

# Malignant Ulcers of Capitalism: The Proletarian Struggle for Reproductive Freedom (Parts 1-3)

By the League of Internationalist Communists and  
the Internationalist Communist Tendency



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## **Preface**

In this preface we would like to make mention of some of the changes that have taken place since the series was first written between 2020 and 2022. Currently, the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic has been replaced with the cost of living crisis. Alongside this is the fact that South Australia has since decriminalized abortion and it is now seen purely as a healthcare matter, the laws mentioned in these articles which further restrict abortion in Poland have since gone ahead, and Argentina has followed through on the legalization of abortion until the 14th week of pregnancy. There has also been quite a bit of change in the United States and its territories since the overturning of *Roe v Wade*.

Abortion is banned from conception in Alabama, American Samoa, Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Northern Mariana Islands, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia. It is banned from 6 weeks in Georgia and South Carolina, from 12 weeks in Nebraska and North Carolina, from 13 weeks in Guam, from 15 weeks in Arizona and Florida, and from 18 weeks in Utah. All of these states permit abortions in the event of medical crises, albeit state laws may differ in this regard. For instance, although some jurisdictions allow abortions to safeguard a person's "health," others only approve them when a person's "life" is in danger. Several abortion providers have stated that the wording in many medical emergency exceptions is overly ambiguous or ignores the complexities of medicine,

making them unfeasible in real-world situations. Out of all of the US states, only Alaska, Colorado, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington DC have legal abortion with no restrictions on the procedure based on foetus viability or the 24 week mark of pregnancy, as is the case in Virginia, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Washington, Kansas, and the US Virgin Islands.

While Bourgeois women in states where abortion is banned have the luxury to travel to another state where abortion is legal and they can receive the procedure without penalty. Working class women who are unprepared to be mothers are more likely to have no alternative but to have a baby they do not want; something that could significantly traumatize both the mother and child. Although some working class women may feel happy and fulfilled with motherhood, many also face serious hardships, primarily financial. Many working class women in the U.S. are abandoned by their partners soon after finding out they're pregnant or giving birth to a child. A large percentage of single mothers end up staying in abusive relationships because they cannot provide for their children on their own – despite the fact that the children will likely become traumatized by being around domestic violence. Single mothers may also have to engage in sex work to survive in order to make a high enough income to provide for their children. Sex workers may

face the likelihood of being raped by a client and becoming pregnant with their baby, without the option of getting a legal abortion. With safe and legal abortions inaccessible to proletarian women, their only alternatives are illegal ones, which are unregulated, and prone to dangerous or even fatal procedures.

Only once capitalism has been abolished will women and all people have full reproductive freedom. In a communist society, people will not only have the choice to decide whether to proceed with a pregnancy or to have an abortion, but we will have the resources required to ensure that the latter option is a last resort. Since women will no longer be confined to economic subjugation by the bourgeois family unit, child rearing will be made social and women will no longer bear the burden of domestic labor. We must abolish capitalism to get rid of the family as an economic unit and achieve full reproductive freedom.

## **Introduction**

In this pamphlet on reproductive struggles in class society we bring to focus some of the facts and dangers surrounding abortion, as well as the family unit and prostitution, two phenomena that Marxists deem to be flip sides of the same coin, and inseparable from the struggle for reproductive freedom. We also speak on sterilization, the impact that the climate crisis has on us having children, sexual violence in times of imperialist conflict, religion and reproduction, and shed light on bourgeois laws as specific to the needs of capital,

noting the consequential damages to the proletariat. Included in our sections on bourgeois laws and religion will be sex-selective abortions, China's one (now two) child policy, Muslim-majority countries such as Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran, and Catholic dominated regions such as Latin America and Poland.

Even today proletarian women are often denied the same freedom to control their own bodies as their less financially challenged 'sisters'. Sex education is still woefully erratic, as is access to safe and effective contraception. While legal, accessible, affordable abortion is just not a practical option for those who are left to seek out a clandestine ("back-alley") abortion or are forced to carry the pregnancy to term. These women, many of whom are single or lacking in adequate support networks, are forced to have children without the necessary money or time, as both are monopolized by wage-labor. A large number decide that it would be in their best interest to have an abortion due to this absence of needed resources or the desire to raise a child. When forced into situations of restricted access, many proletarian women give birth to babies who then grow up in environments which lack the necessities required for child-rearing.

## Part 1

### **Abortion and Contraception Facts and Dangers**

Women of the bourgeois class have long had their own private physicians and ability to pay for safe clandestine abortions. On top of this is their adequate access to birth control – leaving abortion for them as purely a backup option. Meanwhile, “back-alley” abortions, sought by working-class women around the world, used to see the most notable tactic be the use of wire coat hangers – Clorox, knitting needles, Coke bottles, and sticks were also often used.

Today in countries with legalized abortion, the pill RU486 – actually comprised of two pills, known medically as mifepristone and misoprostol – is commonly prescribed for abortions up until 9 weeks gestation. After 9 weeks, the procedure of surgical abortion at a specialist clinic or hospital is required. When performed by qualified health and medical professionals in hygienic conditions, abortion is one of the safest medical procedures and complications are relatively rare.

Meanwhile in many countries where abortion remains banned or heavily restricted, misoprostol pills are often legally sold in pharmacies for the treatment of ulcers

and subsequently sought out by pregnant workers. Although much safer than older methods of back-alley abortion, using misoprostol comes with a significantly increased risk of experiencing potential health complications, when taken on its own, rather than in combination with mifepristone.

The risk of complications also increases the further into the pregnancy that an abortion is needed. These risks include infection or damage of the womb, pregnancy remnants in the womb (incomplete abortion), continuation of the pregnancy, excessive bleeding, and a damaged cervix. When safely performed, abortion does not affect your chances of having normal pregnancies in the future. But repeated abortions have been associated with an increased risk of premature birth and potential risks to your fertility and future pregnancies if womb infection develops and is not treated promptly. Many people are able to get pregnant immediately after the procedure, so it is necessary to start using contraception right away.

The only contraception that largely protects against pregnancy, disease and infection comes in the form of the condom. While other temporary measures include: natural calendar based methods, spermicide, birth control pills, intrauterine devices (IUDs), contraceptive implants (Nexplanon), hormonal patches, and

injections. More permanent forms of contraception include: tubal ligations, hysterectomies, and vasectomies. All of these forms of contraception help prevent pregnancy, come with their own benefits and risk factors, and have varying levels of efficiency. For example, birth control pills can reduce the risks of some cancers and pelvic inflammatory disease, but come with an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases. IUDs are highly effective in preventing pregnancy, but they come with a risk of infection that other contraceptives do not. Some forms of birth control can also have a negative effect on an individual's mood, weight, libido, or cause physical pain or irritation. In regards to male contraceptive measures, beyond condoms and vasectomies, much more still needs to be done to see such a thing be commonplace and readily accessible.

