

TRADE UNION CAMPAIGN TO REPEAL THE 8TH

Press Statement
Embargo: January 31, 2018
Oireachtas Briefing

Abortion is a Trade Union Issue *‘Removing the 8th Amendment is first step in creating a culture of dignity, respect and support at work and in wider society’*

As the state prepares for a spring referendum to repeal the 8th Amendment, deputies Joan Collins and Clare Daly have invited trade union leaders, activists and academics to brief Oireachtas members on the findings of a groundbreaking survey commissioned by Unite the Union, Mandate, CWU Ireland, Unison and GMB and activist groups Alliance for Choice and the Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th. Over 3,000 union members took part in the *Abortion as a Workplace Issue* research (see below). This event precedes a public meeting in Unite the Union, Mid Abbey Street D1, at 7pm this evening on repeal and the role of trade unions.

Joan Collins TD, who hosted the briefing, said: “I welcome the publication of vital research by the trade unions who undertook this survey, this work that shines a light on women's experiences within Irish workplaces and the barriers to accessing health care that they face on a regular basis. “I also very much welcome the initiative of the trade union campaign in organising for repeal of the 8th. Trade unions have played a valuable role in forefronting equality and human rights issues in the past and will play a crucial in the forthcoming referendum.”

Steve Fitzpatrick, general secretary, **CWU**, said: “This survey provides clear proof that abortion is a trade union issue from an economic, social and members’ welfare perspective.”

Dr Fiona Bloomer, lead researcher of *Abortion as a Workplace Issue: A trade union survey north and south of Ireland* (see below), said: “This pioneering research provides clear evidence that abortion is a workplace issue, that those needing abortions have encountered barriers in relation to obtaining time off work, accessing sick pay, advice and support and that many also experienced isolation.

“The study also highlights the benefits of having a safe space to talk about abortion, demonstrated through the process of the online discussion forum, whereby research participants talked to each other about their experiences. We found that even those who expressed hostile attitudes to abortion could see that abortion was a workplace issue and that trade unions had a key role to play in supporting members on this.”

John Douglas, general secretary, **Mandate**, said: “The survey findings make interesting reading in that it has been confirmed that safe open supportive access to abortion is a workplace issue for very many workers. Where there is a lack of support at work, workers feel more vulnerable and pressurised at a time which is already very stressful for them.

“Therefore there is an obvious need for unions, employers and workers to create a culture of dignity and respect for the choices of women workers and to support those choices by all means necessary in the workplace in terms of privacy, leave and other supports. The removal of the 8th Amendment from the Constitution will be an important first step in creating this culture of dignity, respect and support both at work and in the wider society.”

Maggie Ryan, Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th, said: “The 8th Amendment does not reflect the reality of a country in which women regularly seek and have abortions either by going abroad or using pills. The reports of the Citizens’ Assembly and the Joint Oireachtas Committee demonstrate clearly that abortion is an Irish reality. Our survey shows that 20% has some experience of abortion as a workplace issue. In 73% of cases the abortion was not disclosed within the job and 42% had a struggle to pay for it. The current regime is particularly bad for poorer and low paid women and even worse for migrant women whose right to travel is restricted.”

Brendan Ogle, political, community and education officer, **Unite**, said: “With just months to go until a likely referendum, it is crucial that the Repeal the Eighth debate is informed by verifiable facts with respect to the socio-economic aspects of the abortion issue. Thanks to the groundbreaking research in this report – and to the 3,000 union members who took time to respond to the survey – we now not only know that abortion *is* a workplace issue, but also that trade unionists want legal reform. “Nearly 90% oppose the criminalisation of women who have abortions, and a clear majority of all demographics want legislative change to the abortion regimes in both jurisdictions. As a pro-choice union, Unite will be joining with other unions and civil society organisations to vindicate our members’ right to bodily autonomy. At the same time, we will be pressing for workplace supports for women facing a crisis pregnancy and all the associated healthcare issues.”

Ends

Notes for Journalists

Abortion as a Workplace Issue: A trade union survey north and south of Ireland can be found here

<http://www.mandate.ie/News/Mandate/1229/abortion-debate-views-of-over-3000-trade-unionists-reflected-in-new-report.aspx>

The purpose of this research is to provide evidence for Unite the Union, Unison, Mandate, the CWU Ireland and the GMB on union members’ views on abortion in overall terms and legislative reform in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. This research also aims to identify workplace issues surrounding abortion that might affect women, their partners or families.

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*The **Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th** is supported by the CWU, the ICTU, IMPACT, Mandate, the TEEU, Unite along with the youth councils of the CWU, ICTU and Dublin, Bray & District, and Waterford trades councils. We're supported in England by the TUC and Aslef and in Northern Ireland by Unison. We are one of the 100+ members affiliated to the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment.*