assault against sex workers is still sexual assault. You are providing a service in exchange for money, and you can withdraw consent at any time.

It is common for managers to downplay experiences of assault in the club because doing their job properly is inconvenient for them.

If you have been assaulted at work you should be allowed to go home and look after yourself.

If you want to press charges against the person who assaulted you, you should be supported with that. The person who assaulted you should not be allowed back in the club.

Clubs often fail to enforce this so it is important that you work with the other workers to warn each other of dangerous clients and protect each other.

Etiquette and Safety Tips for inside the Club:

- **Don't grasscut** - if another dancer has been hustling a customer for a while and then goes on stage or to the bathroom, that is not your opportunity to approach the same customer!

The exception to this is if you're walking by and the customer requests a booking with you specifically. It's always good to communicate with the other workers around this so that no one feels hard done by. However if another dancer tries with a customer and then moves on, you can approach them. It pays to check with the other dancer to see what the vibe is. This applies the other way around too, if you try with a customer and it doesn't work, and then another dancer is successful that's okay. Diversity in the strip club is a good thing and everyone is after something different.

- **Ask before you join a table with other strippers-** if a few customers are overwhelmed with dancers it impacts sales for everyone
- **Have eachothers backs!** Talk your colleagues up to customers the same way you would for yourself. Encourage customers you're sitting with to tip dancers on their tip rounds.
- **Don't screw up the stage spots-** If you miss your stage spot, don't just jump on at a random time. Everyone will get confused and you could be taking someone else's opportunity for tips. If you need to take a different spot, talk to the people after you and make sure it's okay with them. And if someone gets on stage for you when you miss your spot, thank them!
- **Pay attention to who's on the floor and who's in bookings,** this will change the stage spots and everything will run smoother if you're prepared.
- **Don't steal other dancers' tips or belongings.** That's just shitty.
- **Have a fake name, and a fake real name.** Customers aaaalways want to know your real name. Sometimes it's easier to give a fake real name instead of interrupting your hustle

Don't give away information about other dancers. Ever!! This could be anything- real names, sexuality, if they have a partner/family, age, ethnicity, drug and alcohol habits, where they're from... the list goes on. The answer should always be: 'I'm not sure, you could ask them yourself'. We are all making up our own stories, don't take that away from other workers.

- **In the same vein, don't trash talk other workers or gossip to customers.** It makes the whole club look bad, including you. If gossiping is part of your hustle, get the customer to complain about the people in their own life!
- **Don't steal music.** This can sometimes be a hard one to figure out especially if you're new to the club. If you're choosing your own music, don't pick songs that other dancers already use. If it's your favourite song and someone already uses it, they have dibs. If you're not sure or worried, just ask a more experienced dancer. You'll get a good feel for who dances to what after a while. Which is handy because you can tell who's on stage easily!
- **Communicate with each other.** If another worker has done something that bothered you, try talking to them about it. Maybe it was intentional, but maybe it wasn't and they can learn from it.

This applies to everything listed above. If you feel like you did something that bothered someone else, bring it up at a quiet time when they're not busy and check in. Having open communication will go a long way in making the club environment enjoyable and lucrative for everyone.

- **Safety is an issue in our industry for a number of reasons, misogyny and whorephobia mean that some people are less likely to see you as a human** (super shitty but has to be said) which means they often feel like normal rules around respect don't apply. It's important to take steps to protect your safety while working, and in your personal life. I want to note that all of these things should not be necessary 'in a perfect world', and getting harmed at work is not your fault. However, there are steps that are worth taking to keep yourself safe while we deal with the larger, society wide issues
- **Uber/ drive home (sober babes only).** If you think someone is waiting outside the club for you to leave, let someone else know and go with a buddy.
- **Keep your phone on you in the club and on outcalls.** You'll need your phone for keeping time and contacting workers or manager if you needed.

Managers are meant to be there to ensure your safety. Different managers have different... approaches to this. It is important to let your manager know if you're in trouble or if they need to kick someone out, but don't rely solely on them. Contact the other workers too.

