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CYM

CONNOLLY YOUTH MOVEMENT



Partition,
Neutrality,
Reproductive Rights,
Language Revival

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From the Editor

A chairde,

As the Editor of *Forward*, I would like to extend my deepest fraternal greetings, as well as my thanks, for the opportunity extended to the Connolly Youth Movement to partake in the present festivities. As a Marxist-Leninist youth organisation, internationalism is one of our core values, and the opportunity to meet and develop links with our comrades overseas is one that we will never pass up.

Our organisation currently finds itself in a tumultuous period: our recent disaffiliation from the Communist Party of Ireland likely came as a shock to many of our fraternal organisations worldwide. However, it was a decision that was reached by the membership as a whole after much internal debate and discussion, and one that was carried by the full weight of our highest decision-making body, the Ard Fheis. The experience, though challenging and not without its fair share of unpleasantness, did have many positive aspects. Fore-

most of these was reflection on where our organisation was, and where we would like it to be in the future. This has led to an impressive level of professionalisation in areas such as education (to ensure the lessons of the split are not forgotten or lost on those who join in its wake), and social media output (to bring the organisation's outreach with the youth of Ireland up to scratch). As someone who has been in the organisation long enough to see both iterations, the change is nothing less than astounding.

This volume serves primarily to update our international comrades on the material conditions in Ireland as we in the CYM understand them today. Foremost among these is the continued presence of the land border dividing our island, which leaves 6 counties under direct British rule. The existence of two separate and distinct jurisdictions in Ireland is a situation which affects every other cause we direct our efforts towards.

Ongoing struggles include the continued fight for acceptable reproductive rights, with both

the northern and southern situations being discussed in the pages below. With the recent outbreak of war in Eastern Europe, neutrality is also a topic fresh in the minds of the southern public, with establishment parties once more calling for increased Irish integration into security alliances such as NATO. And finally, language rights, ever present in Irish socialist-republican politics, are addressed in light of ongoing efforts to see a legal recognition of Gaeilge in the north, as well as the continued degradation of the languages position south of the border since the state's formation.



As editor, I have had the pleasure of working extensively with my comrades in the development and production of their work, and I hope that the passages in the pages below bring the reader as much joy and stimulation as they have done me.

Le meas,
Stiofáin Ó Sionnaigh,
Éagarthóir



International Report

I.W.

The Connolly Youth Movement continues to experience steady growth in its capacity as an all-Ireland, cadre-based Marxist-Leninist organisation. With our refusal to recognise the colonial government operating from Stormont in the occupied

6 counties, we continue to organise across the border dividing our island. In continuity with the decision reached at our 2020 Ard Fheis, we view the doctrine of socialist-republicanism to be the manifestation of Marxism-Leninism in the Irish context.

We therefore continue to uphold the teachings of our namesake, as relevant to us now, as they were upon the occasion of his execution over 100 years ago. The movement's latest Ard Fheis (National Congress), held in February 2022, saw great success, and a strengthening of

our commitment to international solidarity with our comrades abroad. The 2022 Ard Fheis saw the passing of a number of meaningful motions, for instance a concrete commitment to the strengthening of the usage of the Irish language



CYM Activists meet with Cuban Ambassador to Ireland Hugo René Ramos Milanés

within the organisation, with the aim of eventually making it the CYM's primary language. The implementation of Irish vocabulary for structure and roles, as well as in communications, and providing regular educational resources to our members are just the first steps towards this goal. The CYM

fully recognises that the predominance of English as the first language of Ireland is a direct result and legacy of British colonialism, and in line with our dedication to anti-imperialism and socialist-republicanism it is our duty to promote and pursue the revival of Gaeilge in any way we can.

Our latest Ard Fheis also saw a strengthening of our dedication to the trade union movement in Ireland, as the strongest manifestation of working-class power with trade union membership and participation being made mandatory for all members. Commitments were also made to work in tenants associations, community involvement strategies, food banks, and more.