While the majority of people who seek to terminate their pregnancy are straight cisgender women – lesbian, bisexual, and transgender workers are also heavily impacted by whether adequate contraception and safe abortion are accessible. Increased risk of sexual assault and attempts to combat bullying in school or otherwise conceal their sexual or gender identity can lead to adolescent sexual and gender minorities who are capable of pregnancy, falling pregnant at a much higher rate than their straight cisgender counterparts. Due to



this, they are said to be at least twice as likely to seek out an abortion.

## **The Bourgeoisie Family Unit, Domestic Violence and Prostitution**

As Marx wrote in *The German Ideology*, “The first division of labor is that between man and woman for the propagation of children”. The development of monogamous marriage created the first form of the family, one based on economic conditions and the preservation of private property. Engels added on to Marx’s prior statement that “The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male.”. This in no way implies that women and men comprise two separate classes. It simply means that the oppression of the female sex arose with that of class oppression. The husband has a position of supremacy over his wife within the bourgeois family unit; in the heyday of industrial capitalism he was the one expected to support the family through his wages, placing him in a position of financial dominance – giving him the power to make financial decisions for the family, or cut off support at his will. Despite the fact that many women were employed, especially in factories and

mills, the standard picture was that women, especially married women, should manage the household. By carrying out their family duties, the proletarian woman is excluded from social production and falls financially dependent on her husband. Thus, the bourgeois family unit provides a basis for the oppression of the proletarian woman.

Male supremacy within the household was and is protected by law. Within the proletarian family, the introduction of women into the labor market allowed them to become the head wage-laborer of the household. In such cases, it would appear there is no economic basis for male supremacy within the family. However, that is not to say that such supremacy fails to exist, either in legal terms or in terms of social norms. The integration of women into the workforce created a dual-dependency; in addition to their financial dependence on their husbands, women were now exploited through the commodification of their labor-power.

Part of the reason for this is that women comprise a cheap labor force and still today are paid less than men for the same amount and quality of work. In addition, many proletarian women spend less time than their male counterparts wage-laboring and continue to take up the non-waged domestic labor of the household.

Women are here seen as still somewhat excluded from social production, rendering them unable to truly gain economic independence.

Carrying a pregnancy to term largely confines the proletarian woman to the non-waged labor of child-rearing. The time which she spends taking care of her children and running the household is time taken away from selling her labor-power. Thus, she is subordinated to her husband due to his economic supremacy over her, which reinforces the male supremacy within the family. Although proletarian women cannot be emancipated without the abolition of class society, women's entry into social production was a necessary precondition for this abolition.

Proletarian women are often forced to stay in relationships against their wishes due to unwanted pregnancies and inaccessibility of abortions. This is especially dangerous for them and their children in cases of domestic violence: violence which is often not recognized as such, but on the contrary, regarded as a right to inflict it. Marital rape, for instance, only became fully criminalized in England in 2003. Even today, countries such as China, Syria, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, Bangladesh, and Algeria, still do not fully recognize rape within marriage to be a criminal offense. Another example is Russia, where "non-aggravated"

battery was decriminalized in 2017 – an action which has led to a rise in domestic violence, as well as a decrease in the number of cases reported. It has left victims less inclined to try and leave or seek any form of help since their experiences are now largely deemed acceptable in the eyes of the law. In many instances where they do reach out for help, the police do nothing, leaving the victims vulnerable to retaliation for speaking out or trying to escape. Here, we could go as far as saying that the cycle of violence is the *raison d'être* of the bourgeois family unit.

Domestic violence reinforces the victim's economic dependence on the abuser, which prevents many women from leaving – especially if there are children involved. Confined to the duties of the household and child-rearing, women cannot escape violent relationships without the necessary economic independence that would free them from the control of their husbands. The abuser may even prevent his partner from working or keep her isolated to make sure she remains financially dependent on him. Even in cases where the victim is employed, the abuser may force her to give up her earnings, or even steal her paychecks without her knowledge. Thus, she is forced to stay and remain at his mercy.

Research has shown that women who experience unintended pregnancies are often at greater risk of domestic violence. A New Zealand study indicated that 13.4% of women who had an unintended pregnancy experienced physical violence from their partners within the next 6 years, compared to 5.4% who experienced physical violence after having intended pregnancies. This could be due to the fact that unintended pregnancies cause additional strain on relationships and the financial and emotional stresses involved in child-rearing could potentially exacerbate abusive behaviors.

Reproductive coercion and control is a form of sexual violence that is prevalent among victims of domestic violence. It includes sabotaging contraceptive methods, coercing a partner to have unprotected sex, and attempting to or succeeding in impregnating a partner against their will. According to an Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) survey of domestic violence victims in the US, four in ten women reported that a partner had forced them to stop using birth control or attempted to impregnate them against their will. 84% became pregnant. Another cross-sectional study investigating young women in Northern California found that out of the 53% of participants who reported intimate partner violence, 19% experienced pregnancy coercion, 15% experienced

birth control sabotage, and 35% experienced reproductive control from their partners. Pregnancy coercion and birth control sabotage were both found to be associated with unintended pregnancy.

It is evident that reproductive coercion and control limits the victim's ability to retain a job or education, since full-time child-rearing creates barriers to working or studying. The majority of the victims in the IWPR study reported experiencing financial abuse from their partners;  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the survivors indicated that intimate partner violence had hindered their educational and job opportunities, and 83% reported that their partners had disrupted their ability to work. Reproductive coercion and control strengthens the bourgeois family unit by establishing a dynamic in which the victim becomes financially dependent on the abuser, unable to leave because of a lack of economic freedom.

One of the most concerning things about everything we have mentioned above is that so many people still do not even understand what domestic violence is. In Australia, for example, recent studies have shown that, within the 18-34 age range, more than 4 in 10 men did not consider punching, hitting, or restraining a partner to be domestic violence. Almost half did not believe that controlling finances and forcing one's partner into economic dependency are acts of domestic violence.

These numbers do not even indicate how many must still not recognize psychological abuse and verbal degradation to also be forms of intimate partner violence. Emotional abuse, usually in the form of manipulation and gaslighting – a method of psychological control which involves breaking down an individual’s mental state over a prolonged period of time, causing them to doubt their thoughts, experiences, and even their own sanity – can be a precursor to physical violence; often, they go hand in hand. Interestingly, it was reported that people across all genders from the older generations were more inclined to recognize domestic violence.