- **Keep your money somewhere safe!!** If you don't want to bank your money (or maybe just not all of it) keep it somewhere safe. I say this as someone who had hundreds of dollars stolen out of a MENSTRUAL CUP CONTAINER lmao.
- **Record your earnings-** many clubs notoriously underpay dancers. Try to keep your own record. This will also come in handy if you're handling tax on your own.
- **Don't add customers on facebook.** This impacts everyone's safety, because if they have you on facebook they are much more likely to find other dancers too.
- **Have a work instagram/phone number/ email.** If you want to keep in contact with clients and build up regulars, keep it separate from your personal life. This helps to separate

work from life, and also protects your privacy and the privacy of other dancers. Don't cross follow other workers or friends between your work and personal instagrams, and definitely don't follow your own work instagram! There are real stalkers out there.

- **Enforce rules early on.** At the start of your booking lay out the rules straight away. If your customer breaks the rules you have given it's up to you how you want to handle it, but you should absolutely feel free to leave the booking and go to your manager about the client.
- **Let other workers know about dangerous clients.** Whether or not you want to take a booking with someone is your choice, but making sure everyone is informed about a client's past behaviour helps us look out for each other and ourselves.
- **Stay in control.** Many people drink at work, totally normal. BUT you don't have to drink at work, and your club should have non alcoholic options that you can pretend are alcohol if you need/want to. Retaining control is an important part of asserting your boundaries and looking after your safety.



Employee VS Contractor

Throughout this journey we have had no shortage of helpful civilians imploring that the answer to all of our problems is to *become employees*.

Fired Up Stilettos believes this is not good enough. Like full service sex workers, we need autonomy and independence to do our job safely.

Many of us get into the industry because we want the freedom that comes with working as a contractor. We also know that venue owners are not people that we want a closer working relationship with.

Included below is information found on the Employment New Zealand website. If the venue you work at is treating you like an employee but paying you like a contractor... hit us up!!

There is a lot more detail on the employment website, which is listed in resources at the end of this booklet.

	Employee	Contractor
Holiday Pay, hourly wage, sick leave	Yes	No
Control over work, time, location	No	Yes
Set hours	Yes	No
Control over availability/holidays	No	Yes
Supervision and direction (by a manager or boss)	Yes	No
Works with own equipment	No	Yes
Profit	No	Yes
Uniform with company logo	Yes	No
Mainly working for one entity	Yes	No

Key Differences

An employee usually has little or no control over the work to be done

A contractor generally has more discretion regarding when and how much time is spent at work. You choose your days. None of this “compulsory Friday Saturday” or having to “apply for leave”.

A contractor has their own ‘plan’ of what work to do each day and which site to work at. They are usually a specialist in their field of work, and so

do not need to be closely supervised or instructed how to do their job. Your manager is the manager of the VENUE, not of you. You are your own manager.

A contractor may work for multiple principals at the same time eg a builder having contracts to do work for Company 'A', Company 'B' and Company 'C'.- This means that there should not be ANY kind of non competition or restraint of trade clauses in your contracts.

A contractor is able to profit from their work. For example, they can often decide how much to charge for their services, and how many jobs to take on.- You decide when to work, when to go home, if you want to take a booking, and how much you want to charge.

Contractor Protection

There's not a lot going on in our laws to protect contractors, and this is causing problems for many contract workers. There have been studies done on contractors and what's happening in various industries, but sex workers and strippers were not included in these investigations. This is a real shame because our needs are quite different and specific, and none of the proposed solutions work for us.

Contractors have less legal protections than employees because there isn't meant to be a power imbalance between the parties signing the contract. Also, the contract should be negotiated to work for *both parties*.

Navigating as a contractor

Justice

Seeking justice as a stripper or sex worker can be really difficult. Contractors aren't supported by the employment relations authority and it can really feel like there is nowhere to turn when things go wrong.

On top of this, stigma and discrimination can make things impossible. This is where the most structural and societal change is needed, it's a work in progress. BUT there are still things you can do, and growing awareness and support for our rights!

