The Contagious Diseases Acts and Josephine Butler’s True Reason for Repeal

By:

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A bumper sticker once stated that “If guns cause crime, then women cause prostitution.” Not a true statement, of course, but a Victorian Londoner would agree with most of that statement, or the latter half at least. A working class woman would fit the picture of that phrase, and the reason a Victorian Londoner would believe an outrageous statement such as the previous one mentioned, is a result of the events that occurred in the late 1800s. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, a set of acts was passed through Parliament in 1864, 1867, and 1869: the Contagious Diseases Acts. The acts required that prostitutes – or women thought to be prostitutes - living in large garrison towns to undergo periodic medical examinations for venereal diseases.\textsuperscript{1} If a woman was found to have a venereal disease, the acts then put her unwillingly in a special hospital known as a “lock” hospital to receive physical and moral treatment until she was cured.\textsuperscript{2} The Contagious Diseases Acts made a good effort to rid the British military population of venereal disease, but the prejudiced – and even painful – treatment against the women these acts applied to raised concern among feminists, liberals, and the working class. The concerns grew into protests, and many associations like the Ladies’ National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts came as a result of Parliament’s failure to repeal the legislative mistake.\textsuperscript{3} After two decades of feverous protesting, the acts were suspended in 1883 and finally abolished in 1886.

When studying the Contagious Diseases Acts, a scholar may think of their most recognized theme: feminism. Many scholars have tended to focus on that societal area during the time these acts were in effect, and research the leading women of the repeal movement. One woman in particular has received such treatment, and her name is Josephine Butler. Butler was basically the female leader of the repeal campaign and was responsible for rallying many of the supporters in the campaign. Her role in the

\textsuperscript{1} Janet Murray, Strong Minded Women and Other Lost Voices from 19\textsuperscript{th} Century England (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 424.
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid, 424.
\textsuperscript{3} Martha Vicinus, Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 96.
campaign has repeatedly been associated with feminism, but this association is biased on the fact of the
other causes Butler was involved with. People from her time period and even some of the historians of
today make the comparison. Josephine Butler herself stated that that her reasons for being part of the
repeal campaign coincided with the protection of all the citizens’ rights, not exclusively women’s rights.\textsuperscript{4}
Once this distinction is made, however, an individual has to wonder if Butler had the ideals –other than
feminist ideals- of the future political party: the Labour Party. If Josephine Butler claimed truthfully that
her reasons for campaigning against the Contagious Diseases Acts were for lower-class citizens’ rights in
general, then she could have had some of the beginning ideas of the Labour Party that came later.
Nevertheless, one needs to understand the history of the acts before delving into the issue of Josephine
Butler and her political views.

The entire problem began with the military. After the Crimean War, medical statistics from
military returns began to surface and gain the attention of officials because of the alarming information
included in the reports. The shocking information revealed a very high frequency of venereal disease
within the troops after the Crimean War ended.\textsuperscript{5} In fact, the reports of the military since 1823 concluded
that there had been a constant increase in sexually transmitted diseases since that time period.\textsuperscript{6} Therefore,
by the time of 1864, the statistics of the venereal illnesses in the British military were astonishing.
According to Judith R. Walkowitz, “one out of three sick cases in the army were venereal in origin.”
Reforms were put into effect immediately to fix the many problems that were discovered. The problems
ranged from the decrease of men in the army to the high frequency of venereal disease. The correlation
between the unsanitary environment and the rate of venereal diseases resulted in the Army Sanitary
Commission. It was later found out that the commission actually had a positive effect on the illnesses,

1982), 49.
decreasing the disease rate by forty percent. Prostitution, however, still remained an active part of military men’s lifestyle. Venereal disease may have decreased, but the idea of vice being the primary cause of numerous cases of syphilis caused many doctors to argue for the regulation of prostitution. These continuous arguments throughout the early 1860s eventually led up to the introduction of the Bill by Secretary to the Admiralty Lord Clarence Paget on June 20, 1864.

The Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 passed through both houses of Parliament on June 29, 1864. The main clause of the act basically stated that if a police officer- or even a doctor- found a woman in a garrison town to be a prostitute, then that woman was sent to appear before a Justice of the Peace. If the JP was satisfied with the evidence regarding the woman to be an active prostitute, he then ordered the woman to be examined in a licensed hospital. If she was infected with a venereal disease, the JP could then keep her confined in the hospital until the disease was gone. This whole judicial process happened if the woman refused voluntary examination beforehand. This first act also applied to only certain garrison towns, as well.

The first act of 1864 was meant to be temporary to rectify the situation of venereal disease among the troops. Nevertheless, the high approval of the act encouraged extension of its legal power. Plus, there were still a few kinks in the trial system that also encouraged extension. According to the few complaints made by doctors, the idea of police getting information from hospitalized men about the location of certain prostitutes was not very reliable. Of course, this could be a result of the hospitalized men having associations with many prostitutes and them not being able to remember who exactly was to take the blame. Another complaint from the doctors, and officials, was “the legal and administrative loopholes,” of
the act that caused the women to just walk out and never come back. Moreover, there were high expectations for the rate of venereal disease to lower dramatically, but there were actually sudden rises in the rates of the districts placed under the legislation. The extensionists of the acts placed the blame on the prostitutes, saying that the threatening hospitalization caused the women to flee the garrison towns. Furthermore, the opinions of the witnesses for regulation of prostitution during Skey Committee in 1866 proved to be mainly for extension. Since Parliament believed the administrators of the acts, there was no difficulty in making new amendments to the Contagious Diseases Act in 1866. The public unfortunately knew little of the first act, since the writing of anything to do with vice in public media was inappropriate so idea of any substantial opposition was infallible.

The new amendments of the Contagious Diseases Act were added because of the Reform Bill passed by Prime Minister Gladstone on March 15, 1866 and Lord Clarence Paget introduced the second Contagious Diseases Bill in March 1866. The Bill then finally became a legal Act on June 11, 1866. The Contagious Diseases Act of 1866 included two new districts along with the other dock towns under the act’s the legal premises, Chatham and Windsor. The Skey committee also recommended that the act now incorporate the study of the “pathology and treatment” of sexually transmitted diseases. Another clause of the revised act was that all prostitutes were then required to submit to periodic medical examinations every two weeks to see if they needed containment in certified hospitals. The Metropolitan police stationed in garrison towns were required to dress in “plain clothes” to keep a close eye of known prostitutes, as well. In *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, Walkowitz stated that at this point, the term

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Ibid, 78.
Ibid, 77,78.
Ibid, 78.
McHugh, 42.
Ibid, 43.
Walkowitz, 78.
Ibid, 78.
Ibid, 78.
McHugh, 43.
“medical police” was used to describe those officers that kept surveillance of known prostitutes (pg 78). So, in other words, these medical police officers were used as “spy-police.”24 There was also a form of relationship with the spy-police and the government because an Assistant Commission by the name of Captain W.C. Harris was in control of the police force.25

In a prior statement of this paper, the public knew barely anything of the workings of the first Contagious Diseases Act. This lack of public information also continued within the second act. However, the administrators knew that civilians would eventually have to find out about the legislation, and since “medical men” and “civil authorities” already wanted to extend the act’s powers again in 1867, they knew that they had to come up with some sort of special campaign to have the civilians on their side to keep the acts in effect.26 As a result, the Association for Promoting the Extension of the Contagious Diseases Act of 1866 to the Civilian Population was formed and gained the support of conservative political groups, the military, and aristocrats.27 With Gladstone as the Prime Minister during this time, the Parliament was mainly made up of members from the Conservative Party, and the Conservatives would of course support the plan to get rid of venereal disease and lower juvenile prostitution- which statistics had shown a decrease in this form of vice. But, even if there was a decrease in prostitution, the act really went for regulation. Regulation was actually preferred by civil authorities instead of the decrease of vice because they accepted prostitution as a part of life.28

Not everything went smoothly during the peace of the first two acts, however. There were problems going on in some of the “lock” hospitals. Lock hospitals were the designated containment centers made for treating prostitutes with venereal diseases. They made their main appearance in history during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Portsmouth Hospital had trouble keeping an eye on the