As a communist youth movement in contemporary Ireland one of our biggest focuses is the ongoing housing and cost of living crisis. Ireland currently has over 10,000 residents homeless or in precarious housing, while 190,000 houses were counted as empty on the night of the census in April. These 190,000 empty houses consist of holiday homes of those

lucky few living in affluence, and derelict buildings left vacant by landowners. This misuse of resources points to a blatant disregard of the Irish government towards the working-class, a divide between the ruling and the ruled which is furthered by the fact that 1 in 5 sitting TD's are landlords and therefore actively profit from the current crisis. Connolly Barracks is therefore one of the Connolly Youth Movement's most significant political projects, as the ongoing occupation of the previously derelict building is a manifestation of our standing dedication to a 'housing for all' policy and mindset. The cost of living crisis is however one that not even the capitalist government can deny as imminent. The staggering increase in votes and election success of the nationalist party Sinn Féin displays a demand for change and left-wing politics amongst the Irish population. However, while they work within the framework of bourgeois government they will never be able to provide the left-wing alternative the working class of Ireland deserves.

Last year our Ard Chomhairle (Central Committee) worked tirelessly on rewriting and

updating our programme. This is ready to be launched in the next few months, along with a 10 point Charter summarising our programme in its entirety. This has served as an excellent opportunity for us to further flesh out the ideological positions long established in the organisation, and put them on paper. The programme is the natural summary of decisions made at numerous Ard Fheiseanna through the practice of democratic centralism, and the strategy therefore sees a heavy focus on education and community engagement as some of the primary and immediate objectives of the organisation. Our programme and charter will be available on our website, which also features a new webstore selling printed copies of the programme, alongside other publications, pins and more. All proceeds from the webshop will be going towards our political projects.


The international office has had a highly active start of the season, with a lot of engagement and collaborations with our sister organisations across the globe. For instance, in collaboration with our publication *Forward*, we have been conducting interviews with fraternal organisations with the aim of providing introductions to these movements to our members. We view it as absolutely vital to stand steadfast in solidarity with our comrades abroad, to share our resources, ideas and strategies, failures and successes, in order for the broader communist movement at large to continue to prosper healthily. Since the fall of the USSR the movement has seen a decline internationally, but recent years are showing it growing stronger once again, which is a foundation we must build on. Dear comrades, the Irish proverb “*Ní neart go cur le chéile*” rings as true to us in the communist movement today as ever - there is no strength without unity.





**100 Years of Partition:
Craigavon, Hauntology,
and the Orange
State**

Alec Leamas



A few miles south of Lough Neagh lies a city that never existed. A loose collection of houses, shopping centres and public buildings mark the site of Craigavon. With construction beginning in 1965, Craigavon was intended to be the heart of a new linear city incorporating Lurgan and Portadown, a new metropolis for the Orange State. Named for the first Prime Minister of the northern statelet, James Craig, the man to whom the quote “A Protestant Parliament for a Protestant People” is attributed, about half of what was planned was never built, and of what was built, some had to be demolished after becoming empty and derelict. In a way, it has become a metaphor for the six counties itself: an arbitrary geographical and political unit that does not work, haunted by the Orange State.

As we look back on over a hundred years of partition, we primarily see one hundred years of two failed states. In the North, the issues that directly led to the civil unrest of the 20th century, such as the sectarian nature of housing, are still as prevalent now as they were in 1969, with 20,000 homeless

households, 82% of whom come from a nationalist background. The landscape of post 98’ politics may have brought an end to the majority of armed violence, but the much vaunted ‘Peace Process’ has enshrined the sectarian nature of the state into international law, codifying the unionist veto through the power sharing executive in Stormont. Meanwhile, the state maintains an armed and militarised police force with special powers provided by Section 21 of the Justice & Security Act, as well as non-Jury Diplock Courts.