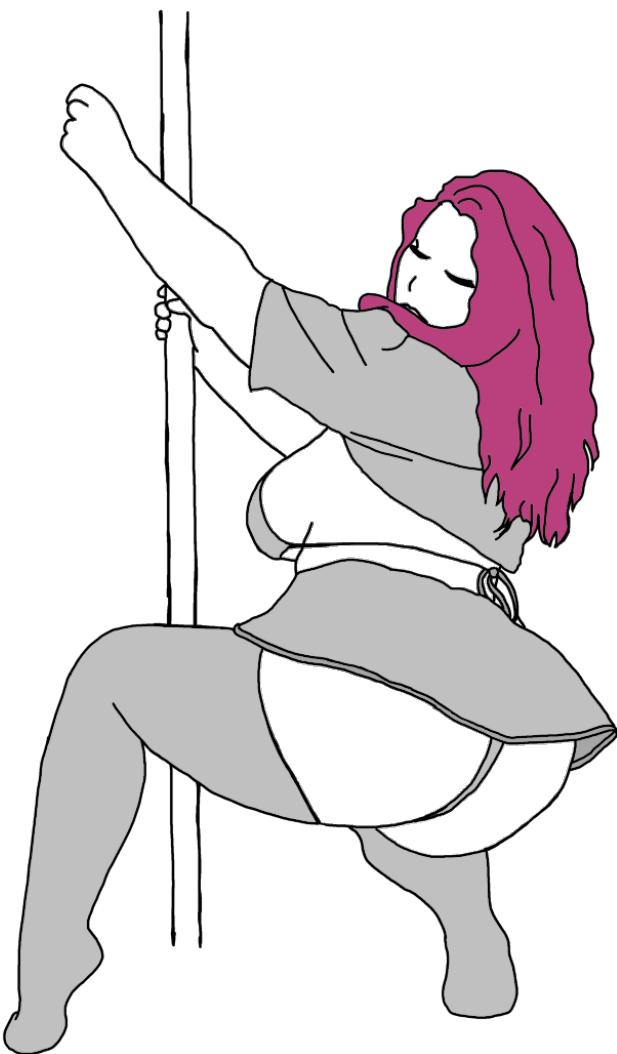
Submitting a personal grievance

If your workplace has been treating you like an employee and then fucked you over you can submit a personal grievance. This must be submitted within 90 days of the event, except in cases of sexual assault where you have 12 months from when you became aware of it.

Submitting a personal grievance is something that only employees can do, so this would be escalated to the ERA who would determine if you have been treated as an employee or not, before dealing with the actual grievance. This is a SLOW process, and you'll need a lawyer.

Fired Up Stilettos is working on ways to make this process more accessible so if it's something you want to do let us know and we can support you through it.

You can also go to your local community law office and talk to someone there for free. We know that there are people who have done this and won against their clubs. When the settlement is made the worker always has to sign an NDA so we never get to celebrate or teach each other how to do it or feel like there is hope... but there IS HOPE!! And you can take that to the bank.



Civil Court

If you haven't really been treated like an employee (or you just don't want to go through that process) but your club is still doing sketchy shit (like fining you, or refusing to return your bond) you can take them to court through the civil system.

We are still learning about this process ourselves, but recently we had a dancer take their club to court over a bond issue and they won!! This process is way more chill than the ERA thing. The hearing in this case was actually over the phone. The judge will decide who's right and then send a bill to the losing person.

It costs \$40 to submit your claim and if you win the other party has to pay that fee. If you lose you'll have to pay the other parties fee. So you're looking at a risk of \$80.

If you need any kind of help with this you can contact us, we have a few lawyers helping us out and some funds dedicated to legal aid.

WorkSafe and the Commerce Commission

The most useless organisations on the planet. Haha jk maybe. Historically we have been entirely unsupported by these institutions BUT times are changing and they are the current government people who are meant to make sure that workplaces are safe (WorkSafe) and contracts are fair (Commerce Commission).

FUS makes no promises that reporting to these organisations will do anything useful at all, however we still encourage you to do it. The more reports there are the more records we have of these issues, and if nothing happens we can go tell some politicians about it and protest.

Making a WorkSafe report is really easy. There are two forms on their website, one for physical safety risks and one for mentally unhealthy workplaces. You can also tick a box for the report being anonymous, which we recommend so that you're not putting yourself in danger.

Making a report to the commerce commission is a bit more involved. So far we have reported the calendar girls contract for its fining policies, and we HOPE that will be investigated. If you want to

report your contract, please do!! We need to keep reporting stuff until they listen to us. We have a template for how to write it and can work on it with you, get in touch.

Exercising your right to choose when you work

If there are several workers at your club who are sick of the bullshit, you might decide that you simply can't work in these conditions and all have to have next Friday off work for personal health reasons.