Although domestic violence victims are disproportionately female and this article focuses mainly on this factor, as proletarians see our living conditions increasingly decline, more and more working men, in both straight and gay relationships, are also finding themselves either trapped in a toxic or violent home environment, that they would rather leave, or left out on the streets at further risk of COVID and other dangers. The COVID-19 pandemic, and its subsequent lockdowns, lay-offs, and income decreases, has only exacerbated what were already high domestic violence rates around the world. It has also further impaired the ability for working-class victims of any gender to be able to leave.

Although the brunt of childcare and the consequences of unintended pregnancies fall primarily on the mother, fathers are also affected by restrictive abortion laws. Proletarian men who are loving and caring partners may have to work greater hours, increasing their dependence on capital as they struggle to support their families. Since the majority of their time is occupied by wage-labor, they may grow distant from their families and become unable to develop proper relationships with their children. Regardless of devotion to their families and partners, an unintentional pregnancy in conjunction with economic burden can hinder relationships, since marriages beginning after an unintended conception have a greater chance of failure. If it ends in divorce, the now-single mother is likely to have a more difficult time balancing both domestic and wage-labor in order to provide for her child on her own.

Capital acquires its needs through the law, with restrictions on reproductive freedom reinforcing working women's subjugation within the household through a division that only strengthens the bourgeois class.

Within the shadows of the bourgeois family unit, prostitution (sex work) thrives, with capital forcing millions of proletarians to resort to selling sexual access to their bodies for the sake of survival. Many



others see themselves forced or trapped in the industry in the form of being trafficked: manipulation, threats, physical violence, and withholding of pay or legal documentation (such as passports), these are just a few ways in which this extra level of force can manifest. Although prostitution predates capitalism, it does not predate class society. In the ancient and medieval world prostitutes served as the legal complement to exclusive familial relationships and were tolerated by society. With the rise of capitalism, more toiling women were thrust into this form of labor, a direct result of both the exploitation of labor by capital in and of itself and women's barriers to the legal labor force. Bourgeois society simultaneously encourages prostitution while punishing and shaming prostitutes.

Alexandra Kollontai described prostitution as a social phenomenon necessarily tied to the economic dependence women face in marriage. She stated that the woman sells herself legally to her husband; rendering her confined to the household, and financially dependent on her husband. The wife and the prostitute both have an economic dependence on men; be it inside or outside of legal marriage, each resort to selling themselves for survival. Thus, prostitution could be considered the flipside of bourgeois marriage. This is depicted clearly in the cycle of violence; the proletarian woman who relies on the abuser's wages to

survive is confined to the bourgeois family unit. In order to escape his violence, she resorts to prostitution to provide for her and her children.

Prostitution is a form of wage-labor which particularly impedes on reproductive freedom. Reproduction on one's own terms becomes impossible when it is coerced through wage-laboring. For instance, unwanted pregnancies as a result of prostitution often result in the sex worker only becoming further trapped in the industry. As Kollontai wrote, "When a woman's wages are insufficient to keep her alive, the sale of favors seems a possible subsidiary occupation.". Unable to access reproductive care, women who have unintended pregnancies can fall into poverty without having the resources to raise a child – especially if they are already at a financial disadvantage. The proletarian woman's dependence on capital puts her in a position in which she partakes in prostitution to provide for her child. This cycle is perpetuated by the nature of prostitution and limited access to contraceptives – sex workers who have children as a result of their occupation are then forced to remain in prostitution in order to care for their children.

This is the case in many countries in which abortion is illegal or inaccessible to the majority of proletarian women. In Uganda, the penal code allows for abortion

in instances where the pregnancy is a threat to the pregnant person's life, physical, or mental health. However, the laws are vague enough that it is unclear under which circumstances abortion is legally permitted, resulting in many medical providers refusing to perform abortions at all in order to avoid legal consequences. Despite the restrictive laws, 314,500 women in Uganda had abortions in 2013, many of whom were sex workers. Contributing factors to low contraceptive use in Uganda and other countries across Africa include: poverty, cultural values, spousal violence and a lack of support, health and sexual education services. This helps fuel unintended pregnancies which in turn increases the rate of maternal and infant mortality. This is due to proletarian women delivering their babies with unskilled or low skilled assistance.

Many sex workers living in Uganda have unintended pregnancies due to the lack of knowledge and accessibility surrounding contraceptives and sex education – along with men typically not wanting to use condoms. Some accounts tell of sex workers being unaware of abortion medications and instead, nearly dying from the use of washing detergent and tea leaves as alternative abortion methods. Other accounts tell of workers who were raped by clients, attempting to have an abortion by ingesting local herbs or taking

homeopathic medications – all of which were unsuccessful, forcing them to give birth against their wishes. Much like criminalizing prostitution does nothing to help those who have no other options nor those who are forced into the industry against their will, criminalizing abortion does not stop abortions from happening – it simply makes the procedures more dangerous and, in many cases, fatal.

Similar to Uganda’s penal code, abortion is illegal in Brazil except in cases of rape, fetal abnormality, or if the mother’s life is at risk. Despite these laws, one in five women by the age of 40 reported that they have had at least one abortion. In 2015 a study among sex workers in Brazil showed that more than half of those surveyed had obtained at least one abortion in their lifetimes; the most common method used was misoprostol. Those who used more invasive methods of abortion, such as needles and uterine probes, faced greater medical complications such as hemorrhage and infection. Although the majority of sex workers who used misoprostol went to the hospital to confirm the completion of the procedure, most refrained from disclosing the abortion to medical professionals – likely to avoid punishment or legal consequences. Furthermore, many sex workers who induced abortions themselves received misoprostol from illegal drug distributors, which included counterfeit pills that took

larger amounts to ensure that the abortion would be successful.

In studies conducted across Iran; Russia; Colombia; and Zambia; it was found that a large amount of sex workers reported to having at least one abortion in their lifetimes, many of which were induced. In most of these countries, little to no contraceptive methods were used. These results indicate that a restriction of legal access to abortions has little to no impact in stopping women from seeking them. However, it is clear these that laws target working-class women, who are then forced to resort to dangerous, and even potentially lethal methods to perform these abortions themselves, often seeking little to no medical care to avoid any legal repercussions.