Ibid, 44.
Ibid, 44.
Walkowitz, 79.
Ibid, 80.
Ibid, 80.
inmates because of their architecture. This could also contribute to why women walked out of their containment without being noticed during the first act, and this hospital was known for walkouts. The discipline, staff, and cleanliness were questionable, too. Inspectors had to visit the place often to keep it from falling apart and becoming the black sheep of the extension movement. Another holding back of the extension came with the first opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1868. The committee of the Rescue Society, an evangelical group dedicated to saving prostitutes, did not like how the 1866 Act was known as “A dear remedy.” This caused problems for an extension of the act, and it was not until June 8, 1869 that a committee was put in place to see if an extension was a good idea. Thirteen witnesses were present to tell the truth on the effects whether positive or negative. However, all of the witnesses were for the Act since they were either part of the administration or had connections with the public health administration. There were two individuals, however, who were not as biased as the other eleven individuals. Dr. T. Graham Balfour, Deputy Inspector-General of Military Hospitals, and Sir John Simon, Medical Officer to the Privy Council, was present and reported their statistical evidence. The bottom line of their discoveries was that the acts did work in lowering the rate of venereal disease, but the results had not met their expectations. On July 23, 1869, Lord Northbrook, Under-Secretary for War, introduced the third bill and final extension bill of the Contagious Diseases Acts. Surprisingly, even with the start of civilian protests in 1868, the bill passed though the houses of Parliament easily, and came into effect on August 11, 1869.

Ogborn, 45.
McHugh, 47.
Ibid, 47.
33 Ibid, 49.
34 Ibid, 49.
36 Ibid, 51.
37 Ibid, 51.
When the final extension was passed in 1869, the opposition of the Contagious Diseases Acts finally came during the same season. These men and women were mainly composed of the middle class, and held the ideals of feminists, evangelicals, and Republicans; a mixture of religion and political views. These people were just disregarded, though. It was not until December of 1869 that the repeal movement became a force the extensionists had to worry about. The largest worry of all had to be the feminist movement that reacted to the acts as a repression of women’s rights. It all began when Dr. Elizabeth Wolstenholme contacted Josephine Butler to create an organized movement for the repeal of the acts. Fatefully, Butler agreed, and so began the campaign and the Ladies’ National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. The LNA formed the main female organization against the acts while the National Association formed the male version. The two were gender-separated even though both fought for the same cause. Other associations were lined up for repeal, as well. One was just for the cause of feminism, but it still fought against the acts: the Vigilance Association for the Defense of Personal Rights (Butler partook in this organization, too). The Society of Friends campaigned for the same cause, as well.

The arguments for repeal remained a constant throughout their existence during the fourteen years of protest. Their reasons were outlined by Josephine Butler in her “The Ladies’ Appeal and Protest against the Contagious Diseases Acts” in 1870. She gave eight reasons for the LNA’s arguments in this petition. The first reason Butler made was that the representatives of the public and press had an obligation to talk over any form of legislation before putting it to effect on the citizens. The second and third; the police

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38 Ibid, 55.
40 Ibid, 93.
41 Ibid, 93.
42 Ibid, 93.
43 Roberts, 88, 89.
44 Walkowitz, 93.
45 Murray, 428-431.
46 Ibid, 429.
had too much power over their decisions of who was a prostitute, and the acts defied liberty. The fourth and fifth; the acts punished the vice, but not the “main causes” of prostitution and the results, and the State makes it clear that vice is a part of life even if the act is immoral. Finally, the last three points made by Butler; the medical examinations and treatments are “cruel,” the decreasing rates of the disease are nothing compared to the immorality and the number of prostitutes, and last of all, the “morality” of venereal disease is the main cause, not the effects of the disease. These arguments of Butler basically embodied the main arguments of the entire feminist movement against the acts.

The medical side of the repeal movement had other reasons. One was that not all prostitutes suffered from venereal diseases and could be infected with other maladies that were harder to distinguish. Syphilis, the most common of venereal diseases, proved difficult to diagnose, as well, and the instruments used to examine the women could have been contaminated, resulting in other health problems. The doctors against the acts did agree with the feminist movement on one aspect, though. They believed that the medical police could accidentally –or intentionally- arrest an innocent woman, forcing her to “voluntarily” undergo examination.

