

For free abortion on demand!

No to the government's anti-woman abortion referendum!

The government's March 6 referendum to overturn the X Case and to further cement the constitutional ban on abortion is a deadly threat to women. Ireland already has among the strictest anti-abortion laws in Europe. If this referendum passes it will put the wind in the sails of the reactionaries and make the fight for women's rights of any sort more difficult. The Dublin Spartacist Group says: *Vote no in the government's anti-woman referendum! For free abortion on demand in Ireland!*

Every year more than 8000 women from Ireland (including the North, where abortion is also virtually illegal) have to make the trip to Britain to obtain an abortion. For working-class women this often means having to borrow from moneylenders at extortionate rates. Because of the difficulties in arranging travel, Irish women have a much higher rate of late-term abortions than British women, with a greater danger of complications. Many other women are forced to carry to term unwanted pregnancies because of the social stigma associated with having an abortion or because they are unable to afford the cost of the trip. *There is an urgent need for abortion facilities in Ireland!* When the Dutch "Women on Waves" abortion ship was in Dublin for a week last June over 300 women contacted it seeking its services.

Ireland is a vicious clericalist state under the sway of the Catholic hierarchy and a rotten hellhole for women (as well as for immigrants, Travellers, gays and workers). Divorce, only legalised in 1997, remains prohibitively expensive and requires that the spouses have lived apart for at least four of the preceding five years (!); childcare is often unafford-

able for working-class women if places are even available. Women are daily victims of horrific levels of rapes and domestic violence.

In the context of a growing recession and the widespread recognition that the "Celtic Tiger" economic expansion is finished and that working people didn't get anything out of it, this government is desperate to get re-elected by fulfilling its promise to copper-fasten Ireland's almost total ban on abortion. The government was shaken by their defeat last year in the Nice Treaty referendum. Now they want to win back the support of those who helped to defeat that referendum based on reactionary opposition to abortion (which the Treaty did not include). Furthermore, as Conor Ryan wrote in the *London Independent* (20 November 2001) in an article entitled "The Celtic Tiger is losing its teeth and seeking refuge in religion": "Another divisive abortion debate will distract attention from concerns about the Irish health and transport services—and the economic slowdown".

Over the nearly 20 years since the first anti-abortion referendum in 1983, the attitudes of many people towards questions of sexuality and the Church have undergone dramatic changes. Particularly as many women have taken jobs outside the home, the Church's "morality" is broadly resented and often ignored. Despite this change in attitudes the Catholic Church maintains a stranglehold on society. The Church is closely tied to the capitalist state and controls key social institutions including most of the hospitals and 93 per cent of national schools (with another six per cent being run by the Church of Ireland). In its budget for the year 2000, the government proposed

For women's liberation through socialist revolution!

revising the tax bands to encourage married women to enter the labour market because of perceived labour shortages. But it was forced to back off when the bishops condemned this "attack on the family". *For the separation of church and state! For free quality healthcare for all!*

The petty-bourgeois nationalists of Sinn Féin share basically the same position on abortion as the clericalist state: that it should be permitted only "where a woman's mental and physical well-being or life is at risk or in grave danger" (*Irish Times*, 6 December 2001). In the North, the Unionist, Loyalist, and Nationalist parties are almost unanimous in their opposition to abortion rights. At a Stormont debate on extending Britain's 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland the DUP, UUP, Alliance Party and SDLP all opposed legalising abortion. Significantly, although Sinn Féin's Bairbre de Brún is health minister in the sham Executive, Sinn Féin absented themselves from the vote.

Labourite fake left, an obstacle to the fight for women's rights

The main leftist opposition to the government's referendum is the Alliance for a No Vote (ANV), led by Labour Party activists like Ivana Bacik and made up of fake leftists like the Socialist Party, Socialist Workers Party (SWP), and Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM). Taking their cue from the Labour Party the ANV consciously tailor their demands to what they think the clericalist state will grant: maintenance of the miserable status quo. Labour staunchly defends the Supreme Court ruling in the X Case on the grounds that "if another case such as the 'X' case emerges a suicidal pregnant rape victim would be entitled to an abortion in this country" (*Irish Times*, 8 February). This we are obscenely told is defending "abortion rights" in Ireland!