I would be remiss if I did not

“The much vaunted ‘Peace Process’ has enshrined the sectarian nature of the state into international law”

also mention the other partitionist state on this island, The Free State in the southern 26 counties. This model of a modern neo-liberal client-state is the darling of international capital, boasting core “European” values like 210,363 children living in poverty (More than 660,000 people in poverty in 2020, over 210,000 are children). The continuing erosion of Irish neutrality by overtures to NATO, the persistent use of Shannon Airport by the

US military to service its imperial interests, and the continued integration of the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána into the European security state through PESCO all represent massive threats to our sovereignty, and our ability to chart our own course in the world in the face of rising geopolitical tensions.

It remains to be seen if provision for a border poll in the Good Friday Agreement will facilitate reunification. An airtight argument that it can bypass the so called 'Imperialist Triple-Lock' (British, EU & US imperialism) has yet to be presented, and the terms and ultimate settlement of any border poll provided by the GFA would ultimately be decided from London. However, not engaging in a campaign for a border poll could prove short-sighted given the momentum Sinn Féin have built up on both sides of the border. Border poll or no border poll, what is certain is that without a mass mobilization and the creation of a broad social movement directed towards reunification and the smashing of the failed states on both sides of the border, the new Ireland will never come to pass, and we will

continue to be at the mercy of the imperialists and robbers.

While 62% of the population of this island would support re-unification, the political establishment fears opening the door to new potentialities of reality and political economy. Too often reunification is viewed through a lens distinctly lacking in imagination and vision, with the Free State simply absorbing the northern state, with Germany often stated as an example to follow by Irish analysts.

This misses the opportunity re-unification provides to imagine a new Ireland: the smashing of the two failed states, new ways of pol-

itics, of running the economy, being able to imagine a future for ourselves and generations to come. We do not have to be under the boot of the Brits, European imposed austerity, or Yank imperialism. We can chart our own course into the future. We can build a socialist republic for the 21st century, and we can confine the Orange State to history, as a dusty curio, just like Craigavon.





Festo do Avante!
Seixal, 2021

The North is When? Abortion Rights in the Six Counties

Amy Margaret

In January 2017, the leading parties in the Stormont executive, the DUP (Democratic Unionist Party) and Sinn Féin, split over the DUP's handling of a green energy scandal, causing the executive to collapse. This meant that, in the absence of executive ministers, civil servants were running the country. However, because civil servants have limited powers, they can only administer and implement policy, and as such were hesitant to make decisions outside of their remit, including any changes to laws on abortion.

A year later on 25 May 2018, after tireless campaigning by pro-choice activists across the island, the referendum to repeal the 8th Amendment passed in the South, legalising abortion up to 12 weeks, with provisions for later terminations in restricted circumstances. This both

inspired and frustrated the people of the North, where abortion services still remained limited.

In February 2018, a UN com-



mittee released a report stating that the UK had been breaching the rights of the women in the North by limiting their access to abortions services. This followed a decision by the Belfast Court of Appeal, ruling that northern abortion laws are a matter for the Stormont Assembly, which overturned the 2015 High Court ruling that found Northern Irish law had breached the European Convention on Human Rights.

Regardless of this report and the demands of people in the 6 counties who had been campaigning tirelessly for years, changes to abortion law could still not be made due to the lack of an executive.

With the stagnation of Stormont, changes to the law in the South, and the North having the most restrictive abortion laws in the UK, MPs in Westminster made a decision that shocked many of us.

In 2006, the St Andrews agreement was signed which decided that Westminster would not implement direct rule (the governance of the north directly from Westminster) without passing a law in parliament. This meant that direct rule would only be implemented in extreme circumstances.



October 2019 came around and devolution was not restored, meaning that abortion would now be decriminalised and same-sex marriage would be legalised. It was a contentious move: many people, especially

republicans, did not like the idea of being governed from Westminster, and while this concern cannot and should not be ignored, this particular situation was a relatively positive one.

This was a momentous occasion for people in the North. I remember walking around Belfast the

“In those heady days that look like victory, be careful, for you’re never over the finish line”

Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, Rally for Choice, Belfast, September 2019

As such, the decision of MPs in Westminster in July 2019 to back an amendment to the NI Executive Formation Bill was extremely surprising. This bill would lead to significant changes to abortion law in the north unless Stormont could get back up and running by October 2019.