While the LNA helped move along the repeal campaign tremendously, one can not forget the main association for the extension of the acts: The Association for the Extension of the Contagious Diseases Acts, which formed back in 1866. The LNA and the AE formed the two rival organizations. The repealers had their fair arguments, but the extensionists also had convincing reasons. The first being that prostitution was a part of life that needed to be regulated. Then, the lock hospitals provided moral and medical treatments, so along with convalescing; the prostitute would be encouraged to give up her sinful

48 Ibid, 431.
49 Ibid, 431.
50 Vicinus, Suffer and be Still, 96.
51 Ibid, 96
52 Ibid, 96.
53 Ibid, 96.
54 Ibid, 96
Another point for regulation was that men and women are apparently different since they “stood in a different relation to the contraction of the venereal disease by prostitution.”\footnote{Ibid, 96.} Next, the extensionists completely contradict the doctors’ point of the medical police’s high probability of accidentally arresting an innocent woman; the police could not do such a thing since they knew everything about the brothels and who lived there.\footnote{Ibid, 97.} Finally, one of the most convincing arguments the extensionists had was statistical evidence.\footnote{Ibid, 97.} Evidence proved a decrease in the number of prostitutes and venereal disease rates in the military.\footnote{Ibid, 97.} The statistical evidence of the decrease in prostitution only probably came as a result of women escaping the garrison towns.

Over the years between 1870 and 1886, the number of repeal organizations increased and varied the political nucleus of the campaign.\footnote{Walkowitz, 94.} Throughout the sixteen years of fighting for the same cause, different political leagues joined in. These organizations included the Northern Counties League, the Midlands Electoral League, the Quakers, the Wesleyans, and the Congregationalists.\footnote{Ibid, 94.} Even though, these political alliances provided challenges for the governing Liberal Party in the early 1870s, the repeal movement proved unsuccessful in Parliament and capturing the interest of the press and public.\footnote{Ibid, 95, 96.} When Gladstone’s government lost the 1874 election, however, the repeal movement had their chance to have a say in Parliament. James Stansfeld, MP for Halifax, encompassed everything the repeal movement stood for.\footnote{Wikipedia, “James Stansfeld,” \textit{Wikipedia} [home page on-line]; available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Stansfeld; Internet; accessed on 9 November, 2008.} This man became the “national leader” for the repeal campaign, and added more electoral leagues to the movement.\footnote{Walkowitz, 97.} Moreover, Stansfeld knew that the repeal movement needed foolproof statistical –both
scientific and medical-evidence like the extension campaign, so he helped establish the National Medical Association in 1875. The repealers finally got what they wanted, attention inside of Parliament. Plus, now that they had supporters in the form of Radicals, the campaign moved faster.

Both supporters and opponents of the Contagious Diseases Acts had convincing arguments, but the acts were eventually abolished. The repealers had zeal and their muses by the names of Henry J. Wilson of Sheffield and Josephine Butler on their side while the extensionists just had empirical data. The acts were an honorable idea, with wanting to decrease the rate of venereal disease amongst the military and to save the members of vice. The administrators’ ambition soon turned from honor to greed in the pursuit of more power within the Parliament. Moreover, the police posted in garrison town were given too much power over the women. The other reasons the acts were abolished included the limited area they had power over. Even if the number of prostitutes decreased, the soldiers just went somewhere else in search of brothels, and that somewhere else was usually London. The next reason was how much it cost to keep the acts in effect. In order to make them as effective as possible, an insurmountable amount of money would be needed. Theoretically, the cost would equal £100,000 annually and £500,000 initially. Taxes would have increased, and historically speaking, every time taxes were increased for government expense the public would greatly disapprove. Because of these problems, the Contagious Diseases Acts were suspended in 1883. They were finally abolished in 1886 because of the suspension. Afterwards, most of the repeal organizations ceased to exist with the exception of the LNA. Even though the acts were repealed in 1886, the LNA continued campaigning for the discontinuation of the acts in India until 1915.