At the launch meeting of the ANV, it was only the Spartacist speaker from the floor who raised the call for *free abortion on demand in Ireland* and for the separation of church and state, which the assembled fake leftists sneered at. When it counts they are all silent about a "woman's right to choose", (which is meaningless if you don't have the money) let alone "free abortion".

The ANV and all of the parties involved in it are obstacles to the fight for women's rights now just as they were in 1992 when thousands demonstrated in the streets for abortion rights around the X Case. Coming out of those militant struggles there was an expectation that there would be some advancement of abortion rights. However, nearly ten years on women can still not get abortions in Ireland. At the time of the X Case the reformists' campaign was called "Repeal the 8th Amendment

Campaign" which we described as the "Keep Abortion Illegal Campaign" since it did not touch the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act (a holdover from British colonial rule) which firmly prohibits abortion.

The reformist fake left push the "politics of the possible" rather than fighting for what is in the interests of women and the working class. Because these opportunists adapt to the national terrain in which they operate, they remain firmly lodged in the framework of Irish clericalism. Their line in this referendum is almost indistinguishable from that hotbed of radicalism the Irish Medical Council which last year voted that a termination of pregnancy is permissible where there is "a real and substantial risk to the life of the mother" (*Irish Times*, 13 September 2001). A motion to exclude the threat of suicide as a ground for abortion was defeated.

In an article headlined "No referendum! legislation now!" the SWP explicitly argues for maintaining the status quo: abortion rights in Ireland for women who are suicidal and the "right" of all other women to take the boat to Holyhead!

"There is no need for another referendum. In 1992 the Supreme Court judgement in the X-case accepted that women who are suicidal do have a right to abortion.

In a three part referendum that same year, there was an overwhelming vote in favour of the right of women to travel for abortions, in favour of abortion being available and against a move to reverse the Supreme Court judgement.

People voted to make abortion available here for women who are suicidal because of an intolerable pregnancy."

— *Socialist Worker*, 17-30 September 1999

The SWP are crawlers for Labour and their "fight" for abortion rights is subordinate to this. Thus they supported Labour's anti-abortion candidate Adi Roche in the last presidential election.

Both the Socialist Party (*Voice*, October 2001) and the WSM (*Workers Solidarity*, May-June 2001) condemn the "hypocrisy" of the Irish government, saying Ireland "exports its problems" rather than dealing with them at home. Only someone in the grip of Catholic "morality" would speak of abortion as one of Ireland's "problems". The Socialist Party goes so far as to call on bourgeois parties "to prove that they really are 'pro-life' by providing a properly funded and staffed health service. This would include full services for reproductive health, including abortion when necessary, and would put an end to the hypocrisy that allows us to pretend that the 8,000 women travelling to England every year don't exist" (*Voice*, October 1999). The Socialist Party disgustingly panders to the anti-woman, anti-abortion bigots by accepting their

terminology and limiting themselves to calling for "abortion when necessary".

Winning any meaningful abortion rights (and a decent health system) will require social struggle against the anti-abortion bigots and the capitalist clericalist state and the church behind them. We seek to link this to the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat to overthrow the capitalist bloodsuckers.

For the separation of church and state!

The government assures the "pro-life" bigots that they are getting what they have campaigned almost a decade for. The reactionaries are split however, with William Binchey's "Pro-Life Campaign" and the Catholic bishops supporting the referendum and the likes of the Youth Defence scum (obscenely styling themselves the "Mother and Child Campaign") opposing it based on their view that under the proposal human embryos "will not have legal protection from conception". Youth Defence is an action group of extreme anti-abortion bigots that harbours a violent, clerical-fascist core. It has links to anti-abortion groups in the US that have murdered doctors who provide abortions and Youth Defence has a history of attacking family planning clinics and leftists here. We fight to make the working class conscious of the necessity to fight for abortion rights, which requires a political battle against the Labour Party and trade union bureaucrats who bring bourgeois consciousness into the working class and who tie workers to church and state.