*CYM Activist at Rally for Choice, Belfast, 2019
Credit: Ciara McMullan Photography*

night the news was announced. There was a buzz around the city, bars were full of people celebrating. The collapse and stagnation of Stormont had a horrible impact on all of us, but finally there was something to celebrate. It felt like the North was finally moving forward a bit.

However, the words of Bernadette McAlisky just a few months earlier had warned us of what was to come. Many people thought abortion rights had been won, but there was still a long way to go.

Devolution was restored in early 2020, and the northern executive had already begun designing new

abortion regulations. The British government went on to publish details of the new legal framework for abortion services in the North that would take effect from 31st March 2020. However, the regulations state that it would be up to Stormont's Department of Health to commission full services.

Interim services were set up in April 2020, but they could only provide services for up to 10 weeks of pregnancy. For an abortion outside of this window, people would have to travel to England. In 2020 371 people were forced to travel to England and Wales for abortions and although funding was provided for this, it is hard to effectively ex-

press the mental toll travelling, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, would have on someone seeking an abortion. This is a situation which disproportionately impacts working class people who cannot afford to pay for abortion pills and may not be able to take time off work for recovery, never mind travel.

In April 2021, the Western Health Trust announced a suspension of interim services from 23 April as the system was no longer sustainable. This meant accessing an abortion in the North became a sort of “post-code lottery”.

By 2021, abortion services had still not been commissioned and rolled out, with a High Court judge ruling that the Secretary of State Brandon Lewis had the legal authority to direct the establishment of abortion services, and failed to do so.



*Bernadette Devlin,
Rally for Choice, Belfast, 2019
Credit: Ciara McMullan Photography*

Unsurprisingly, in 2022 we are still waiting for the Department of Health to centrally commis-



*Rally for Choice, Belfast, 2019
Credit: Ciara McMullan Photography*

sion services. Brandon Lewis recently visited the North, claiming that if he does not see positive steps in the, “very near future, the British government will take action”. However, there is no indication of what this “action” will be or how long we will have to wait. Minister of Health, Robin Swan, who happens to be a pro-life member of the Ulster Unionist Party, has said that he is seeking “legal advice” on the issue.

In England, Scotland and Wales, the Abortion Action 1967 legalised abortion up to 28 weeks gestation. In the North, we are still waiting for any functioning services in 2022.

The struggle for bodily autonomy will continue, and as Bernadette McAlisky stated, we should not become complacent. We have recently witnessed the stripping back of abortion rights in the United States, and the arrest of Justyna Wydrzynska, a human rights defender who faces up to three years in prison for supporting a pregnant woman who

needed a safe abortion in Poland.

So long as we live in a patriarchal, capitalist society, our fight will continue.



Irish Neutrality: A Tenuous Commitment

Under Threat *Stiofáin Ó Sionnaigh*

Since the state's formation, neutrality in international affairs has been a key tenet of foreign policy considerations in the 26 counties. With a semblance of independence gained (albeit with considerable neo-colonial ties) after over 800 years of colonial occupation, and so soon after a global conflict, there was little appetite for war among the Irish people, especially for wars that were seemingly of no concern to them. This led us to be one of the few European nations to not participate directly in the Second World War, a conflagration we deemed fit to term only "The Emergency". This neutrality, as well as the lack of colonial past, gave the state an air of legitimacy in the newly emerged United Nations, independent as it seemed independent from the capitalist and communist blocs. The role of peacekeeper then, in conflicts (many of them anti-colonial in character) around the globe, began to be filled primarily by Ireland, as well as the Scandinavian

nations (Sweden especially), the so-called "fire-brigade states". This role diminished in importance as former imperial possessions won their independence, and took these roles over themselves.

Unfortunately, Irish neutrality is a tenet that has seen continuous challenges from successive governments, and has been eroded by measures such as the use of Shannon airport as a stop-over and refueling site by the US military, the south's participation in EU Battlegroups, and its involvement with the EU's Permanent Structured Co-Operation (PESCO).