In countries such as the United Kingdom, where a fifth of the population now fall below the poverty line, there has been an increase in “survival sex”, particularly among workers at risk of homelessness. The housing crisis in the UK has prompted the rise of “sex for rent” situations, in which landlords prey on the vulnerable by offering a room in exchange for sex. Often, those who refuse to partake in this are punished; in some cases, landlords proposition sex to struggling tenants as an alternative method of payment, to which the tenant may be evicted if they refuse. With capitalism inherently

necessitating the exploitation of most of the human race, it is not simply a matter of having a broken system as bourgeois reformists claim. The capitalist system has come full circle and resulted in more and more unemployed and precariously employed proletarians being coerced into providing sexual access to their bodies in exchange for food and shelter.

These articles contain a lot of information that we wrote before the current COVID-19 pandemic hit and only worsened conditions. With lockdowns and other restrictions coming and going, many sex workers have seen themselves face the same sorts of struggle as all other workers. They have either been put out of work due to the health risks of the pandemic and legal repercussions of breaking lockdown or they have had to continue working under these extremely risky conditions. Laws and restrictions on prostitution in Canada have resulted in many sex workers unable to even access government assistance.

As Engels wrote, the abolition of the family is necessary for the abolition of prostitution, as both are rooted in private property and the dependence of women on men. This can only be done through the abolition of class society, through an international proletarian revolution. Upon the realization of a world which has abolished all the components of class society

and meets everyone's needs, there will be no channel for the commodification of women's or anyone else's bodies to exist. Children will no longer be brought into the world through prostitution. Women who wish to have children will be able to do so without being confined to the household. Children will be raised communally, the brunt of the labor no longer falling on the mother. People would no longer be forced to partake in unwanted sexual acts in order to survive, nor could they prey on others in that situation, and instead would be able to enjoy consensual sex for mutual pleasure. Only upon this abolition taking place will there be true reproductive freedom and the liberation of all of humanity.

## Part 2

### **Bourgeois Law and the Stronghold of Capital**

*Such laws [against abortion and the distribution of medical literature on contraceptive measures] are nothing but the hypocrisy of the ruling classes. These laws do not heal the ulcers of capitalism, they merely turn them into malignant ulcers that are especially painful for the oppressed masses. - Lenin, The Working Class and NeoMalthusianism, 1913*

As of 2019, the Hague Convention includes 101 countries. It has been in force since December 1983 and is said to have been drawn to prevent one parent from fleeing internationally, with their child, upon losing custody. The majority of Hague cases, however, involve proletarian mothers attempting to escape domestic violence. Women, especially those who are unable to access contraception or abortion and have had children as a result, are then faced with the stark choice of either leaving their child behind, if they need to flee internationally, or remaining trapped in the country that they gave birth in – whether they are a permanent resident or citizen or not. On paper there is an exception



to the convention if there is a grave risk of harm to the child. Despite recognizing that domestic violence puts the victim's entire family at risk of violence (especially those living in the same household), courts often dismiss this when a direct impact on the children cannot yet be proven. Under these circumstances, the ability to escape this violence is further impaired. Many proletarian women are unable to access legal advice or government assistance, they often end up homeless, at risk of losing custody, or murdered. This is a prime example of how bourgeois laws reinforce the same harm they claim to protect people against, while restricting our movement through sovereign borders.

## **North America**

One of the first countries to sign the Hague Convention was Canada, where abortion has been free from legal regulation on a national level since 1988. The mistake of conflating nationwide legality with accessibility is one that overlooks other hurdles to obtaining the procedure, such as funding, distance to medical facilities and provincial laws and regulations. For example, Ontario does not fund abortions at every clinic and New Brunswick only funds them in hospitals. The result is that workers living outside of the urban centers, such as Vancouver, Toronto, and

Montreal, face further distress when seeking an abortion.

The Northern regions are heavily populated by First Nations workers and further reflect just how much better “universal healthcare” in capitalist society looks on paper than it works in practice. In the capitals, access to abortion is rather the same to the southern provinces, except for surgical abortion rarely being immediately available. The procedure is only performed a few days each month and a lack of resources often see them bumped back for incoming emergencies. Those residing in rural communities, face barriers to accessing abortion that are distinctive to those anywhere else in the country. Whether the abortion service chosen is medical or surgical, the procedure demands travelling to a capital city – a demand that is financially and emotionally taxing.

In the United States, abortion is still the topic of many protests, with a handful of providers and their assistants being killed over the years and clinics vandalized or bombed. In 2019, a myriad of states passed – or proposed to pass – stricter abortion laws. Some of them were later blocked by federal judges and others are still yet to go into effect. Most of these bills would ban abortion from the moment a heartbeat can be detected – before the embryo has even formed a heart chamber,

and before many realize they are pregnant. Taking the matter further, Alabama signed off on laws which would prohibit abortion at any stage of pregnancy, unless the pregnant person's life is at risk. These laws are more restrictive than those found in Saudi Arabia – where abortion is allowed under these circumstances, as well as if there is a serious threat to mental or physical health. In Texas, laws were proposed that would see those who seek an abortion facing the death penalty.

With maternal and infant mortality in the United States continuing to rise, more working women and girls were already dying from pregnancy-related complications than in any other developed country before any of these bills were proposed. As symptoms present in the same manner, even healthcare professionals cannot tell the difference between a miscarriage and a medical abortion. Around 30% of the world's imprisoned women are in United States' prisons, and 80% of them are mothers. Most of them have not been convicted of any crime and are simply unable to afford bail. Anyone who suffers through a miscarriage and avoids seeking medical attention, out of fear of prosecution, could face serious health consequences.

There is no national guarantee of maternity leave in the United States, and the price of childcare continues to

soar – disproportionately driving mothers out of the workforce. In two parent households, where both are in employment, over a quarter of household income is spent on childcare. Things are even bleaker for single parents, as childcare costs around half of their income. Childcare workers themselves remain among the lowest-paid in the country. When working long hours (often in multiple jobs), the need to survive often results in working women taking care of others' children for survival, with little time left to spend with their own.

Canada and the United States both have a long history of forced and coerced abortion. First Nations women in Canada have been seeking compensation for these atrocities, some as recent as 2017. It has been reported that Californian prisons' authorized the coerced sterilizations of nearly 150 prisoners between 2006 and 2010. We understand this struggle against forced abortion and sterilization to be one and the same; both are part of the struggle for safe access to consensual terminations and overall reproductive freedom. They are both a part of the fight against capital's incessant fetish for controlling our bodies.