This might be inconvenient for your venue, because it's pretty hard to run a strip club without any strippers, but in the words of WorkSafe "you have a responsibility to your own health and safety".

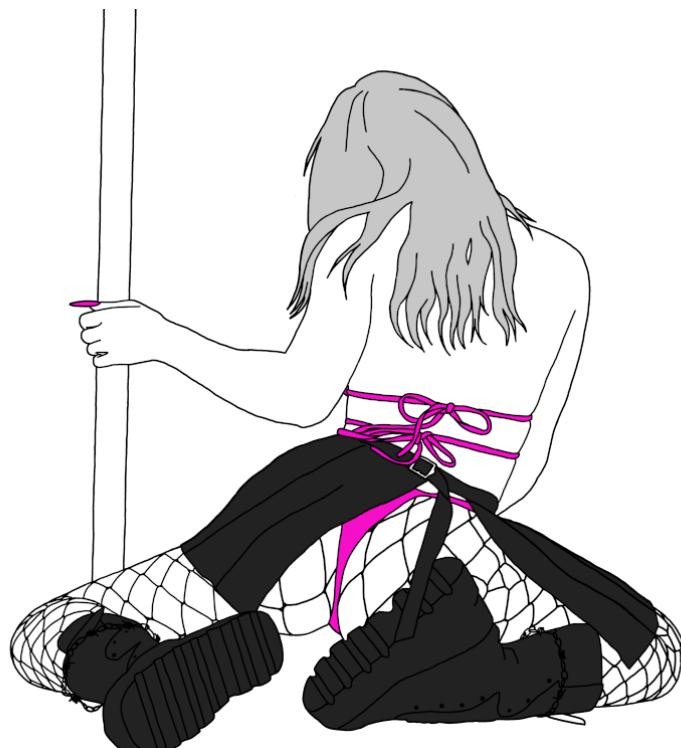
FUS can support you with any negative consequences this may cause.

You don't need a union to be a unionist!

If you're not quite at the point where you all need a Mental Health Friday, but you still want to see changes at your venue, start by having

conversations with the other workers. Together you should have a clear idea of what is important to you at work and what needs to change.

The next step is to try and have a conversation with the venue manager. I won't lie, this is a pretty bold move that could cost you your job. But unfortunately we have to start somewhere. If we stand together and support each other it will become a lot harder for clubs to treat us like we are disposable. Strength in numbers baby!!



Responsibilities of Contractors

These are some things that contractors have to do. If you are a migrant worker things are different, we can talk to you about this directly but can't really put it in this booklet.

Paying your own tax

To do this you need to register as self employed with IRD. You can use the occupation code for entertainer. You'll need to calculate your own tax OR get a third party to do it for you. This could be an accountant, but there are also apps that can help with this.

Hnry is what I and many others have used for tax. You transfer your earnings into your Hnry account and they take the tax off and pay it back to you. You can also list business expenses like shoes, make up and ubers (get home safe xx).

If you don't use a third party you'll need to keep a record of your earnings and put money aside for your tax bill at the end of the financial year.

Paying your own ACC levies

This one can be confusing. I didn't know what a tax levy was until it turned up in the mail saying if I didn't pay in 10 days they would come and TAKE MY STUFF. Gasp. Luckily calling them is pretty easy and there isn't a big wait time. If you're registered as self employed you can get an ACC for business log in, and your levies will reflect your annual income. They get it wrong sometimes so call them if you have concerns.

Buying your own equipment (lingerie, shoes, makeup)

You'll need to supply your own lingerie, make up and shoes, as well as cover ups to wear between stage sets.

Shoes are commonly referred to as pleasers, with Pleaser being the main shoe brand. There are other brands that also supply stripper heels.

Some clubs will have a box of stuff that you can wear before you buy your own. Shoes will need to be bought online. If you're lost on where to look start with shoeme.com/au

The movement

FUS Resources

We are kind of developing into a stripper social service, slowly.

At the moment the things we can help with are:

- **Journalist connections**- If you or the dancers at your club want to get a story out or draw attention to something we can hook you up with a journalist or send out a press release. We will have a phone call/ video call with you before we do this to protect our name in the media and provide brief media training.
- **Legal support** - We aren't lawyers, but we do know lawyers! We can provide support surrounding any legal stuff you want to address.

