

# **Abortion vote**

**YES to Travel : YES to information : NO more “X” cases**

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**A 14 YEAR OLD rape victim was injuncted last February by the Irish state. She was physically prevented from leaving the country in order to have an abortion in England. Public outrage, manifested in near continuous demonstrations forced the Supreme Court to reverse this decision.**

The government then came under pressure to clarify what the legal situation was in Ireland. The “pro-life” movement pressurised for a reversal of the Supreme Court ruling. Public opinion called for changes that would ensure that a case similar to the “X” case would never occur again.

## **Juggling with womens rights**

There are two ways they could have done this, by legalisation on the Supreme Court decision or by a referendum which would in some way amend the original Eighth Amendment to the Constitution. Fianna Fáil like to appear as all things to all people, they usually go where the votes carry them. For this reason they avoided the option of legalisation. Enacting legislation based on the Supreme Court judgement would inevitably result in allowing for abortion in some circumstances (i.e. threat of suicide) in Ireland.

If the government were to propose this they would face the Catholic church and the “pro-life” movement organising against them in the constituencies, costing them votes. For this reason the preferred option of Fianna Fáil was to “let the people decide”, thus letting them off the hook, through having a referendum. As would be expected the holding of this referendum doesn’t indicate a new found desire for democracy as much as a desperate attempt to sit square in the middle of the fence.

## **Three referenda FOR THE PRICE OF ONE!**

However they attempted the impossible and they messed things up. They attempted to forge a consensus between diametrically opposing points of view. There can never be agreement between the “pro-life” movement and those who would allow abortion in Ireland. The result of all this manoeuvring is that we are being faced with three separate, and each in their own way highly insulting, referenda. These are on the right to Travel, the right to Information and on the right to Abortion in certain very restricted circumstances. Anarchists will be voting Yes to Travel, Yes to Information and No to the so called “pro-life” wording.

## **A Woman’s Right to Choose**

Our decision on which way to vote is based on our support for a woman’s right to choose. The state, it’s lawyers and it’s police should have no right to force any women to continue with a pregnancy. The role of the medical profession should be to advise, not to dictate to women. The decision whether to remain pregnant or not should only be made by that pregnant woman. Any state that state that uses force to ensure that a pregnancy is continued is at its root barbaric (and this includes Ireland).

Anarchists believe in real options and real choices for women. This is why we favour full childcare provision paid for by the state, maternity leave and flexi-time for working women as well as free access to contraception, free public creche facilities, adequate sex education, decent

housing and a living wage. On the other hand a woman who does not want a child should have a right to free, safe abortion on demand. This is what we see as “a woman’s right to choose”.

## **Travel and back street abortions**

I always assumed that I had a right to travel. Its an indication of how bad the situation in Ireland has become that we are voting on this at all. It would be funny if it weren’t true. We have abortion in Ireland. At least 4,600 Irish women travel to England every year to have abortions (this is the figure for those who give an Irish address, many don’t). The logic behind the wording is that if enforced, women would be prevented from travelling to England to have an abortion.

Those women would still be having their abortions and some would die on Irish back streets. In September Channel 4 reported on a Belfast teenager who couldn’t afford to travel to England and became seriously ill following a back street abortion. You don’t here the “pro-life” movement saying much about the 300,000 women worldwide (World Health Organisation figure) who died last year following backstreet abortions in mostly Catholic countries.

## **Information**

The ban on information imposed on the Well Woman Centres and Open Line Counselling clinic has recently been overturned in Europe. After the Supreme Court ruling on the “X” case, the Irish government conceded in Europe that they had lost the case. The Supreme Court ruling allowed for abortion in some circumstances in Ireland, making it impossible for the Irish government to continue their argument against information.

No matter what happens in the information referendum, the government have been told by the Council of Europe to sort out Irish law so that it allows abortion information. The ball is in the Irish government’s court. It it could be there for a very long time. A similar ruling was handed down by them, in the David Norris case, regarding our anti-homosexuality laws. Four years down the road and the government still hasn’t managed to get round to it. A sizable ‘Yes’ vote to information could form the basis for a strong campaign which would ensure that information was still available. A ‘No’ vote could give them just the excuse they need to avoid touching the issue.

If we do vote ‘Yes’, the story doesn’t end there. The government will then have to legislate on the circumstances where we will be able to obtain information. The political parties who brought us Section 31 obviously believe that too much knowledge is a bad thing. If they had their way we would only be able to get the information from Catholic priests!

It seems women are not to be trusted. Any attempts to impose restrictions on information will have to be resisted. There must be no restrictions. If restrictions are brought in we will have to continue as as we are at the moment, supporting those services that clandestinely give information (such as the Womens Information Network). The law will have to be publicly and continuously broken. It must be made unworkable.

## **The so-called ‘substantive issue’**

Anarchists are calling for a ‘No’ vote on the 12<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The wording seeks to allow abortion “where there is a real and substantial risk to the life as opposed to the health of the mother, excluding self termination”. The “X” case changed Irish abortion law. Previously it was illegal under any circumstances. The Supreme Court ruling changed this. The judges indicated that abortion should be allowed where there is a threat to the life of the mother, including that of suicide. The present wording cuts out suicide. In February “X” could have had her abortion here. If this wording is passed this would no longer be possible.

The new wording also introduces the concept to the Constitution that a distinction can be made between the “health of a woman” and the “life of a woman”. A medical condition that was life-shortening would not be grounds for an abortion. There has been much discussion within the medical profession about this distinction. The amount of disagreement alone indicates how difficult it would be for women faced with complications during pregnancy if the wording were passed.

## **Cruelty**

A woman whose foetus had died as a result of chemotherapy or whose foetus is encephalic and therefore had no possibility of survival, would be needlessly and cruelly forced to carry the dead foetus for the nine months. Indeed it could be, that cancer would not be treated until it developed to such an extent that it became “life-threatening”.

At the moment women with ectopic pregnancies (where the foetus implants in the fallopian tube, which is life-threatening for the woman and there is no chance of survival for the foetus) lose the entire fallopian tube. This is completely unnecessary. It reduces their chance of having further children. All because the more direct straightforward treatment, an abortion is illegal.

The “pro-life” movement criticise this wording because they say it is a choice between “some abortion or more abortion”. In fact it is a choice between extremely limited abortion and abortion in even more extremely limited circumstances. In reality it won’t change the situation for the vast majority of the 4,600+ who travel to England. They will still have to get the boat to England. However a victory now could pave the way for a further victory later. It is time to start a big fightback, we need to start winning.

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