## Oceania

In Australia, abortion legislation varies from state to state. Some even have “safe zones” surrounding clinics which criminalize anti-abortion protesters. In every state and territory, abortion is legal to protect the life and health of the person carrying the pregnancy. In recent times, several states have removed abortion from the penal code. Western Australia was the first to do so over two decades ago and now the focus has shifted onto South Australia finally doing the same. The current laws in South Australia state that all surgical abortions must be signed off by two medical professionals and performed at a registered hospital. After 23 weeks, abortion can only be lawfully performed to save the pregnant person’s life.

Despite being available through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) since 2013, RU486 is still classified as a special drug. In rural areas especially, where many doctors are unable to prescribe the pills, pregnant workers experience great difficulties in accessing them. The demand for a surgical abortion after 9 weeks gestation can also leave many working women without access to much-needed services. On top of the limited medical facilities in some states and most rural towns, the price of a surgical termination varies. The cost of the procedure and the common need

for travel and accommodation is one that not all working women can afford.

Access to permanent forms of birth control, such as tubal ligation or a hysterectomy, is practically non-existent for anyone under 30 – no matter how adamant we are about the decision to not have (more) children. At the same time, the Australian state has an ongoing tendency of forcing contraception, sterilization, and abortion – that is wanted but inaccessible to others – onto disabled women and girls. Capital informs who ‘must’ and who must not raise children. The unborn are deemed as either necessities or liabilities – reproductive restraints are here enforced by the state.

Proletarian Indigenous women are the fastest growing segment among the Australian prison population – they are 21 times more likely to be imprisoned than their non-indigenous counterparts. Evidence suggests that up to 90% of imprisoned Indigenous women have been physically, sexually or emotionally abused at some stage of their life (in some cases, they are even imprisoned for calling the police on someone who has assaulted them). It is believed that these experiences, coupled with racial profiling and the usual working class struggle of poverty and exploitation, frequently lead to their offending and subsequent criminalization. The majority of them are mothers and it is largely

through this fragmentation of their families that women are more inclined to reoffend out of desperation. Indigenous women are the least likely to find secure housing after leaving prison, they are often left homeless or must return to a violent household. Being denied the ability to provide a safe and secure home for their children only fuels the conditions in which children are more likely to end up in the child “protection” and “criminal justice” systems themselves.

The forced removal of Indigenous children from their families runs rampant throughout Australia’s history and to this day they are still extremely overrepresented in the child “protection” system. They compose just under 6% of the child population but 37% of children in “out-of-home care” are Indigenous – 81% are on a long-term guardianship order and therefore in state care until they turn 18. Additionally, the number of Indigenous children in the child “protection” system doubled in the decade between the 2008 “apology to the stolen generations” and 2018. In Australia, children as young as ten can be thrown in prison. Indigenous minors constitute a little over 53% of those in youth custody. It is clear that the state has never ceased imprisoning Indigenous people or stopped stealing children, they simply altered their methods. We could consider this to be a generations-long, colonially

informed, capitalist suppression of one of the most simplistic forms of reproductive freedom: the freedom to partake in the raising of one's own children.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has found that conditions in Australia's "offshore processing center" on the nearby island of Nauru are "cruel, inhuman and degrading". Despite this statement, they believe these policies have not been purposely designed to harm anyone and say there is not enough evidence to prosecute the Federal Government. For years, these camps have produced tragic accounts of women and children being sexually assaulted – especially at the hands of those who are paid to "protect them". From 2015, until a policy change in 2017, 24 women were flown to Australia to terminate pregnancies – most of them the result of rape. This change has meant that traumatized women and girls would no longer be seen by doctors in Australia and would instead be referred to the Nauruan Overseas Medical Referral committee. As abortion is illegal in Nauru, except for when saving the pregnant person's life, women are now denied yet another necessity. These laws are the same in Papua New Guinea, Micronesia, Tuvalu, Kiribati, the Solomon Islands, and the Marshall Islands. In Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu abortion is only allowed if it is lifesaving or is for the preservation of physical or mental health.



## **Religion, One Child Policies, and Son Preferences**

In many religions, abortion is forbidden and seen as an act of murder. This is the case in Roman Catholicism, where the belief is also that any form of contraception, outside of natural calendar methods, is an “intrinsic evil”. In recent times, Pope Francis has compared abortion to the mob hiring hit men to kill people to resolve a problem. Despite these factors, it is said that around 90% of Catholic women in the United States use some form of artificial contraception. All denominations of Christianity adhered to the Catholic Church’s view on contraception until the 1930s, today they are one of the only denominations to maintain it. The views of some Anabaptists (such as the Amish) are even stricter and prohibit both artificial contraception and natural methods.

Across predominantly Catholic Latin America, abortion is heavily restricted. Out of 33 countries, only Cuba, Uruguay, and Guyana permit elective abortions – as well as Mexico City. Some countries permit abortion in the case of rape or if there are life threatening conditions. But Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Suriname all have a total ban on abortion, and punishments include up to 50 years imprisonment.

Although abortion is legal in Cuba, access to contraception is extremely inadequate for workers and this often results in repeated abortions being sought in its place. Studies have indicated that 76% of pregnant teenagers terminate and that many pregnant 15 to 19 year old girls have already had at least one abortion. This is not only evident of the lack of contraceptive access, but also of the broader issue of economic crisis and skyrocketing food prices. It is all the more complicated to flee from a country when you are pregnant or have small mouths to feed – something that is evidenced by Cuban, Venezuelan and other Latin American migrants currently being held and living in uncertainty in Mexico and in ICE cages upon trying to enter the United States.

In Argentina, birthplace of Pope Francis, you can face prison time of up to fifteen years for having an abortion. It is also quite common for pregnancies to be forced to term. In 2019, there was the controversial case of an 11-year-old girl who was raped and then delayed an abortion by state authorities, until a doctor stepped in to perform a caesarean section at 23 weeks gestation. Despite the strict abortion laws, it would have been legal for the procedure to have taken place when the pregnancy was discovered at 16 weeks. A minority of health professionals and activists provide information about accessing safe abortion, while others

go a step further and provide access to abortion pills. The health professionals and first group of activists are protected by “freedom of information” laws as they do not provide access to the pills themselves, but the latter must operate more discreetly to avoid prosecution. It is unfortunate, however, that just as in many other places, most pro-choice activists put their faith into electing the “right people” into parliament. In 2015, following the murder of pregnant 14-year-old Chiara Paez by her boyfriend, Argentina saw mass protests against femicide under the slogan Ni Una Menos. And in 2016, following the brutal rape and murder of 16-year-old Lucía Pérez, protests broke out again and a one hour “women’s strike” was called (inspired by the “women’s strike” in Poland a few days earlier). The Ni Una Menos movement has since spread into surrounding countries and mobilized support for reproductive rights but in 2018 a bill to legalize abortion was rejected in the Argentinian senate. On 11 December 2020, a bill legalizing abortion until the 14th week of pregnancy passed through the lower house and is now once again awaiting the decision of the senate. We must keep in mind that even if legalization does go ahead, it could just as easily be stripped away again while the capitalist state still exists. The same issues that women in other countries with legalization deal with are also likely to present themselves.

