

Trying to turn the tide

Fighting the Hamilton Injunction

Workers Solidarity Movement

1988

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THE “DEFEND THE CLINICS Campaign” is running out of steam. The recent Information Picket on Dublin’s O’Connell Bridge attracted only 20 people. It is unable to mobilise large numbers. Even those political parties with a pro-abortion policy are running scared of even raising the issue.

It is not too surprising. It is only five years since the “pro-life” amendment to the constitution was voted through 2:1, and it is debatable how many of those who voted against were actually voting in favour of abortion rights. Since then there has been a further shift to the right in Ireland. Even the promotion of condoms as a means of preventing the spread of AIDS was a matter of great controversy.

DEFIANCE OF LAW

Trying to turn this tide is a mammoth task. It is not possible to mobilise lots of people on the streets. First the argument about abortion has to be won. And while that is being done information has to be provided. This means defiance of the law.

The campaign is not even popular with all who should be its friends. Some, the Labour and Workers Parties in particular, haven’t given their support because they don’t agree with giving abortion information to women because that is against the High Court injunction. The fact that they haven’t controlled the campaign may also have had something to do with their stance.

NOT TRUE

An example of this was seen at the recent ICTU women’s conference with a bizarre attack from Gaye Cunningham (ESB Officers Association) accusing the campaign of collecting money under false pretences and of not supporting the legal battle against the Hamilton Judgment. This despite the fact that at a meeting in Liberty Hall in January, ’87, about £900 was handed over towards the legal appeal, and that since that time the campaign has sought money exclusively for such things as printing leaflets or Fact Packs, establishing telephone help lines or booking halls for meetings etc.

The Hamilton Judgment, delivered on January 12th 1987, granted the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child an injunction against Dublin Well Woman Centre and Open Line counselling, restraining them from giving non-directive pregnancy counselling. As a direct result, Open Line shut down and Well Woman no longer provide this service. There is now no legal clinic a woman who finds herself with an unwanted pregnancy can go to to receive advice on ALL the options open to her, free of intimidation or judgmental attitudes. The judgment is a new attack on the few rights women possess in holy Ireland. It also has implications for the future availability of the IUD contraceptive device and the morning after pill — and has already had an effect on the speed with which women can make it to England for a termination: there is a tendency now for Irish women to attend abortion clinics later in their pregnancies, resulting in increased cost and greater trauma.

NO EFFECT

Needless to say, despite contributing to the climate of fear and intimidation, despite having caused a huge fall-off in the number of women attending for post-abortion counselling/check-ups, the judgment has had NO effect on the number of women travelling to Britain for abortions. In the first quarter of 1987, 987 women declared Irish addresses in British abortion clinics. The real figure is obviously higher — i.e. over 4,000 a year, over 10 a day

Since January 1987, the campaign has published, and distributed to a wide range of organisations, a complete Fact Pack on Abortion, distributed tens of thousands of leaflets, put up posters around the city, organised pickets and public meetings, run information stalls in central Cork and Dublin, collected hundreds of signatures on a petition which endorses the campaign's aim to make the law unworkable, and, most importantly, helped establish phone lines in Cork, Galway and Dublin which provide a crisis service for women who need information

HELP WANTED

All of this costs money. The campaign has been running on a shoe-string budget, and is once again nearly broke, The WSM urges everyone to affiliate to the campaign or to get their organisations or unions to do so. This will ensure that the information remains available, and the forces of reaction will not have succeeded in silencing us. Further, we urge all trade unionists to take this issue up at branch, or any, level. Discussion could be based around motions such as:

1. This Branch/Congress condemns the Hamilton Judgment and upholds the democratic wishes of the 67%* of Irish Women who support the provision of information on Abortion as a Right. (*Sunday Press opinion poll).
2. This Branch/Congress supports the Defend the Clinics Campaign in its aim to make the law unworkable by continuing to provide this vitally needed information and to this end will make a donation to the Campaign of £...
3. This Branch/Congress will contact the Defend the Clinics Campaign, request information on Abortion, keep that information on hand and make it available to any woman who wants it.

FACING REALITY

Motions like these provide a chance to get discussion of the issue with your colleagues and work mates. They are important. They keep the issue alive and they win new support for a woman's right to choose. If we are honest we have to face the reality that we won't turn the right wing tide this year, or next—but we can make small gains and we can keep the phone lines in operation. This is what has to be done at present.

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Retrieved on 9th October 2021 from struggle.ws
Published in *Workers Solidarity* No. 28 – Summer 1988.

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