

Time to defend abortion rights... again

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The 1967 Abortion Act legalised abortion in Britain and went a long way in freeing working class women from dangerous and often deadly 'backstreet' abortion techniques – but not in Northern Ireland where the act has never been implemented.

The 1967 Act, combined with other advances such as the introduction of the contraceptive pill, was a huge step forward for women, giving them some control over their own fertility for the first time. Unfortunately, just like all other victories won under capitalism, we have to fight to maintain them.

Recent weeks have seen an escalation of reactionary attacks on the gains won by women during the last century. The most visible of these has been the avalanche of deeply offensive rape-victim-blaming, with some politicians and police falling over each other to suggest that women (and even children) who have experienced sexual abuse were somehow 'asking for it'.

These same politicians, most notably reactionary Tory MP Nadine Dorries, have also been plotting policies to roll back the clock on women's rights. For example, Dorries is pushing for abstinence education for girls in schools and abortion rights are again under attack.

The Con-Dems' new Sex and Relationship Advisory Council includes groups, some religious, which advocate abstinence-only sex education, are explicitly anti-choice, and discriminate against Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) people and single parents.

The new council includes the anti-choice group Life, which opposes abortion even in cases of rape or incest. Notable in its exclusion from the council is the highly reputable British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS), an independent organisation which provides both counselling (after which, 20% of women decide against termination) and abortion services.

In an attempt to destroy women's access to services like BPAS, Dorries has teamed up with Labour MP Frank Field and proposed an amendment to the government's

now infamous Health and Social Care Bill (itself intended to tear up and privatise the NHS).

The proposals will make counselling compulsory rather than elective for any woman seeking a termination and also ensure that no provider of abortion services can provide counselling services.

This is an attempt to subject women to forced counselling from anti-choice organisations like Life before being granted access to abortion services. Right wing politicians have tried to justify the move as supposedly ensuring that no "conflict of interest" arose – this from a government who invited McDonalds and PepsiCo to advise on nutrition!

The Department of Health has recently issued an ambiguous statement implying that the Con-Dems may try to implement these anti-choice measures without a vote, stating "we do not believe it is necessary to set out this requirement in primary legislation". We must not stand for these attacks, even if a majority of MPs vote for them.

Unhindered access to abortion, free at the point of delivery, is a basic freedom for women which must

be defended. However, freedom of choice depends in all cases on the material conditions an individual finds themselves in.

Even if we defeat Dorries and Field and secure free access to abortion, a woman in Britain today may not feel free to carry a pregnancy to term as she sees the NHS, pregnancy and child benefit, EMA, welfare, schools, jobs, housing and access

to higher education being cut back viciously.

The choice over when and whether to have children will only be truly free when everyone can be confident that they and their children have secure access to a good standard of living and when high quality, evidence-based sex and relationships education is given from a young age.