Abortion is also illegal in Venezuela, except for when the pregnant person's life is at risk. These strict laws, increased prostitution due to the country's economic woes, and a lack of affordable birth control have caused a rise in sexually transmitted infections and in unintended pregnancies. Due to this, many working women seek out back-alley abortions and die or are lucky to survive. When the pregnancy is carried to term, the struggle continues in the form of trying to avoid sending children to bed hungry. With most of the country's population living below the poverty line, more permanent forms of contraception, such as sterilization – which the government offers for free while denying access to safer, less permanent contraceptive measures – are being sought by teenage girls after one pregnancy. Previously, this procedure was sought primarily by people in their late 30s with multiple children. On top of this is a freshly emerging trend of childless workers seeking out vasectomies. The crisis of reproductive freedom in the country continues to grow.

In recent years, Catholic Poland has repeatedly tried to tighten their already highly restrictive abortion laws. In 2016 and 2020 this resulted in nationwide protests where tens of thousands of people from all over the country missed work and school, or disregarded lockdown measures, to attend them. This year's

protests have resulted in a temporary freeze on the implementation of laws that virtually ban abortion by making them illegal even when the fetus is severely deformed or will not survive the pregnancy. In the Republic of Ireland a long campaign and a series of protests (with the likes of Strike 4 Repeal again taking direct inspiration from events in Poland) culminated in a referendum in 2018 which legalized abortion. The procedure is available for any reason until 12 weeks, until 24 weeks in case of serious risk to the pregnant person's health, and beyond this in instances of fatal fetal abnormality. When these laws went into effect in January 2019, the country's national health service also began offering the procedure free of charge. However, there is a lack of doctors able to provide it and there is a mandatory 3-day "cooling-off" period between requesting an abortion and being able to receive one. These conditions make it so that many people are still likely to have to pay for travel and accommodation – like they did before legalization. In October 2019, Northern Ireland also scrapped their draconian abortion laws. Some of the women who were forced to travel to England and had to pay for procedures they could not truly afford have now won compensation cases that they filed against the government.

In Islam, contraception is permissible only if both parties consent – in other words, if the man gives

permission. It is widely agreed that abortion after 120 days is the killing of a soul – an act forbidden by Allah. Before that 120-day mark, the permissibility varies among different sects. Although no Muslim-majority country has a complete ban on abortion, it is illegal to have one under any circumstance other than for saving the life of the pregnant person in almost half of these countries. Where abortion is legal outside of this factor, the only additional leeway typically comes in the form of also allowing fetal abnormalities, if there is a proven risk to the woman's mental or physical health or in cases of rape.

In some countries with looser abortion laws, it is not often easily accessible or affordable for working women. The reasons behind this legalization also do not stem from genuine concern for the well-being of anyone who falls pregnant. Since 1973, Tunisia has been the only Muslim-majority country with legalized abortion for social reasons if it is before the end of the first trimester. This is believed to have been influenced by post-war neo-Malthusian ideology that had the ruling classes deem population control as a top priority. In Turkey, abortion is legal until the tenth week of pregnancy. But most public hospitals reject the request for an abortion if it comes solely from the pregnant person. Around 12% of hospitals refuse to perform the procedure as a matter of principle and in the regions

near the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, abortions are no longer permitted at any hospital. In a country where the average household income is far below that in Europe and where only one-quarter of women are employed, the costs of the procedure vary and are often far too expensive for working women.

After the 1979 Islamic “revolution” in Iran, abortion became a criminal offense and was only permitted before 120 days to save the life of the pregnant person. In 2004, laws were changed to include preventing stillbirth and deformity as grounds for legal abortion. Approximately one third of all pregnancies are unintended, around half of these are unwanted and the other half are poorly timed. A number of these pregnancies are terminated through unsafe back-alley methods. As a result, abortion complications are one of the main causes of maternal mortality in Iran and around the world.

The practice of sex-selective abortion is influenced largely by cultural beliefs that deem female children as an economic burden. In Muslim-majority Pakistan, these beliefs and a lack of sexual education are just two factors behind high abortion rates. Due to the vague laws that regulate the procedure, many hospitals will not provide it. In cases where the hospital does believe it is legal, doctors often use their personal beliefs as an

excuse to refuse them. Once again, it has been proven that abortion laws and social influences do not always deter people, especially if they are desperate not to give birth – they only maim and kill them.

The main religion in India is Hinduism, which permits abortion if the pregnant person's life is at risk – due to it being viewed as the lesser harm. Outside of this condition, abortion is considered tantamount to killing one's own parents. It is not uncommon for illegal unsafe abortions to be sought, for procedures to be delayed by abortion clinics, or for pregnancies to be forced to term. This is a struggle that unmarried female workers especially face, at an increased rate, due to the social stigma surrounding sex before marriage, and the additional legal hurdles faced by minors. It was not too long ago, that dowries involved the family of the bride paying the family of the groom. These days it is the bride's family who pay, to maintain or increase the family's status. The combination of dowry costs and women earning less comes with the fear of the family being financially crippled if they have too many girls. The act of “bride-burning” (also known as “dowry death”) – where a husband or his mother sets the wife on fire – claims the life of at least one woman every hour, in India. This threat, and other instances of domestic violence, pose a significant risk to married women, whether that marriage is forced or one of love



– especially to those who only bear girls or who marry into a family with little, or no, dowry. Similar to this act of bride-burning, is the ancient ritual known as “Sati”. Sati began as an act that was considered as the greatest form of devotion to one’s husband and signified the end of a marriage. The widow would “follow her husband into the after-life” by throwing herself on his pyre and burning alongside him. Over time, Sati became a forced practice and women who did not wish to burn to death were forced to kill themselves in different ways. This is because widows are viewed as a burden who have no role to play in society, especially if they have no living children to support them.

In 1979, under Deng Xiaoping, China implemented a one-child policy to ensure that population growth did not outpace economic development. During the 1980s, a change was made to allow rural parents to have a second child if the first one was a daughter. Towards the end of 2015, the shift was made to a two-child policy. This move has so far failed to resolve any of the extensive issues that were caused over a 36-year period. In Chinese culture, women typically join their husband in taking care of his parents in old age, rather than taking care of her own. This is a tradition that makes male children more desirable and has them seen as a wise investment for retirement. The one-child policy has also had a significant impact on those who

lose their only child and are left to suffer financially and mentally, along with having no one to care for them in old age.