65 Ibid, 97.
66 Vicinus, 98.
67 Ibid, 98.
68 Ibid, 98.
69 Ibid, 98.
71 Walkowitz, 99.
72 Ibid, 99.
The legacy of the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869 were unique in respect to politics. Included in the fold of repeal groups, trade unionists made their rise onto the political scene.\(^{73}\) The trade unionists, along with the other working-class repeal groups, stated that the acts were “class legislation” since they only applied to poor class women in which prostitution was classified with.\(^{74}\) In fact, the Trade Union Congress was established in 1871 as the main Parliament of labour.\(^{75}\) The working-class mainly wanted “equality before the law.”\(^{76}\) Then, there is the aide to feminism. Feminism existed before the acts, of course, but the activism increased with the repeal movement and its various women’s organizations. Since social change came with the acts, women thought that social change was possible for them, too. This soon led to the suffragette movement towards the end of the nineteenth century.

The writings of the history of the Contagious Diseases Acts can sometimes be one-sided and mainly over the same, lasting effect brought by the repeal movement. This was the feminist movement. References to the CDAs have been laced throughout many accounts of the Ladies’ National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, the accounts of Josephine Butler, and the repression of lower-class women. Most of these accounts were written by women, as well. Janet Murray in her *Strong-Minded Women* writes commentaries on speeches and essays to give the idea of how the different classes of Victorian woman lived, and how they suffered\(^{77}\). Right at the end of Murray’s account, there is a section of the CDAs, but she mainly focuses on how unfairly the prostitutes were treated, how the men were to blame, and how Josephine Butler came to the rescue during the repeal campaign. The speeches and essays of Butler can be found throughout the book. Then, the next mention of the CDAs occurs in Ann Loades’ *Feminist Theology*. The title explains itself, but the acts are mainly mentioned in the

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\(^{74}\) Biagini, 159.  
\(^{76}\) Ibid, 161.  
\(^{77}\) Murray, 3, 4.
lengthy section discussing Josephine Butler’s life. The author gave the reader accounts of the many causes Butler was involved in besides the acts: abolition of slavery, domestic violence, and raising the age of consent. Judith R. Walkowitz took her approach in a more unbiased manner in *Prostitution and Victorian Society* and *City of Dreadful Delight* than the previous two authors. If a scholar or student were to read first of these accounts, they would find both sides of the argument. Instead of just saying that the administration of the CDAs made a terrible mistake in passing that legislation, Walkowitz actually gave both sides of the argument, and detailed sections about the many aspects involved throughout each aspect of the acts. In a *City of Dreadful Delight*, the author writes mainly of prostitution and the sexual danger between the dates of two “newspaper scandals”: W.T. Stead’s “exposé of child prostitution” in 1886 titled “Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon,” and then in 1888, the “tabloid reporting” of Jack the Ripper and his murders. The author does mention the Contagious Diseases Acts, though, on a few pages. Surprisingly, however, she does not write of the effects the acts had on prostitution, but on Josephine Butler aiding the cause of repeal and aiding the “fallen women.” The full-length works previously mentioned represent the main idea of the amount the CDAs have been portrayed in historical accounts. They are either not discussed enough, or the entire book discusses the subject. Unfortunately, there is a lack of the number of books that mention the acts in depth.

Besides the subject of feminism, accounts of the CDAs have included other aspects of the legislation. Walkowitz in *Prostitution and Victorian Society* mentions the political and legal point of views besides the social point of views. She mentions the different political parties involved with both the extension and repeal campaign; how the Liberal Party had control of Gladstone’s Parliament, and how liberal radicalism made an appearance in the repeal campaign. Another source that mentions politics and

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80 Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 90.
the CDAs is in Biagini’s *Liberty, Retrenchment, and Reform*. The author makes a comparison between the CDAs and the Criminal Law Amendment Act that lasted from 1871 and 1875.\(^81\) The two laws were made on the basis of doubt, and they both ended up having opposition from the trade unionists and Nonconformists, along with other repeal groups.\(^82\) In fact, Biagini stated that the CDAs and the CLAA helped give the radicals, trade unionists, and the Nonconformists a better standing in politics.\(^83\)

