The CPI was one of the first, if not the first, political party in Ireland to support a Women’s Right to Choose. The Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) wants to draw attention to the most recent policy with was passed at the CPI congress November 2017, see page 6.

1. We note that since that time a vote to repeal the 8th the constitution in the Republic was won, a situation that the CPI welcomes, albeit that progress on legislation is ongoing. We consider that this change in the Republic has an influence on the North.

2. We do not accept the situation (as some parties do) where women will have to travel to Britain, the Republic of Ireland and other countries to obtain an abortion neither do we accept that women should be criminalised for accessing an abortion pill whilst at the same time being denied the right to access it legally.

3. Another change that has occurred is that the Marie Stopes Clinic in Belfast has now closed. This clinic gave advice and also abortion pills legally to women here (albeit a small number), the closure of this clinic means that a service is no longer available for those in need, especially those who cannot afford to go to Britain.

4. The CPI has welcomed the change in the culture and policy of the trade union movement and including the support of trade unions for the repeal of the 8th Amendment of the Irish constitution (As noted, with many things on this Ireland the YES campaign impacted upon the North and now is the time to act to to change the situation to introduce legislation in the North to ensure free, legal abortion for women here. We also welcome the research and publication by the trades unions in Ireland North and South of the report on abortion being a workplace issue, and also the education in support of women at work in need of abortion services and advice. This would not have happened 30 years ago.

5. We commend and support those organisations who are working for a positive change in the abortion laws.

6. We also believe that the lack of adequate sex education, nursery schools, poverty, poor housing, all have an impact on unwanted pregnancies.

7. We note that the devolved government is neither meeting nor willing to introduce legislation to give women access to abortion.

8. We note with concern that a majority of politicians many of whom are male with strong religious views, have been given control to decide whether or not to introduce legislation on the question of abortion, an issue that directly affects only women. In the past, majority rule in the North discriminated against people; it was not democratic then and is not democratic now.

9. During the period of time known as “the troubles” women (and children) in the North have experienced domestic violence and sexual abuse in particular circumstances where paramilitary organisations and the ‘security forces’ have used their position of power to control women. The lack of abortion services has been a major issue in these circumstances.

10. We do however believe that there are many people in political parties and other organisations who support the right to choose even if the party is opposed or does not have a policy on this, this include a number of women’s organisations.
11. Alliance for Choice has been instrumental in bringing the issue to into the public and political sphere.

12. The Green Party have been very supportive of change.

13. There has been a of change in Sinn Fein’s policy who now support a woman’s right to abortion under the legislation that is in place in the Republic of Ireland. Whilst we welcome this, we believe that the 12 week time scale is too short, that costs could be restrictive and that women should not have to travel to the Republic to get this health services.

14. We note that recently the UN declared that universal rights to life include the right to safe abortion and that obstructing access is a breach of the United Kingdom’s obligations to uphold our human rights.

We support and note the main findings and proposals that Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) made in July 2017 in the Report of the inquiry concerning the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

**NAMELY:**

The sources allege that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) has committed grave and systematic violations of rights under the Convention due to restrictive access to abortion for women and girls in Northern Ireland (NI).

II. Submission by the sources of information

While the NI Court of Appeal recently remarked that the present law on abortion prioritises protecting, to a reasonable extent, the life that women can enjoy independent of the state of health of the foetus, procuring, aiding and abetting abortions in cases of rape, incest, and severe foetal impairment, including fatal foetal abnormality (FFA), remain criminal and carry a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

84 CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/7 (2013), paras. 50 and 51

The Committee recommends that the State party urgently:

(a) Repeal sections 58 and 59 of the Offences against the Person Act, 1861 so that no criminal charges can be brought against women and girls who undergo abortion or against qualified health care professionals and all others who provide and assist in the abortion;

(b) Adopt legislation to provide for expanded grounds to legalise abortion at least in the following cases:

(i) Threat to the pregnant woman’s physical or mental health without conditionality of “long-term or permanent” effects;

(ii) Rape and incest; and CEDAW/C/OP.8/GBR/1

(iii) Severe foetal impairment, including FFA, without perpetuating stereotypes towards persons with disabilities and ensuring appropriate and ongoing support, social and financial, for women who decide to carry such pregnancies to term;

(c) Introduce, as an interim measure, a moratorium on the application of criminal laws concerning abortion, and cease all related arrests, investigations and criminal prosecutions, including of women seeking post-abortion care and healthcare professionals;
(d) Adopt evidence-based protocols for healthcare professionals on providing legal abortions particularly on the grounds of physical and mental health; and ensure continuous training on these protocols;

(e) Establish a mechanism to advance women’s rights, including through monitoring authorities’ compliance with international standards concerning access to sexual and reproductive health including access to safe abortions; and ensure enhanced coordination between this mechanism with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission; and

(f) Strengthen existing data collection and sharing systems between the DHSSPS and the PSNI to address the phenomenon of self-induced abortions.

B. Sexual and reproductive health rights and services

86. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Provide non-biased, scientifically sound and rights-based counselling and information on sexual and reproductive health services, including on all methods of contraception and access to abortion;

(b) Ensure accessibility and affordability of sexual and reproductive health services and products, including on safe and modern contraception, including oral and emergency, long term or permanent and adopt a protocol to facilitate access at pharmacies, clinics and hospitals;

(c) Provide women with access to high quality abortion and post-abortion care in all public health facilities, and adopt guidance on doctor-patient confidentiality in this area;

(d) Make age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights a compulsory curriculum component for adolescents, covering early pregnancy prevention and access to abortion, and monitor its implementation;

(e) Intensify awareness-raising campaigns on sexual and reproductive health rights and services, including on access to modern contraception;

(f) Adopt a strategy to combat gender-based stereotypes regarding women’s primary role as mothers; and

(g) Protect women from harassment

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SECTION OF CPI POLICY ON WOMEN DEALING WITH ABORTION

10 To be welcomed is the solidarity of women’s organisations and trade unions who can work together on common issues on an all Ireland basis. At the present time in Ireland the trade union movement and a number of women’s organisations have joined forces to work on campaigns such as reproductive rights and domestic and sexual violence.

11 The CPI calls for decriminalisation of abortion in line with international human rights standards so that health professionals can provide such care without the threat of prosecution. The CPI supports a woman’s right to choose and free, legal, abortions,
we will continue to fight to have abortion made legal in Ireland. When and where the law is changed it should be clear and precise and not open to interpretation. Where this is not the case we will fight to have the law changed. The woman should have the right to decide what she wants to do in relation to continuing or terminating her pregnancies.

12 The CPI recognise that there is a need to change the laws immediately to ensure that a termination can take place where a woman’s life is at risk and where complicated medical or social issues exist.

13 The CPI further supports the establishment of the Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th Amendment. We view this as a significant step forward for women’s rights. We continue to support both the Abortion Rights Campaign and Alliance for Choice, and all progressive campaigns in this struggle.

14 The CPI particularly welcomes the statement by ICTU that “barriers to reproductive rights are barriers to full social, economic, political and workplace equality” and that “Restrictive abortion practices and barriers to access to safe abortion to the full extent of the law are gender discriminatory, denying women and girls treatment only they need.”

15 We continue to support the work of the Marie Stopes Clinic in Belfast in the recognition that there is an absence of facilities for women in Ireland and we condemn the anti-choice groups who physically harass members of the public, staff and volunteers at the clinic.

16 There is clearly a class dimension to abortion as women who can afford terminations do so, while those who cannot are forced to continue with crisis pregnancies.

17 We recognise that other social measures should be in place like adequate state provision of sex, relationship, and health education in schools, increased access to free contraception, nursery, crèche and other child care support. National Congress November 2017

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