The one-child restriction resulted in the abandonment of many baby girls in public spaces – in hopes that another family would come along and adopt them. For some families, a second child could mean anything from large fines to women being forcibly sterilized or tied up and their pregnancy aborted. There are now 30 million more men than there are women in China, largely due to many having opted to terminate their pregnancies upon finding out they were carrying a girl. Although sex-selective abortions are morally condemned in mainstream opinion and have long been the exception to China's otherwise loose abortion laws, there is a clear contradiction and both cultural and state enforced factors are the driving force behind such choices.

The two-child policy has done little more than add pressure on women to have more children and has caused fear of state measures that could force pregnancies to term in a bid to boost the population. Despite this pressure and fear, birth rates have continued to decline. With children being trafficked out of the country to foreign orphanages for decades and women from Myanmar now being trafficked into the

country to marry Chinese men, we can see that the lasting impact of the one-child policy extends well beyond China's borders.

## **Bourgeoisie Law and Religion Conclusion**

We know quite well that a surge in working women's militancy can trigger big and great things. For example, the 1917 February Revolution spurred from working women and soldiers' wives taking to the streets on International Working Women's Day. As mentioned above, recent years have seen mass women's protests for reproductive rights in countries like Poland, Argentina and Ireland. These undoubtedly inter-classist movements have managed to affect public discourse and, at least in Ireland, to change existing laws. In rhetoric they have taken up the language of strike action, but this has hardly translated into reality – more often than not the “strike” consists of not carrying out household duties, simply taking a day off work, or liberal employers letting their employees attend a protest. Although slogans pertaining to economic realities have at times been taken on, organized proletarian elements have not emerged, and politicians (from various mayors up to presidents) have come out in support of these movements. Any real class movement will have to see a struggle not just for one day of action, and not only in the sphere of

reproduction, but also at the point of production where surplus value is extracted (i.e. where the capitalist class would really start to worry). As Rosa Luxemburg noted in 1912:

“This kind of work [bringing up children, housework, etc.] is not productive in the sense of the present capitalist economy no matter how enormous an achievement the sacrifices and energy spent, the thousand little efforts add up to ... As long as capitalism and the wage system rule, only that kind of work is considered productive which produces surplus value, which creates capitalist profit ... This sounds brutal and insane, but corresponds exactly to the brutality and insanity of our present capitalist economy. And seeing this brutal reality clearly and sharply is the proletarian woman’s first task.”

We do not pass judgement, nor can we say that there are right or wrong reasons to choose to, or choose not to, have an abortion. But what we do know is that downtrodden workers turn toward religion and cultural beliefs, to seek solace from the world that we live in. They put their faith into the idea of an afterlife that will reward them for having lived this life in accordance with the sacred scriptures. Religious beliefs, in masters and slaves, in heaven and hell, parallel the conditions in class society here on earth. The ruling classes have

long considered religion to be an extremely useful tool for deceiving the working class into adapting to and accepting their position as slaves. This is because they know that the religious worker is more likely to accept anything that comes their way without so much as a whispered objection – because everything is the will of God. One example of this can be observed during the Stalinist counter-revolution in the USSR, where the Russian Orthodox church was revived during the Second World War to fuel patriotic support among the working masses and to garner help from the West. In 1936, several years prior to the outbreak of the war, abortion had been recriminalized (after the Russian Soviet Republic had been the first country in the world to decriminalize it under all circumstances during the revolution) due to concerns about needing to boost the population due to impending war. If one thing is sure it is that laws reflect the needs of capital, which always override all else – not all religious states have strict abortion laws and not all states with strict abortion laws are officially religious.

Our goal as communists is to make life here on earth into one that we all look forward to living each day, rather than spend our days exploited and struggling for survival – a life that is free from slaves and masters. We aim to live in a world where caring for children, the elderly, and the disabled is something that is done

communally and has ceased to ever be a burden that primarily falls on women. The laws, economic conditions, and religious and cultural beliefs that impact reproduction in class society, will disappear or become superfluous upon states (religious or not) being abolished and these matters becoming private ones. This can only be achieved through international proletarian revolution and the global communist society that comes as a result

## Part 3

### Imperialist Conflict and Sexual Violence

Women being driven into the workforce because of imperialist conflict is as old as imperialism itself. This has been the case in Syria for over a decade now; multitudes of working men have been killed in the war and this has left many women as the family breadwinner. The need to support their families now has them bearing the burden of unemployment, low salaries, and high living costs. Women were largely confined to the household prior to the outbreak of the war in 2011, with only 4 percent of households headed by women. Now around 22 percent of Syrian households are headed by women, and they make up most of the workforce in certain sectors. In pre-war Syria, 96 percent of women were able to access qualified maternal healthcare. Consequently, the maternal mortality rate dropped significantly between 1970 and 2009.

The past 11 years of ongoing conflict on top of the pandemic has left many starving due to what little income they had having been wiped out. Maternal healthcare services are now near non-existent and previously long eradicated diseases such as polio have reappeared. Approximately two-thirds of professionals

in the medical industry have fled Syria and more than half of all hospitals have been closed or are only somewhat operational. What hospitals remain in the war-torn country are not sufficiently protected from airstrikes and so many women give birth at home or in the streets rather than risk the danger of debris or falling shells. Newborn babies are often malnourished and sick, and with little to no neonatal care available, imminent death is a frighteningly real possibility.

The situation is quite similar in Yemen. According to reports from Unicef, one in 260 women die during pregnancy or childbirth, one out of every 37 newborn babies die in their first month of life, and just 3 out of every 10 births takes place in a health facility. Only around half of all health facilities are fully functional and they still suffer with severe shortages of medical and health essentials. In these times of crisis, reproductive healthcare is all too often the first thing to go. The necessity of these services has been overshadowed by the urgent need to respond to outbreaks of cholera and more than 80 percent of the population lacking food and drinking water. Increasing poverty endured by working class families is another reason the number of women giving birth at home continues to rise, with medical care only sought if there are complications.



