

Summary

This book tells a story extending over almost a hundred years. It begins in England with the minister wife Josephine Butler, who spent a great part of her life to fight the sexual double standard. With prostitution and contagious diseases in tow, the double standard was deeply unfair and insulting. When the state invented regulation of the prostitution to counteract its injurious consequences, Josephine Butler and numerous of women and men became strongly outraged. The fight to abolish the state regulation of prostitution started in England in the late 1860's and was then spread to vast parts of the rest of the world.

At the same time the social worker Benjamin Waugh pointed to the cruel fact, that children were very badly treated in England; a society in strong economic and social transformation. An important part of the cruelty to children was sexual abuse and exploitation. Even Waugh gained plenty of supporters, who wanted to draw the authorities' attention to a grave social problem.

When it was discovered that under age English girls were exported "like animals" to brothels in Belgium, Josephine Butler and Benjamin Waugh got a mutual platform in the suppression of the "white slave traffic". In 1885, the famous English journalist, William Stead, published a series of articles in his paper, Pall Mall Gazette, which caused a strong outcry. He presented a cluster of conclusive proof of the existence of a marked sexual abuse against children in London and how easy it was for a man to buy a young girl as his sex slave. In a short time various changes in the law were carried out. For instance was the age of consent raised from thirteen to sixteen years and the regulation of prostitution was abolished. This occurred about the same time as the working classes got the right to vote. Groups of workers, influenced by Josephine Butler and William Stead, gained strong reasons to be furious with the upper classes' repression of poor people.

As a consequence William Stead started the National Vigilance Association, NVA, in 1885. Its foremost task was to make sure, that the new laws were observed. As time went on William Coote, NVA:s secretary, felt that too little was done to suppress the traffic in women and children. In 1898, he started a journey to several countries in Europe with the intention to raise the regents' interest in a mutual fight against the traffic. In a row of countries national committees were built up and some of them were backed up by governments. In 1899 the first international congress against the white slave traffic took place in London. In 1902, in the first international conference with government representatives, two preliminary agreements for the suppression of the white slave traffic were adopted; "the arrangement" and "the convention", which were sanctioned in Paris 1904 and 1910.

Of tactical reasons NVA avoided to make common cause with the abolitionists – those who wanted to abolish regulation of prostitution in countries where it existed and prevent its incorporation in remaining countries. Accordingly Coote did not agitate for a struggle against regulation of prostitution but only against traffic in women and children. He was himself an abolitionist by heart, he said, but the association could lose its support from reglementarist countries, if it sided with abolitionism.

However many members in NVA were convinced abolitionists. Already during the Congress in London 1899 the ideas of abolitionism went on as an undercurrent in the deliberations. In the same way it was going on during the movements future conventions. At the conference in Wien in 1909, the abolitionists had an advantageous position. And at the congress in London 1913, the national committees took a principal declaration against "the system of brothels as being the foremost support to white slave traffic."

It can thus be pointed out, that there was a broad support of the fight against all forms of organised prostitution in the movement against white slave traffic. It became a task for the League of Nations (LN) to go along with the question. As early as in October 1920, the

council of LN dealt with the question of regulated prostitution. On LN's conference in 1921 the issue was brought up by voluntary organisations; for instance, by the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, originally founded by Josephine Butler, among others. This association claimed, that it was absolutely necessary to map out and prove the origin of the markets of slave trade. In 1923, LN appointed a committee of experts to perform an international investigation. The committee delivered its results in two progress reports 1927 and 1928. In 1928, the National Assembly decided, that the suppression of traffic in women and children should include the whole complex of problems of prostitution.

This decision resulted in a couple of activities. A new convention which changed the stipulations of the convention of 1921 and criminalised traffic in women of age, irrespective of their consent to the trade or not, was taken in 1933. Research about organised prostitution in oriental countries was undertaken. A conference on Java for government representatives from oriental countries was carried out in 1937. Finally in 1938, a convention draft was taken that replaced all earlier agreement and contained strong stipulations against exploitation of the prostitution of others.

Thus my research has disclosed that the League of Nations had a positive attitude to both the suppression of traffic in women and children and of all forms of commercial and organised prostitution. It's not unreasonable to claim, that LN embraced Josephine Butler's and her follower's negative attitude to sexual double standard and saw regulated prostitution as its foremost expression and traffic in women and children as a nasty tool in its service.

