

Review: Abortion information is illegal

Workers Solidarity Movement

1992

“Ireland’s Abortion Reality – Including a Guide to Abortion Services for Irish Women” by the Cork Abortion Information Campaign (£1.00)

The mainly black cover of this pamphlet showing a drawing of a gagged woman with the words “censored” over her mouth give a graphic first sight into the contents of this pamphlet.

A well written and informative document, we are brought through the recent history of Women’s Rights in Ireland, in particular a woman’s right to control her own fertility.

After the introduction we get the legal history starting from the 1861 “Offences against the Person Act” which made any person performing or assisting in an abortion liable to penal servitude for life. The abortion referendum of 1983, the Hamilton judgement of 1986 (not 1987 as the pamphlet says) and the Finlay judgement which has made all information on abortion facilities illegal are also mentioned.

The main body (roughly 30 pages) is devoted to abortion itself. What is abortion? What are the risks? The statistics and “Why abortion isn’t murder” are dealt with briefly. The Cork group has managed to pack a lot of facts into a short space but at the same time keeps the style interesting and easy to understand.

The pamphlet ends with a list of clinics, prices and a catalogue of useful phone numbers such as the Womens’ Information Network – (01) 6794700 which continues to defy the State by giving non directive pregnancy counselling on all the options including abortion.

There are other small signs that a fight for the Right to Abortion Information may be possible. There is definitely large support given the recent motions passed in various places. For example, in November the National Youth Council, and students at Dublin City University voted overwhelmingly for information on all the options. The Dublin Trades Council has recently voted for abortion facilities to be provided in Ireland.

But as far as action goes there is very little. The most active campaign at the moment is the Trinity College Right to Information Group. Though small they organised a public meeting in Dublin in early December which attracted 90 people. Their aim was to try and start a Dublin campaign. To advertise they leafletted and postered with the WIN telephone number on their literature.

The chances of a campaign succeeding in the short term are small and is too early to see how successful the proposed new Dublin group will be. But there is obviously more support for the campaign than the media will admit to. The task of any Right to Information Campaign is to

turn the passive support into active support. As in any campaign when you have enough active numbers on your side the state can be forced to back down.

The best tactic would be to try and link the campaign with unions, getting motions passed and discussed in branches to get grass roots support. Meanwhile a publicity campaign should be done, as a build up for a march. For example an Abortion Information Bus going from Dublin to Cork or occupations of libraries demanding the reinstatement of the Miriam Stoppard book which was banned recently because it had abortion information in it.

The WSM has been active in the Trinity group to which we give our continued support. We see the winning of the Right to Information as a first step towards the Right to Choose – obviously a much harder battle.

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Retrieved on 9th October 2021 from struggle.ws
Published in *Workers Solidarity* No. 34 – Spring 1992.

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