Negotiation Support - If you are trying to negotiate for changes in your workplace we

can support you with this. We can email/call your managers or owners (whoever has the power) to support your negotiations.

- **Financial Aid**- If workers at your venue are standing up for their rights and being punished we can assist with financial burdens. Anyone who is fired for action related to workers rights will be supported with work and income applications and supported financially by FUS until these applications are approved. We can cover basic costs only, so- food, rent, bills.

If your whole club is planning something that will cause financial pressure we can start a give a little page and promote it to raise funds for your workers specifically!

The first step with any financial aid will be a video call or face to face meeting with one of our organisers, and we go from there. You will not be left to fend for yourself!!

Legislation stuff

We are working to introduce legislation that protects strippers from exploitative venues and enforces our rights as independent contractors. We are doing this in two ways - a petition and a members bill.

Petition to Parliament

- Establish the right of adult entertainers to bargain collectively while maintaining independent contractor status

Notes: Independent contractors are not currently allowed to use collective bargaining, as it is seen as 'cartel bargaining'. Given the severe power imbalance between venues and workers, FUS wants workers in adult entertainment (and sex work) to be able to use collective bargaining legally. This would allow us the right to strike, and actually call it a strike. It would also mean that whatever issues arise in the future, workers in clubs would have the right to address them as a workforce, rather than as individuals (who would just get fired).

- Establish a nationwide maximum of 20% that an employer can take from a contractor's profits.

Notes: All clubs operate differently in terms of the cuts they take, some are 70/30 to the dancer, some are 80/20, and some are 50/50. I have investigated clubs in Europe that take as much as 60% of a dancer's earnings. Fired Up Stilettos wants to establish a MAXIMUM cut that clubs can take. Meaning they could take less, but they can't take more than 20%. We chose the value of 20% with the expectation that we may have to negotiate to 30%. We would be comfortable with 30% on bookings, provided that the same cut was not taken from tips. There is still some working out to

be done here and feedback/contribution is welcome! We hold the value that the reason a club takes a cut is for the venue service they provide. Therefore the cut should not exceed the costs of running/ reasonable profit of running the venue. We do the work, we should get the money.

- Outlaw all fines and bonds for employees and contractors

Note: I feel this one is pretty self explanatory.

Petition updates:

Our petition has been submitted to parliament (with over 7000 signatures!!) and read in the house by Jan Logie (Green queen). We are now writing a submission to support it.

Members Bill

Our other political avenue is a members bill designed specifically for strippers/adult venue workers. This has been proposed by Jan Logie and approved by the Green Party Caucus. Unfortunately we don't get to decide what is written into the members bill, it is up to the policy writers. What we can do is write an advice article, so that is what we are working on.

The underpinning motive for all of the political/legislative work is - WE are the workers, and the

venue is just a venue. The legislation should be designed to protect us in this way, understanding and catering to how we operate.

Aotearoa Sex Workers Collective History (NZPC)

The New Zealand Prostitutes Collective (NZPC) was formed in 1987 by sex workers as an organisation determined to seek equal rights for sex workers. A year later, NZPC agreed to sign a contract with the Minister of Health to provide a range of services to sex workers with a focus on HIV and AIDS.

NZPC established community bases in New Zealand's main centres, and worked hard to create opportunities for sex workers to communicate their issues. Since inception, NZPC has advocated for the recognition of sex work as work, and the repeal of those laws that criminalise, and discriminate against, sex workers.

NZPC was established with the ideals of the Ottawa Charter (1986) in mind. The Charter acknowledged the importance of community action. In other words, sex workers were able to take control of their own health promotion programs as much as possible in order to determine the direction those programs should take.

I would like to include an excerpt from the NZPC website about the formation of the NZPC- 16 YEARS before sex work was decriminalised.

“We met on beaches, sat round pub tables, huddled in doorways, and spoke on the telephone to unseen, like minded sex workers throughout the country. Sex workers were on the move. People started to talk about us as if we were a force to be reckoned with. This is really when we realised we were becoming an organisation.”

The similarities between this story, the beginning of FUS and other stripper movements, and pretty much every grassroots movement, offer both encouragement and perspective. We are all just people, doing what we can. That is all we have ever been, and what we must have the courage to continue doing. This work won't happen by magic, it will happen when we start talking.