The war in Ukraine, with the subsequent refugee crisis and near universal global condemnation of Russia, has led to fresh calls by establishment figures for the south to abandon its neutrality and formally join NATO. The argument runs that as Ireland is culturally and economically part of the West, it should abandon any pretense of neutrality and embrace the West militarily as well. Taoiseach Micheál Martin has even stated the need for a citizen's assembly on the matter.



The Ard Comhairle of the CYM stands in solidarity with and calls for the immediate release of Mikhail and Aleksander Kononovich



Members of the Dublin branch deliver a letter of protest over the detention of the Kononovich brothers to the Ukrainian embassy

Establishment media has been critical to this fresh push. Almost since the first tanks crossed the Ukrainian border, columnists in outlets such as the *Irish Times*, *Irish Examiner*, and *Sunday Business Post*, have called out for the south to row in behind NATO and its imperialist expansion. The *Examiner* for instance, on 5 March, published an article condemning neutrality as childish, with the adult solution being NATO membership. Similarly, a *Times* piece from 25 February, the day after the invasion, decried neutrality as nothing but a cover for tyrants, also claiming that the description of NATO as warmongers was “inverting reality”. Most egregiously, a piece from 7 March in the *Times* described neutrality as “morally degenerate” (while also making the laughable claim that British imperialism is “long gone”).

It is not the case that 100% of coverage from these outlets is clamouring for NATO membership. However, it is enough to indicate a tendency among the Irish bourgeoisie to cosy up to western imperialism.

In reality, the south is not a neutral state, nor has it ever been. In 2021,

the state celebrated the centenary of its independence, but this marked only the end of direct British rule, with the end of the south’s membership of the British empire not coming until 1949. 6 counties in the north of the island are still under this direct rule, a rule which makes them a NATO member, and to claim that a state can be neutral while this level of strategic pressure is being exerted by an enemy power is the true “inversion of reality”. Rather, it is a cog in the international capitalist system. Since the state’s formation up to the present day, it has preached neutrality, while simultaneously assisting imperialist powers in their global ventures. One need only look at the United



States military’s use of Shannon airport as proof. However, it is the opinion of this writer that Ireland’s neutrality should be respected, enforced, and expanded. It is only through our breaking of the imperialist lock that this can be brought about.



CYM activists march in Belfast in support of the call for an Irish Language Act in the Six Counties

A Protracted Struggle for Minoritised Languages

Eoghán Ó Deirg

A language revival has a lot of similarities with a revolutionary movement.

Just as a revolutionary movement must have its beginnings in particular communities and be built outwards, minoritised languages need to take root in particular communities first and then expand.

Why is this? A language that has no community usage is an academic pursuit, as much a part of the life of working people as Latin. For a language to re-emerge, to be used daily by the entire nation, it must first be used daily by one household, one street, one place of work. A language must take root, develop within a community and become indispensable to its people. It would not be possible for a vanguard party to seize state power without the support of the people, support that is developed through protracted struggle. In the same way, it would not be possible for a language to become the primary language of the nation without first being developed as the lan-

guage of communities across the nation. Support for the language emerges from below, in much the same way as support for the revolution.

Just as revolutionary movements must become, for the working people of the communities they grow in, a more legitimate form of government than the capitalist state, minoritised languages must become, for the working people of the communities they grow in, a



more legitimate form of communication than that of the language forced upon the nation by imperialism.

Why is this? A language that is widespread, but secondary in importance to the imperialist majority language, will naturally only be used as a secondary language. The minoritised language will be used perhaps in the household, perhaps in cultural events, but the imperialist majority language will still be the language of politics, commerce, business, and national communications. In much the same way that a revolutionary movement that is widespread, but seen as secondary to the state, will be seen as a charitable organisation at best, and at worst crushed by the capitalist state, a minoritised language that remains secondary to the imperialist majority language will be seen as a cultural oddity at best, and at worst condemned to extinction.