Next, there are the scholars that write their own scholarly articles about the CDAs or other aspects associated with the acts. M. J. D. Roberts writes a great deal over the acts and the feminist opposition in her article, “Feminism and the State in Later Victorian England,” along with Margaret Hamilton in “Opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts, 1864-1886.” Though, Hamilton mentions Stansfeld and his fight within the House of Commons after the fall of the Liberal Party in 1874.\(^84\) Again, the sources go back to history of feminism when concerning the legislation. One article by Miles Ogborn named “Law and Discipline in the Nineteenth Century English State Formation: The Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869,” discusses the governmental background before the acts, and then emphasizes the problem of discipline enforced through the legislation.\(^85\) Other articles that included references to the CDAs actually included Josephine Butler, but they were not about feminism. Instead, the connection between Butler and the Labour Party was made.

When concerning primary sources, like articles in *The Times*, the references to the Contagious Diseases Acts that did not refer to animals were difficult to locate. Moreover, the supply is scarce. The first mention to the public of the acts in the Press did not occur until after the second extension of the act had taken place. The reason for the scarcity coincides with Victorian values. The Press was not going to

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\(^{81}\) Biagini, 159, 160.
\(^{82}\) Ibid, 160.
\(^{83}\) Ibid, 60.
\(^{85}\) Ogborn, 28.
publish anything that had to do with the social vice; it was unheard of. That is, until the administration of the acts realized they would need public support before the 1866 extension bill was passed. However, the total number of articles in The Times never went over twenty. The Shield, though, was the main journal for the repeal movement. This journal was considered “cosmopolitan, republican, and the constitutional wing” for the entire movement against the CDAs. The first paper published on the CDAs occurred on January 10, 1868, and the paragraph-long article talked of Dr. Berkley and his published finds on how the CDAs had a negative effect on venereal disease in the women examined. Other primary sources consist of speeches by Dr. William Acton, a supporter of extension, and Josephine Butler. The works of Butler predominated, of course. Instead of the ideals of feminism, however, the ideals of equality for all citizens resounded throughout her speeches and essays. In fact, there some scholarly sources that mention Butler along with the discussion of the Labour Party.

Josephine Butler was born in 1828 to John Grey and Hannah Annett, an upper-class family for social reform. In 1852, she married George Butler, who was “an examiner of schools in Oxford.” and only within the first five years of their union, the couple ended up already having four children. After they moved to Cheltenham, the American Civil War was occurring and the Butlers supported the Union’s ideas of abolishing slavery. Later on, in 1867, Josephine Butler heard about the trouble with women’s education, so she helped the cause for women’s advanced studies in universities in which Butler was victorious. She even became the president of the North of England Council for the Higher Education of

86 McHugh, 39.
87 Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society, 92.
88 Ibid, 92.
89 The Times, 10 January, 1868
91 Ibid, “Josephine Butler.”
92 Ibid, “Josephine Butler.”
93 Ibid, “Josephine Butler.”
Women because she was so successful.\textsuperscript{94} She continued on with the women’s education movement, until she was called forth in 1869 to help with the repeal movement of the Contagious Diseases Acts. During this campaign was when she made the most public appearances, and when she stood out from most of the feminists in the LNA. Of course, George Butler became very unpopular because of his wife’s opposition.\textsuperscript{95} Along with being against the CDAs, it was apparent that Josephine Butler also campaigned against child prostitution.\textsuperscript{96} This movement was also a strong force to be dealt with, so the Parliament had to handle two oppositions around the late nineteenth century. The child prostitution opposition made quicker success, however, since the age of consent was raised the age of consent from thirteen-years old to sixteen-years old.\textsuperscript{97} This legislation was passed in 1871, and went by the name of the Criminal Law Amendment Act.\textsuperscript{98} This act, too, was unpopular and received opposition until it was revoked in 1875.\textsuperscript{99} During the last few years of her life, Butler actually associated with the suffragette movement in England, showing that she was a figure involved in generations of the historical beginnings of the feminists’ cause.\textsuperscript{100}