Over the past period the expanding Irish economy created an increased demand for cheap labour and many more women entered the workforce, albeit often in low paid, temporary or part-time jobs and for less pay than men. The growing recession means women will be hardest hit as can be seen with the closures and redundancies for example at Gateway Computers, Kylemore Bakeries and Aer Lingus. The working class must be made conscious of the necessity to defend all specially oppressed groups against attacks by the ruling class. This includes fighting against the underlying bourgeois ideology that women for instance should be confined to domestic drudgery, raising children and "women's work". It is this ideology, of which bans on abortion are a crucial part, which the capitalists use to justify paying women less and making them redundant before men, thereby dividing and weakening the working class as a whole.

The fundamental institution for the oppression of women is the patriarchal family which arose historically alongside the development of private property and the division of society into classes. As a means of the consolidation of wealth in the hands of a tiny minority, the patriarchal family enforced

monogamy for women so that inheritance of property would be easier to determine. The family is also a great conservatising force. The ruling class uses it to regiment the population and make it more willing to accept capitalist exploitation and imperialist war. As Friedrich Engels explained in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, with the development of the family domestic work was also transformed from a social to a private function:

"The administration of the household lost its public character. It was no longer the concern of society. It became a *private service*. The wife became the first domestic servant, pushed out of participation in social production. Only modern large-scale industry again threw open to her—and only to the proletarian woman at that—the avenue to social production; but in such a way that, when she fulfils her duties in the private service of her family, she remains excluded from public production and cannot earn anything; and when she wishes to take part in public industry and earn her living independently, she is not in a position to fulfil her family duties. What applies to the woman in the factory applies to her in all the professions, right up to medicine and law. The modern individual family is based on the open or disguised domestic enslavement of the woman; and modern society is a mass composed solely of individual families as its molecules."

Organised religion is another prop of this decaying capitalist system, tying the oppressed to their present plight with the promise of a better life after death. Hand in hand with the capitalists, the churches of many persuasions (not just Catholicism but Protestantism, Judaism, Islam, etc) serve to enforce bourgeois morality—to maintain the subjugation of women.

Many young people who oppose the oppression of women and who see themselves as radicals or socialists consider abortion to be murder. In a poll last summer, 62 per cent of respondents favoured the availability of abortion in Ireland in certain circumstances. However, only 19 per cent said abortion should be available "when a woman believed that, for her, it was the right choice" (*Irish Times*, 1 June 2001). The absence of the sense that abortion is a democratic right and a purely private matter between a woman and her doctor is an example of the pervasive influence of the Catholic Church in Irish society, which the fake "left" deny.

Abortion is a simple and safe medical procedure, not a moral issue. All of the talk about the "rights of the unborn" is double-talk to deny the rights of the woman and with little concern for the child *after birth*. Thus, in the early 1950s when Noël Browne as Minister of Health proposed the Mother and Child Scheme to provide free health-care for mothers and children, Archbishop McQuaid led the crusade to run Browne out of

government! The health of women and children meant nothing compared to the so-called "threat" to the sanctity of the family.

This clericalist state's supposed concern for the "unborn" was also shown to be rubbish in the High Court in January. The court ruled against a pregnant Nigerian woman who appealed an order for her deportation, arguing that because infant mortality is so much higher in Nigeria, the baby would have a better chance of living if she gave birth in Ireland. The High Court ruled that, in the absence of any adverse medical condition of the mother's, the right to life of the "unborn" was not an issue in the case. The racist state was set on preventing her child from being born here as an Irish citizen and didn't care that the baby may not survive birth in Nigeria! *Full citizenship rights for all immigrants! No deportations!*

For a revolutionary workers party to fight for a socialist revolution!

The liberation of women requires the overthrow of the capitalist system of private property in the means of production through workers revolution.

The establishment of a planned economy based on collectivised property will provide the basis for allowing women to take an equal part in production. As Engels explained:

"With the passage of the means of production into common property, the individual family ceases to be the economic unit of society. Private housekeeping is transformed into a social industry. The care and education of the children becomes a public matter. Society takes care of all children equally, irrespective of whether they are born in wedlock or not."

A revolutionary vanguard party is necessary to instil the working class with the political consciousness to understand its historic tasks, like Lenin's Bolshevik Party which led the working class to overthrow capitalism in Russia in 1917. We fight to build such a revolutionary party, tribune of the people, which is able to react to every manifestation of oppression and lead the proletariat to new October Revolutions. *For an Irish workers republic as part of a federation of workers republics in the British Isles!*

—14 February 2002

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