The idea was, that if the member states abolished all organised and state regulated prostitution, the slave traders would not have any places to sell their goods. On a private level men could not vindicate themselves with the argument, that their immoral behaviour was supported by the state. It seemed that many states now had a political will in this direction and rejected the system of regulation as antiquated and ineffective. According to an LN-report of

1930 the countries which had outlawed the system of brothels, had steadily increased during the ten years as LN had dealt with these issues. When LN, right before the Second World War, presented a convention draft including stipulations against traffic in persons and the exploitation of the prostitution of others, the member states were obviously seen ready to adopt it. But the plans were stopped by the war and it became a task for the United Nations (UN) to fulfil them.

The 2nd of December 1949 UN's General Assembly adopted the convention draft of 1938. Sweden abstained from voting. The convention was not in accordance with Swedish law. The *Convention for the suppression of the traffic in persons and of the exploitation of the prostitution of others*, came into force in 1951. The UN's secretary general continued to exhort Sweden's governments to underline and ratify the convention, but this did not happen. During 1983-87 there was an interest for an adherence – the law was changed in a way which removed the obstacle for adherence – but finally the convention was dismissed as weak and old-fashioned.

In contrast to the benevolent attitude of the League of Nations to earlier conventions on traffic in women and children, the convention of 1949 got no place on UN's agendas under several decades. But in the archive of the Swedish' ministry for foreign affairs (UD) the issue appears 1975, fitted into the question of slavery. This year UN's Commission on Human Rights in Genève appointed a Sub-commission to deal with the "Question of slavery and the slave trade in all their practises and manifestations, including the slavery-like practises of apartheid and colonialism".

In 1975-1987, a lot of resolutions trickled in to UD, from the Sub-commission, demanding Sweden's attachment to the convention of 1949. Before long Sweden stopped to answer the demands and after 1988 the question dropped off.

Even the question of traffic in women and children was conspicuous by its absence during UN's General Assemblies. Sexual assault and other types of violence against women and children were not referred to in discussions about bad social conditions, crimes against human rights or other degrading treatments.

It seems as the UN-delegates did not have the slightest idea about the existence of the convention of 1949. It was obviously put aside, as soon as it was adopted. It seems that even sexual issues were banned from the UN's agendas. A gap in the history of prostitution and traffic in women and children range from the beginning of 1950 until the beginning of 1980. This can hardly depend on that such phenomena stopped to exist in the same moment as LN was broken up. They were obviously not given any priority. In the "Women convention", adopted by the General Assembly 1979, one can hear an echo from old times in article 6, claiming that the states shall "take all proper measures, including law making, to oppose all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of women's prostitution."

As we all know, the question of traffic in women and children emerged. From the end of 1980 the history repeated itself, so that phenomenon (phenomenons ?) and discussions, very like them which are described in this book, go as a red tread through UN's meetings. European brothels were opened again. Cruelty to children became the same urgent problem, as it was in London a hundred years ago. In the 1990's traffic in women and children came into focus as "trafficking" and as a "modern" appearance.

Since the questions of sexual exploitation of women and especially of children had been brought up again, UN's general assembly have adopted a couple of conventions. UN's child convention (1989) contains stipulations that the states shall protect children against all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual violence. One of the Palermo protocols (2000) deals especially with traffic in women and children. In 2005, the Council of Europe, which was not satisfied with the Palermo protocol, took a convention with the purpose to prevent and fight

against traffic in human beings. Accordingly the two last-mentioned conventions provide the demand for international agreements against traffic in human beings, including traffic for sexual purposes. The child convention (1989) covers the demand for an international agreement against all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual violence against children.

Nevertheless there are important differences between these agreements and the convention of 1949. The latter have the intention to combat “traffic in persons” but also the “exploitation of the prostitution of others”. This means all types of sex traffic, all types of brothel activities, procuring and pimp activities; and not only lucrative and continual activities but also occasional and non profitable. Its stipulations apply to both sexes, and to all ages. *“Whereas prostitution and the accompanying of evil the traffic in persons for the purpose of prostitution are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person and endanger the welfare of the individual, the family and the community.”*

The UN convention which is closest to the convention of 1949, is the above mentioned *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)*. Article 6 in CEDAW has the aim to “suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women”. Here we can see a remnant of the sexual policy of Josephine Butler, Benjamin Waugh, William Stead, William Coote and many other fighters from the Victorian time, coming to life again in the back wash of the feministic era of 1970. But the convention of 1949, which is still valid, seems to be buried alive.

