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Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment

# **Ireland: Every vote counts! - May 25<sup>th</sup> referendum for safe abortions**

Sunday 20 May 2018 (Date first published: 18 May 2018).

**Seven days from now, on May 25<sup>th</sup>, Ireland will be voting on whether to repeal the part of their constitution that denies women control over their bodies, writes Susan Moore. This means that 3,265 pregnant people travel from Ireland to Britain every year for safe abortions.**

Unlike the Equal Marriage Referendum that Ireland held in May 2015 when it was clear beforehand that we'd won, this one feels very much that it's still in the balance. Every vote counts! People who are registered in Ireland but living elsewhere are organising to go home to vote. Women who have been forced to leave their homes and travel to have an abortion are telling their stories – and where they don't have a vote asking others to 'Be my yes' [\[1\]](#). Anyone who has a family member or a friend with a vote hasn't long to influence them but it's still worth trying. See Together for Yes [\[2\]](#) and London-Irish Abortion Rights Campaign [\[3\]](#) as well as below for ideas and resources.

One of the important forces on the pro-choice side is the trade union movement. The broad-based Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> launched a tabloid campaign newspaper on 1 May. The 20-page tabloid carries articles by Prof Sabaratnam Arulkumuran, Judge Catherine McGuinness, Prof Veronica O'Keane, Deputies Brid Smith (PBP), Clare Daly (Ind4Change) and Louise O'Reilly (Sinn Féin), Parents Together for Yes, Catholics for Choice, Dr Peter Boylan and, most importantly, unions including the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Unite the Union, Mandate, CWU Ireland, Connect, and SIPTU. This publication is a significant resource for repeal canvassers and campaigners and for unsure voters who want more information to help them decide on May 25<sup>th</sup>. You can read the whole thing [here](#) and we reprint one of the articles at the bottom of these pieces.

Therese Caherty, Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup>, says: "The 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment affects us all, women and men. The trade union movement stands for equality and solidarity. We believe that we cannot create an equal society if women's right to healthcare is restricted.

"In the pages of our newspaper, you can read how the 8<sup>th</sup> has criminalised and tortured women and girls. While the capacity for compassion and care is commendable and defines us as human, trade unionists want a health system that doesn't rely on ability to pay and doesn't treat women as second class citizens.

"Women living in Ireland must be able to make decisions about their own bodies. But we cannot exercise that right until the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment goes."

Steve Fitzpatrick, general secretary, CWU Ireland, says: "The CWU's support for a Yes vote on May 25<sup>th</sup> is based on recognising the need for access to a safe medical procedure for all women in Ireland

and is reinforced by the acceptance of a multitude of reasons why a woman may need access to abortion services.

“To provide abortions services in the Republic of Ireland will not change the moral basis on which a decision to continue or not with a pregnancy is made. It will simply allow women the choice to safely access a medical procedure which is available to millions of women elsewhere around the world.”

David Joyce of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions says: “Congress believes that repeal is necessary in order to achieve a more compassionate Ireland, one in which restrictions on women’s healthcare are removed from the Constitution and one which empowers our elected representatives to legislate for the introduction of a regulated, comprehensive and quality healthcare service that is safe for women and girls.”

**Susan Moore**

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## **Those with least suffer most under abortion ban**

**We must end the lie that abortion is not an issue for women living here, writes TD Bríd Smith.**

A woman’s right to choose, to control her own body, is a fundamental issue of women’s rights and a key prerequisite of gender equality. But it is, and always has been, also a class issue.

The truth is, women of the upper classes, women with the money, could always get abortions.

This is of enormous importance in this referendum campaign and we cannot lose sight of it. We should never forget that every restriction, every obstacle, put in the way of accessing abortion has a disproportionate effect on women who are working class, in poverty or marginalised. It also leads to later abortions because the procedure is not accessible through the health service.

If you have to travel to the UK or elsewhere it is so much easier if you are well off and have the money and connections. If you are a terrified young working class girl, or a migrant worker, or in direct provision it’s much more difficult – or impossible.

In my own experience being exiled out of one’s own country to access abortion carries with it stigma and loneliness that no woman should have to go through. We must end the lie that abortion is not an issue for women living here. It absolutely is. Just not in Ireland because we exile our women or we hold the threat of criminalisation and a 14-year sentence for those who procure the abortion pill here.

Winning repeal on May 25<sup>th</sup> is an absolute necessity and I appeal to every voter to do their best at work and in their communities to get out the Yes vote. But it is also a staging post in the overall struggle for choice, for a new Ireland where every child is a wanted child with a decent chance in life.

**Bríd Smith**

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**P.S.**

\* May 18, 2018: <http://socialistresistance.org/repeal-the-8th/12355>

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## **Footnotes**

[1] <https://londonirisharc.com/repeal-london/2018/4/14/be-my-yes-so-the-journey-i-made-is-no-longer-the-only-option>

[2] <https://www.facebook.com/Together4yes/>

[3] <https://www.facebook.com/londonirishARC/>