The International Revolution

One of the most extraordinary feelings I've had during this process has been the realisation that what we are dealing with is not just our problem. There are stripper movements all over the world coming to the same conclusions and fighting the same battles in their various political contexts.

Different countries have different laws, for many sex work is still a crime, and employment and contracting works differently. We all have different approaches, but our goals are overwhelmingly the same.

After working in an environment that works so hard to make you feel like you're alone with your problems, meeting with these dancers has provided a validation I didn't know I needed. Here is a letter from a fellow labour rights slut, Velveeta of Star Garden in L.A...

Stripper Strike NoHo

“The Star Garden stripper strike (aka @stripperstrikenoho) began in March of 2022. I and 7 fellow dancers walked out on a Friday night after we delivered a petition demanding improvements to safety in the club and the reinstatement of 2 wrongfully fired dancers. Our managers (who are also the owners) had told us that we could not go directly to a security guard if we needed to report a dangerous situation. Above all else they cared about the comfort of their customers and they didn’t want us to “cause drama”. The following night we were blocked from entering the club: the lock out had begun. We picketed outside the club for 8 months multiple days a week. We had success turning away customers and cultivated a fun community atmosphere with a different theme for every picket. One night we even set up a slip ‘n slide on the sidewalk.

We announced our intention to unionize in May but it wasn’t until August that we found a union that is the right fit for us. Our union election to affiliate with Actors Equity Association (representing mostly live theater actors and stage managers) took place in November but the vote count was delayed until May of this year because the Star Garden owners challenged all of our ballots, claiming

we weren't employees covered by the National Labor Relations Act. When our votes were finally counted we won unanimously, 17-0. Leading up to the hearing that would have determined the outcome of our many Unfair Labor Practice charges, the owners decided to come to a settlement agreement with us that included re-opening the club, hiring us all back and bargaining with the union (they had shut the club and filed for bankruptcy earlier in the year).

Now the club is indeed open and we are working but the Star Garden owners still have not given up their union busting ways. They've set the cover charge and drink prices high enough to deter most customers and some of us are only working one 4 hour shift a week. Despite the challenges we're determined to keep fighting until we secure a fair contract. We can count among our wins a clean club with many improvements including a new stage and pole, competent and compassionate security guards, and a just cause firing policy that has allowed us to stand up to our boss while at work as he's attempted to enforce rules meant to control and demoralize us. It's a super strange club environment right now but we're still having fun with themes and gimmicks on stage. One of us dressed up as Steve (our boss) in jeans and a white t-shirt and surprised everyone when she stripped off the first pair of jeans to reveal 4 more pairs layered underneath LOL.

I feel incredibly blessed to have had the opportunity to travel to New Zealand and attend FUS's first protest in front of the Parliament building. It was so inspiring to travel so far and find an extension of the same community that I came from in Los Angeles. I immediately felt a bond with the FUS strippers who are working tirelessly, fueled by their passion for change and big dreams. Taking a stand against oppression in solidarity with your stripper comrades- and winning- is the best possible feeling. From Wellington to Washington D.C., strippers are changing the world! "

-Velveeta

Organizer, Equity Strippers Noho



The revolution and YOU

Deciding to stand up for your rights is scary, and often for a good reason. Sometimes the issues are so complex you don't even know where to start.

I started by following sex work activists on instagram (specifically Vixen Temple, who is now a FUS organiser. Meet your heroes!!). There are soooo many awesome union strippers on the internet that you can follow.

It really helps to remember that you're not in this alone. If you have questions or concerns related to the movement in Aotearoa, or anything I've written in this book, you can hit us up.

We are still learning how to run a movement and an organisation but our first priority is that it works for the workers, and that is you.

I think my final message is:

Sex workers are incredible people who have achieved incredible things throughout history.

Our success is often ignored (do I need to say it again? wHoRepHoBiA (+transphobia, homophobia, misogyny, racism)) but it is EVERYWHERE when you look hard enough.

We are survivors, boundary breakers, outcasts, feminists, critical thinkers, artists, activists... AND we are hot as fuck. Of course society sees us as a threat.

Workers all over the world are fighting, and have been fighting for a long time, to see our liberation. You are a part of that, and don't you forget it.

Other resources

<https://www.nzpc.org.nz/>

<https://www.employment.govt.nz/starting-employment>

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/nightclubs/page-5>

@equitystrippersnoho

@strippersunited

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