Just as a revolutionary movement cannot grow without the active work of a vanguard party, a language revival cannot happen spontaneously.

Why is this? A language revival requires constant diligent work from activists to ensure that the language is protected, used, and promoted within a community. A revolutionary movement, without the guidance



of a vanguard party, will splinter, peter out, and disintegrate. Similarly, language revival, without constant work will become a hobby for a handful of those interested in cultural preservation and will ultimately fall by the wayside. Only a well-organised campaign can successfully begin to grow a linguistic community. Only when activists are holding public free study sessions, demanding public areas include minoritised language signage, speaking and writing publicly in the minoritised language will that language begin to become the community language.

Just as a revolutionary movement cannot stagnate and must be in constant struggle with the capitalist state in order to succeed, a language revival too cannot stagnate, and must constantly be growing in order to succeed.

Why is this? A language movement that is confined to a specific geographic area with no hopes of expansion is a language movement that is accepting its own demise. A language movement that confines itself to a specific region in the hope that this will be enough to preserve the language will see that those people who speak the minoritised language and the imperialist majority language will leave for areas in which the imperialist majority language is spoken, as jobs will be more abundant and wages will be higher in these areas. Just as a revolutionary movement in the stage of protracted peoples

war must be in constant struggle with the capitalist state in order to have hopes of success, the language revival movement must attempt to constantly expand into new communities, building deep roots within them and ensuring the language becomes the primary language of those communities too, before moving on to expand into new areas. A stagnant language movement confined to one area of the linguistic nation will always be in competition with imperialist majority language speaking areas and will compare unfavourably in employment and wages. An active language movement, in constant struggle to expand into new regions, will only be in competition with those who actively resist the expansion of the minority language. Comparison of wages or employment will be less of a problem, because the areas with high wages and high employment will soon also be a community where the primary language is the minoritised language.

Just as an understanding of Marxism-Leninism by the individuals within the revolutionary vanguard is a necessity for the success of the revolutionary struggle on a national scale, an understanding of the minoritised language and its political importance within the revolutionary vanguard is a necessity for the





No strength without unity

success of the language revival on a national scale.

Why is this? A revolutionary movement must be driven by a vanguard party with a proper understanding of Marxism-Leninism, or else it will suffer the same pitfalls as historic revolutionary movements that did not learn from previous struggles. In much the same way, the language revival movement must be imbued with an understanding of the functions of the minoritised language, its history and the reason for the importance of its study. Any revolutionary vanguard that does not study Marxism-Leninism will be condemning themselves to an ideological dead end, strategic mistakes, and in all likelihood failure. Similarly, any language revival movement that does not study the

language, its history and its political importance will condemn themselves to this same failure.

The similarities in the way we construct revolutionary movements and language revivals is not coincidental. Both are community led, anti-imperialist movements. Both require broad public participation. Both are the cause and duty of communists in the peripheral, imperialised nations of the world. When done correctly, both a revolutionary movement and a language revival movement should be anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and conducted in tandem. This is true of our Irish context and is equally true for revolutionary movements around the world that base themselves within nations whose indigenous languages have been minoritised.

Still a Long Way From 25 May

Meg Ryan

In 1983 the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution of Ireland was introduced, outlawing abortion in all circumstances except where the life of the mother was a risk, and also outlawing the provision of information on abortion. However, contrary to the stated aims of campaigners in favour, these restrictions did not result in fewer abortions taking place. Instead women were compelled to travel abroad to access abortion care, many going to the UK where abortion was available in limited circumstances through the Abortion Act 1967, (this did not include the 6 counties, where abortion was only decriminalised in October 2019).

In what seems to have been a step towards women's liberation, on 25 May 2018, a

substantial majority of the electorate voted to repeal the 8th Amendment, leaving the government free to bring forward a general scheme to regulate termination of pregnancy services in July 2018. The Bill was passed into law by the end of December 2018, allowing for the commencement of the Health



(Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 on 1 January 2019. For the first time in the history of the southern state, medical abortion up to 12 weeks gestation was permitted under medical supervision or later in certain restricted circumstances. Following the introduction of this legislation, an annual report

into the ToP Act showed that a total of 6,666 abortions were carried out in 2019 and 6,577 in 2020.