In the pamphlet “Some Thoughts on the Present Aspect of the Crusade Against the State Regulation of Vice” – published in 1874- she summarized that all aspects of the repeal movement were important, especially the organizations, whether evangelical or radical.\textsuperscript{101} It was not just a feminist campaign. Another statement of Butler, referenced in M. J. D. Roberts’s article also emphasized how Butler believed that the acts may have repressed the lower-class women, but the citizens’ rights were also

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{94} Ibid, “Josephine Butler.”
\item \textsuperscript{95} Ibid, “Josephine Butler.”
\item \textsuperscript{96} Ibid, “Josephine Butler.”
\item \textsuperscript{97} Ibid, “Josephine Butler.”
\item \textsuperscript{98} Biagini, 160.
\item \textsuperscript{99} Biagini, 160.
\item \textsuperscript{100} Spartacus Educational, “Josephine Butler.”
\item \textsuperscript{101} Victorian Women Writer’s Project, “Some Thoughts on the Present Aspect of the Crusade Against the State Regulation of Vice,” Victorian Women Writer’s Project [home page on-line]; available from http://www.indiana.edu/~letrs/vwwp/butler/thoughts.html; Internet; accessed on 10 November, 2008.
\end{itemize}
in danger. Unlike her abolition campaigns and women’s education campaigns, all of the citizens of England had rights which could be put in danger if the extension movement won. The citizens of the working-class were on Butler’s side on the act of repealing, but they wanted it for different reasons than for citizens’ rights. The working-class men worried that the regulation of prostitution would move the vice closer to where they lived, and put the women in the family in danger of being under suspicion. Because the working class men were on Butler’s side of the campaign, the beginnings of the Labour Party could have started to form during the repeal movement. The Trade Union Congress formed in 1871 as the main Parliament for labour, so that is evidence for the party’s formation.

To conclude this paper, the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1868 were important in the government’s history and the women’s history in England. The Metropolitan Police were given extra powers because of the administrators. The special “medical police” used those increased powers to put any woman in a designated garrison town that they suspected of soliciting prostitution under arrest. If she was put under arrest, the woman then had to submit “voluntarily” to medical examination. If she did not submit voluntarily, however, she then had to appear before a Justice of the Peace to try –usually in vain- to prove she was not a prostitute. Most of the time, the woman was sentenced as guilty and put in jail, or hard labor. As a result of these unfair conditions, a repeal movement began in 1869. The Ladies’ National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts became the main rival of the extension campaign, and the most important individual of this woman’s association was Josephine Butler.

When studying the Contagious Diseases Acts, a scholar may think of their most recognized theme: feminism. Many scholars have tended to focus on that societal area during the time these acts were in

102 Roberts, 90.
104 Harrison, 139, 140.
105 Pelling, 4.
106 Walkowitz, Prostitution and the Victorian State, 90.
107 Murray, 424.
effect, and research the leading women of the repeal movement. One woman in particular has received such treatment, and her name is Josephine Butler. Butler was basically the female leader of the repeal campaign and was responsible for rallying many of the supporters in the campaign. Her role in the campaign has repeatedly been associated with feminism, but this association is biased on the fact of the other causes Butler was involved with. People from her time period and even some of the historians of today make the comparison. Josephine Butler herself stated that her reasons for being part of the repeal campaign coincided with the protection of all the citizens’ rights, not exclusively women’s rights.\textsuperscript{110} Once this distinction is made, however, an individual has to wonder if Butler had the ideals—other than feminist ideals—of the future political party: the Labour Party. If Josephine Butler claimed truthfully that her reasons for campaigning against the Contagious Diseases Acts were for lower-class citizens’ rights in general, then she could have had some of the beginning ideas of the Labour Party that came later. Nevertheless, one needs to understand the history of the acts before delving into the issue of Josephine Butler and her political views.

Primary Sources:
*The Times.*


This university website has a wide collection of works by Victorian writers, so it is a good site for primary sources. It would appeal to both students and scholars.

Secondary Sources:


This web site can be beneficial to students who would like to know a basic chronological overview of the life of Josephine Butler.


This online article does not count for the actual number of sources on this bibliography, but it was helpful in learning some background on James Stansfeld