In Afghanistan, decades of war have left at least half of the population so poor that they are lacking necessities such as clean water and basic nutritional foods. The pandemic, ongoing food crisis, and winter weather have only aggravated the situation. Although child labor and marriage have long existed on some scale in Afghanistan, it has now become commonplace for children to be put to work and for pre-pubescent girls to be sold into marriage so that the rest of their families may stave off starvation a little longer. There is research showing young girls who are married off are more likely to suffer through domestic violence, have poor mental health, and develop complications during pregnancy. Moreover, the longer girls remain in school, the less likely they are to be married off as a child. Thus, another factor which has increased the incidence of child marriage in Afghanistan is the prohibition of women and girls' education, reinstated by the Taliban since taking power once more.

Sexual violence is exacerbated by militarism and used as a weapon of war by all factions in nationalist conflict. It is inextricably linked to imperialist competition and the subsequent decline in conditions among the proletariat. It is not just inflicted on outsiders though; it especially runs rampant among members of the military. In the US Armed Forces, for example, unwanted sexual contact rose by almost 40

percent between 2016 and 2018. Roughly 85 percent of rape survivors know the identity of their attacker, who is most commonly a superior officer. It is telling that members of the US military are more likely to develop PTSD because of sexual trauma than they are as a result of combat.

One of the most agonizing complications of sexual violence is unintended pregnancies. In many countries across Africa and the Middle East, children are not eligible for national IDs unless the father's name is on the birth certificate; this prevents children born as a result of rape from going to school or receiving government assistance. Many Yazidi mothers who survived enslavement at the hands of ISIS have been left with the heart-breaking decision of having to either abandon their children or not return home. Women who give up their children are sometimes told they will be able to visit them or be reunited later, but this tends not to be true. Once the mother has entered Iraq, she is stopped by border security from returning to Syria. These women often have no other resources and are almost entirely dependent on their families, who typically forbid them from bringing their children back with them.

Similarly, in DR Congo, women who have been raped are often deserted by their husbands and families.

These attitudes are largely influenced by the trauma and shame associated with men regularly having witnessed the assault and feeling as though they have failed in their “masculine duty” to protect their wife. In cases where the husband stays or returns, and this is especially true if his wife has had a baby as a result of the attack, it isn’t uncommon for men suffering from untreated trauma to feel as though they must reassert their role and place within the family, through inflicting more violence if need be.

The same social stigmas and sense of shame have often ensured that the most heinous instances of sexual violence go largely unreported and undocumented throughout history. The state also covers up and passes the blame for the violence carried out in its name. The 2020 report on Australian war crimes in Afghanistan has a significant amount of information blacked out, and remarkably, neither rape nor sexual assault are mentioned as having been committed by Australian Defence Force (ADF) soldiers. Yet, if they were willing to reveal allegations of 39 unlawful killings, including ADF soldiers slitting the throats of two 14-year-old boys, then it is likely that what was blacked out would be even more horrific and shameful than that.

To this day the above factors help conceal from the public that working men and boys are also targets of

sexual violence as a weapon of war. While working women and girls are still disproportionately harmed by sexual violence on a global scale, in places such as Syria, boys and men are almost just as likely to be victims. With zero resources available they are simply left to isolate themselves – sometimes completely losing interest in sex and other activities they once found enjoyable. At other times, the combination of untreated trauma and further poverty from the subsequent inability to work, results in these boys and men becoming violent. The stigma they experience often pushes them to relocate to a place where people are unaware of the assault they endured. Studies from wars in Liberia, Uganda, and post-Yugoslav countries have also shown that men and boys are targeted. Sexual violence in times of war is used to humiliate, terrorize, and subjugate workers of all genders.

Contrary to liberal beliefs, changing laws and providing reparations to survivors of sexual violence will never be adequate nor will it stop this barbarism from happening in the first place. Bukharin put things well in *Imperialism and World Economy* when he stated, “*Human society as a whole, placed under the iron heel of world capital, pays tribute to this contradiction - in unbelievable torment, blood, and filth.*” So long as capitalism and mercantile relations of production persist in some form or fashion, militarism,

war, and sexual violence will too. Thus, the only war to which we can, in good conscience, lend our support is that which leads to our emancipation and deliverance from every form of oppression – the class war.

## **Climate Change**

With the climate crisis worsening, young workers are increasingly opting out of having children out of fear of raising them during environmental catastrophe. Although birth rates in the US are declining due to various factors, surveys indicate that more than a third of young adults are reconsidering having children because of climate change. Similar results have been found among working people within the same age cohort in Australia.

Climate reformists have advocated having fewer children as one of the ways people can reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It has become an increasingly popular position to claim that it is immoral to have children in the face of the climate crisis; this kind of moralizing is unproductive and stigmatizes working class families, many of whom do not have access to proper sex education or contraceptives. A 2017 study showed that having one fewer child in a developed country would save 58 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year, reducing their carbon footprint.

Bourgeois reformists have latched onto these statistics as justification for their anti-natalist narrative. However, the fact that Niger has the highest birth rate in the world and the lowest carbon emissions per person make it beyond clear that the main culprit is capitalism.

In fact, a climate scientist who was part of the same 2017 study, Kimberly Nicholas, clarified that reducing the population, by choosing not to have children, will not solve the climate crisis. In the context of the study, the amount of carbon dioxide per year that would be saved from having one fewer child in a developed country was calculated by considering the hypothetical long-term carbon emissions that would be emitted across multiple generations. Given the recent intensification of the climate crisis, we have a much smaller timeframe to stop the planet from falling into total environmental collapse; long-term consequences of having children are therefore not as relevant or immediately concerning. On the contrary, climate scientists like Nicholas have argued that it is more important to transition away from fossil fuels to clean energy on a global scale. The bourgeois reformists that peddle this brand of climate conscious anti-natalism misrepresent science by taking findings out of context and guilting couples into not having children, displacing all the responsibility for greenhouse gas

emissions onto individual consumers. The onus of “solving the climate crisis” is put on individual workers while the capitalist class continues to indulge in environmental destruction guilt-free. While personal choices may have a small impact on reducing one’s contribution, no amount of “birth strikes” will put a dent in the environmental damage caused by capitalist accumulation.

The drastic increase in emissions following the industrial revolution indicate that production based on never-ending accumulation is responsible for our environmental crisis, and if we wish to avoid total environmental catastrophe, we must organize along class lines towards a new mode of production based on human needs rather than on profits. The solution is not to wait for politicians to reach a global consensus on climate reform, or to avoid having children, but to abolish the capitalist system before it is too late. Politicians would never prioritize saving the planet from environmental destruction if it meant they could not profit from it; even if they did, reforms do not address the root of the issue. Only in a world where production is social, and our development is free will we be able to meet the needs of humanity and save ourselves from ecological collapse.

**-E.K. (LIC) and KM (IWG, US affiliate of the ICT)**

For a full list of references, please see the online  
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