While the introduction of this Act may lead to complacency regarding the fight for women's

“In no other area of my practice could I go to prison for filling out a form incorrectly”

reproductive rights, there still exist significant barriers to this form of women's healthcare in Ireland. For instance, there is evidence to suggest that there are still substantial problems regarding the accessibility of information on abortion in Ireland; The Abortion Access Research Group conducted a study on individuals' experiences of abortion provision in Ireland since the introduction of the Termination of Pregnancy (ToP) Act 2018. Over half of respondents (54%) did not know where to go to get an abortion, 32% reported they did not know where to find information on abortion, and only 65% of respondents were aware that abortion is free at the point when they sought to access care.

In addition to lack of information, there remains an undeniable barrier within both the legal framework of the Act and its operation which

prevents access to abortion care. In 2019, 375 Irish residents were forced to travel abroad to access abortion care. Most of these individuals were seeking care during the second semester, with 20 percent of those experiencing fatal foetal anomalies. These statistics demonstrate that for many pregnant people, the ToP Act has not provided the necessary access

to services. Abortion is one of the most common medical procedures in the United States, and in 2020, 209,917 residents of England and Wales received an abortion, which is an age-standardisation rate of 18.2 per 1,000 women aged 15-44. These statistics imply that access to abortion in other similarly developed countries is much more widespread. Although there is a similar demand for abortion care

“Mandatory waiting periods can have the effect of delaying care, which can jeopardise women's ability to access safe, legal abortion services and demean women as competent decision-makers”

in Ireland, as demonstrated by the number of women who accessed abortion care in the state since 2019 and the numbers who traveled abroad prior to the referendum, access to facilities is much more restricted, a clear demonstration that people seeking abortions

are being let down in this country. There are several factors contributing to the lack of access including cost, lack of service providers, a mandatory three day waiting period, and restriction of abortion after 12 weeks.

Only 1 in 10 GPs provide abortion services in Ireland and only just over half of maternity hospitals provide abortion services. This represents a significant barrier to accessing abortion, particularly for people in rural areas and from marginalised backgrounds who may face sizeable travel costs if there is no access to a provider within their local area. This also reflects a persistent mentality of shame towards women who access abortion procedures. Research from the Abortion Rights Campaign (ARC) showed that almost one in five respondents were refused care and refused a referral to another doctor, and some noted “these GPs were often rude and unsympathetic. Being refused care caused ‘fear’ and ‘confusion’ for participants. Some noted calling other GPs before finally deciding to import pills instead of continuing to pursue an appointment”.

Abortion services in Ireland are free at the point of delivery, but with some stipulations: you must be resident in Ireland and possess a PPS number, which not every person requiring an abortion has. This particularly restricts individuals wishing to access abortion care

who are seeking asylum or living in Direct Provision. In this, as in many other scenarios, some of the most vulnerable people in Irish society are not being considered or cared for under the current legislation.

Under the current legislation, abortions after 12 weeks are tightly regulated and may only take place in a situation where two medical practitioners are of the opinion that there is a risk to life or of serious harm to the health of the pregnant person and it is appropriate to carry out the termination of pregnancy in order to avert the risk.

Abortion is also permitted in instances where two medical practitioners are of the opinion (formed in good faith) that there is present a condition affecting the foetus that is likely to lead to the death of the foetus either before, or within 28 days of birth. These guidelines are the only way an abortion could be accessed for anyone who was unable to do so within the 12 weeks, and the guidelines do not



take into account individuals who may be victims of sexual violence, minors, people living in coercive relationships, migrants or those living in Direct Provision, people who have recently experienced a crisis such as bereavement, or those who were unable to access a GP provider locally.

Despite the World Health Organisation's recognition of abortion as essential healthcare, doctors who provide abortion after 12 weeks



outside of the specific circumstances outlined above may face a prison sentence of up to 14 years.

