

# **WORKERS HAMMER**



**Ireland: Repeal the Eighth Amendment!  
No illusions in capitalist Dáil**

## **Fight for free abortion on demand!**

MARCH 7 — The upcoming referendum in Ireland on repealing the Eighth Amendment is a long-overdue opportunity to get rid of this vile anti-woman provision of the Constitution. On its own though, repealing the Eighth won't bring any abortion rights. Even without the constitutional guarantee of the "right to life of the unborn", abortion will still be criminalised under the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act (2013), except when the pregnant woman's life is in danger.

Under pressure from a population fed up with reactionary Catholic Ireland, the government is promising legislation to allow abortion, possibly on request in the first twelve weeks of pregnancy. If it became law, such a provision would certainly be welcome. It would be a more liberal regime than that in Britain, where women (including thousands of Irish women every year) are required to get two doctors to attest that continuing their pregnancy would damage their physical or mental health, or that the child would be severely disabled. We Marxists are in favour of any reform that workers or the oppressed can wrest from the capitalist ruling class, but we recognise that the full emancipation of women is only possible with the overthrow of capitalism itself.

Almost all of the groups involved in the fight to repeal the Eighth are affiliated to the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, a class-collaborationist lash-up which includes bourgeois feminist and gay rights groups, several trade unions and the reformists of the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Network. Dominated by feminists, this coalition limits its

demands to what it thinks will be acceptable to the bourgeoisie, rather than fighting for what working-class women actually need. The Coalition urges people to email their TDs and appeal to these representatives of bourgeois rule to be "open-minded, courageous and compassionate". This statement promotes the most ridiculous illusions in the Dáil. The bourgeois Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, helped at times by the Labour Party, have taken turns administering the anti-woman clericalist capitalist Irish state.

Fighters for women's rights cannot place any trust in the promises of the Irish government — the executive committee of the ruling class. While the Catholic Church and its teachings are widely scorned in Ireland today, the church still wields considerable power, not least through its control of schools and hospitals. ***For the separation of church and state!***

Even if abortion is to some extent legalised, there will surely be obstacles to obtaining an abortion in practice, especially for working-class, immigrant and Traveller women. A twelve-week limit, for instance, would still be a severe restriction on women's rights. In Britain, nearly ten per cent of abortions are carried out after twelve weeks. Abortion is a safe and simple medical procedure that should be completely decriminalised and treated as purely a healthcare issue. It should be available to any woman who wants it without restriction. ***For free abortion on demand!***

The government has suggested that medical abortions will be provided by GPs, for which most women will presumably be expected to fork out the usual €50 or so, plus prescription fees for abortion

**For women's liberation through socialist revolution**

pills, antibiotics if needed etc. In today's capitalist Ireland, those with money can easily obtain medical treatment, while those who can't afford it are placed on ever growing waiting lists. The fight for abortion rights must be tied to a fight for quality healthcare for all, free at the point of delivery!

Health minister Simon Harris has assured medical professionals that they can refuse to provide terminations. Such a loophole could make abortion difficult to obtain even if it were legal. A similar "conscience" clause in Italy has resulted in 70 per cent of gynaecologists refusing to perform abortions. GPs and clinics which do end up providing abortion services would likely find themselves besieged by militant anti-abortion forces.

Anti-abortion reactionaries are already mobilising to prevent repeal of the Eighth Amendment, including with a nationwide billboard campaign by the arch-conservative Iona Institute and a 10 March rally in Dublin to "Save the 8th". The working class, which has the requisite numbers, organisation and social power, must be mobilised at the forefront of the fight to win abortion rights and defend them against the forces of clerical reaction.

While gains for women and the oppressed can be won under capitalism, the bourgeoisie constantly attempts to reverse them. In Britain, the 1967 Abortion Act, without decriminalising abortion, did broaden its availability. However, in 1990, the legal time limit was reduced from 28 to 24 weeks; now the Tories' vice chair for women, Maria Caulfield, is calling for it to be further lowered. In the States, abortion rights granted by the *Roe v Wade* Supreme Court decision have been rolled back time and again.

Underlying the restrictions on abortion rights is the institution of the family — the root of women's

oppression, and a key prop of the capitalist system — and the idea that motherhood is a woman's destiny. For the bourgeoisie, the family is used to pass property on to the next generation. For the working class, the family — in which women are consigned to running the household and rearing the next generation — inculcates and reinforces bourgeois ideology and morals and, above all, obedience to authority.

The primacy of the family and women's role within it are enshrined in the clericalist capitalist Irish state's Constitution. The repugnant Article 41 recognises the family "as a moral [!] institution" and pledges the state to prevent mothers from having to go to work "to the neglect of their duties in the home"! The entry of women into the working class opens the way to their liberation: their position at the point of production gives them the social power, along with the entire working class, to overturn the capitalist system. The fight for women's liberation is inseparable from the fight for international socialist revolution. Under the rule of the working class, a collectivised, internationally planned economy, will lay the economic basis for the socialising of childcare and housework, freeing women to play a full and equal role in social and political life.

Conditions for women in the North are no better than in Southern Ireland. The intertwining of social and national oppression can only be equitably resolved through a proletarian revolution on both sides of the border and both sides of the Irish Sea. The International Communist League, including its British section the Spartacist League/Britain, fights for the construction of Trotskyist parties which can lead the working class to power through socialist revolution. *For an Irish workers republic, part of a voluntary federation of workers republics in the British Isles!*

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