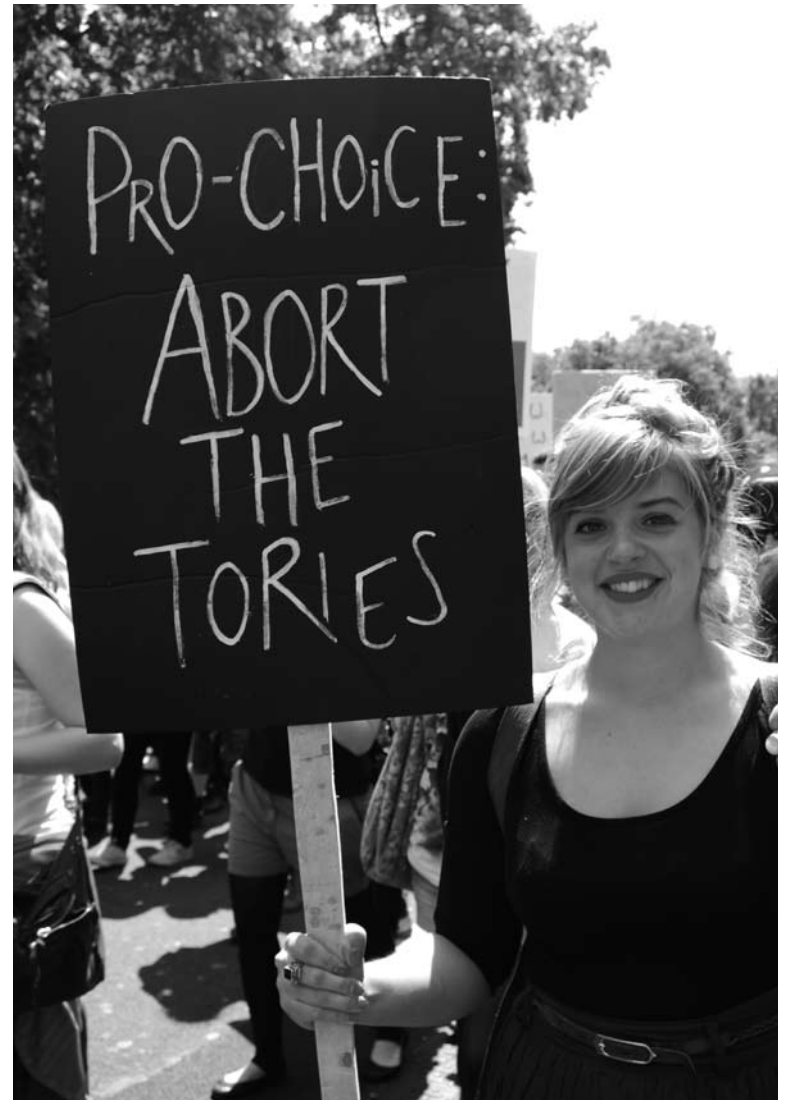


photo Sarah Wrack

To enable women to have a real choice in when and whether to have children we demand:

- No cuts; scrap the Health and Social Care bill
- Free abortion on request; end the need for two doctors' agreement
- For a fully funded, democratically controlled National Health Service, no privatisation
- Access to free fertility treatment on the NHS for all those who need it
- Public ownership of the pharmaceutical industry
- Access to free, safe contraception including emergency contraception; a reversal of the cuts in family planning services and a massive investment into sympathetic youth advisory centres
- Improved sex education in all schools
- Information campaigns on contraception
- A decent living minimum wage and investment in job creation
- A network of publicly funded, good quality, flexible childcare facilities
- Maternity and child benefit to reflect the real cost of pregnancy, childbirth and bringing up a child
- The right to adequate parental leave
- A massive increase in spending on housing, education and other public services
- A democratically run socialist society, planned to meet social needs rather than the profits of a few

Sabotage on ship to Gaza Irish Socialist Party MEP condemns attack

The Irish ship to Gaza in Palestine, part of the Freedom Flotilla 2, has been sabotaged whilst sitting in Dublin harbour preparing to sail. The damage is so serious that the ship will not be able to sail, but fortunately some of those on board can move to the Italian ship that is also part of the flotilla.

Meanwhile, eight of the nine ships in the Gaza Flotilla have been prevented from sailing from Greek ports by the country's government. The passports of passengers and crew have been seized by the authorities, while John Klusmire, captain of the US boat, Audacity of Hope, was arrested on 2 July and detained in a jail cell.

Here one of those on the flotilla, Socialist Party MEP for Dublin, Paul Murphy, responds to this latest development.

"The revelation that terrorist-style sabotage of the Saoirse ship caused severe damage is extremely serious. The evidence pointing towards the Israeli state being guilty is overwhelming. It cannot be a coincidence that two of the boats destined to sail to Gaza have now been sabotaged in the same way, with their propeller shafts damaged.

These attacks match with the Israeli government rhetoric that they would do everything they could to prevent the flotilla from sailing. Those, like US secretary of state Hil-

lary Clinton, who gave an implicit green light to Israeli Defence Forces aggression against the flotilla, share responsibility for this sabotage.

The sabotage not only caused tens of thousands of euros of damage to these ships but also threatened the lives of all the participants aboard. If we had been travelling to Gaza at full speed, an explosion could have been caused that would have sunk the boat and threatened all our lives. An international independent investigation should be launched to fully investigate the sabotage of the ships.

I demand a statement of condemnation of these terror attacks from

the Israeli state. If such a statement is not forthcoming, I call on the Irish government to expel the Israeli ambassador from Ireland.

Although I am very disappointed at not being able to sail on the MV Saoirse due to the damage to the ship, this sabotage will not deter me from sailing to Gaza to protest at the continuing siege and virtual imprisonment of the 1.6 million Palestinians living there. I will be participating on the Italian boat as part of the Flotilla and will be setting sail in a few days."

Break the siege

In an earlier interview with socialistworld.net Paul talked about the blockade of Gaza (now in its fifth year) by the Israeli state.

"My decision to join the 'Freedom Flotilla' is based on the conditions faced by the people in Gaza and an attempt to alleviate their suffering. The Israeli state does not allow essential medicine and construction materials into Gaza, with devastating impacts on living conditions.

The aims of the Flotilla are to break that siege and to highlight the ongoing blockade and its impact on the population.

The Gaza strip is one of the most densely populated areas in the world, with 1.6 million people crammed into an area of 360 square kilometres. Conditions there are horrific and have worsened dramatically as a result of the Israeli blockade.

According to the UN, the un-

employment rate in Gaza reached 45.2% in late 2010. The number of people living on less than \$1 a day has tripled to 300,000 as a result of the blockade and wages have dropped by one-third during the blockade."

To read the full interview, see www.socialistworld.net



Paul Murphy speaks in the European Parliament