In their research on the topic, Donnelly & Murray (2019) argue that this law sets abortion care apart from other forms of healthcare and implies that doctors providing abortion care are in some way “inherently less conscientious than other professionals and that the usual regulatory mechanisms of (general) criminal and civil sanctions and professional/fitness to practice oversight are insufficient for these professionals.” They argue that as a result “the Irish law

perpetuates the stigmatisation of both the care provider and the recipient of abortion care.” Doctors interviewed as part of their research reported a “chilling effect” of criminalisation in their practice with one doctor commenting:

“In no other area of my practice could I go to prison for filling out a form incorrectly”.

In addition to the 12 week limit, there is a mandatory 3 day waiting period before an individual can access an abortion. The 2021 ARC report showed that many people suffered negative impacts of the 3 day waiting period, one person saying that the 3 day wait felt like “a punishment”, while others reported that it caused “undue stress and anxiety”. The World Health Organisation has stated that: “Mandatory waiting periods can have the effect of delaying care, which can jeopardise women’s ability to access safe, legal abortion services and demean women as competent decision-makers”.

Currently there is an ongoing public consultation regarding a review of the legislation. The National Women’s Council of Ireland have outlined what should be campaigned for:

- Review the 12-week limit and extend it into the second trimester: Abortion care, like all aspects of health care,

should be decided in the context of a trusting and supportive doctor-patient relationship, whereby medical needs are met in line with clinical best practice and patient preferences.

- Remove the obligatory 3-day wait: There is no medical purpose or value to the three-day waiting period. This restriction impedes doctors' abilities to provide urgent care when required while also placing additional stress on women.
- Remove the 28-day limit: All women with a diagnosis of severe or fatal foetal anomaly should be guaranteed compassionate care in their own country.
- Recognise abortion as a central aspect of healthcare and end the criminalisation of doctors: Abortion is recognised as an essential aspect of healthcare by the World Health Organisation. The criminalisation of healthcare in Ireland undermines doctor's clinical judgement and professional expertise.
- Broaden coverage: Access to nationwide coverage of abortion services in primary care and maternity hospitals settings must be prioritised by the HSE.

- Introduce Safe Access Zones: Ensure that all those receiving and providing abortion care are protected from harassment and abuse.
- Contraception, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE): To realise the reproductive and sexual health rights of all, universal access to contraception and the development of a modern RSE curriculum must be addressed.
- An independent, external review of the legislation: Ireland's abortion legislation is currently being reviewed. We want to see an external review that is independent, women-centred, transparent and inclusive.

Denial of access to abortion services has the potential to jeopardise a person's physical and mental health and denies them autonomy, dignity and freedom. The denial of abortion access is a form of violence and oppression, and reflects a patriarchal agenda concerned with the control of the sexuality and bodies of women and pregnant people. It is crucial that we stand with women and pregnant people and ensure that they are given the reproductive rights and care that they deserve.

Commuting

Sionnach Ó Phiondar

It takes me two buses to get to work.
I'm up at 5, cross the park at the end of the estate,
Light a cigarette while waiting for the first bus into town.

If you haven't seen it,
At this time of morning, at this time of year,
The sky is the colour of dark denim.

This route isn't supposed to stop on O'Connell Street, but it does anyway.
This morning the butch woman with kind eyes gives me a look of recognition;

I wonder if she looks forward to seeing me every morning too.
Ours is a silent solidarity,
Recognising each other's queerness &
That we're both mad to be up this early,
But a job is a job, right?

I can't see the sun from the stop outside McDonald's -
I know it must have risen by now,
At this time of morning, the sky is the colour of a white t-shirt going grey.

I have to bite the inside of my lip to stay awake on the second bus.
This morning the only other person who ever gets off at my stop doesn't
look up;

I notice we're wearing the same red Penneys' canvas shoes.
She takes the turn before mine &
I wonder what else we have in common.

I promise myself I'll join the union tonight

CYM

CONNOLLY YOUTH MOVEMENT
ÓGRA UÍ CHONGHAILE

