

Radical Women (Australia) Statement

In October 2018, the Queensland Parliament will debate a bill to decriminalise abortion – 120 years after being legislated into the Criminal Code! Radical Women issued this statement on September 26, the day of a far-right “Rally for Life” in Toowoomba Qld, and is distributing it widely in the lead-up to the vote.

Reproductive Freedom for All Women!



(Photo: Justin Brierty)

In 1899, Queensland women were fighting for the right to vote, challenging marriage and motherhood as their sole purpose in life by demanding a political voice. That year, the state Parliament made abortion a crime. By 1905, Queensland became the second last state to enfranchise women — except Aboriginal people, who had to wait another 60 years. But *to this day*, abortion still risks a prison sentence — seven years for procuring and 14 for assisting.

Since 1986, a court ruling has allowed abortion under certain circumstances, and this has been a lifeline for so many women. But in 2009, the country was stunned when a young Cairns woman was put on trial for her medical abortion, as well as her partner for aiding her. Protest broke out across Queensland and the country, and the jury acquitted them.

Now, after nearly 10 more years of tenacious grassroots campaigning, state legal authorities are *finally* considering legalisation. More than 80% of Queenslanders say it's time! And we can no longer allow a tiny anti-choice minority to stop it.

Why so long? Abortion decriminalisation in Australia is only recent. The Australian Capital Territory was the first (2002), then Victoria (2008), and other states and territories followed. Queensland and New South Wales are the only states that have held out.

The profit economy relies on women's reproduction to breed, look after and socialise generations of workers — from birth to death, be they children, husbands or older family members. The burden of care *always* falls on women's shoulders. The traditional nuclear family is the system's bedrock, and the woman's place in it is pivotal. Women not considered worthy for this role — particularly women who are Aboriginal, disabled, queer, trans or too poor — are denied the right to have children, or keep them. This is the status quo, which far-right ideologues, both inside and outside Parliament, mobilise to preserve and enforce. This is what today's "Rally for Life" in Toowoomba is really about.

We're women, not incubators! No standardised data collection on abortions exists in Queensland, but the annual estimate is 10,000 – 14,000. Many women travel hundreds of kilometres from remote areas to main regional centres to receive the reproductive healthcare they need. In addition to the distress this causes, they and their children face greatly increased economic hardship and its consequences. Aboriginal, migrant, unemployed, queer women and women experiencing domestic and family violence all feel the brutal, stigmatising sting of laws, which grossly undermine their right to make the best choices for themselves and their families. These laws not only shame and infantilise women, they diminish their status to that of incubators.

"Baby murderer!" is still anti-abortionists' accusation against women, but they've recently softened their approach a little, claiming to care about the woman's health. Abortion is risky, they say, causing infertility, psychological harm and even cancer! Scientific research has well and truly debunked these claims. Abortion is actually *one of the safest medical procedures available* — less risky than childbirth, dental surgery or even crossing the road — and recent studies show 95% of women terminating a pregnancy *do not* regret their decision. But these *facts* don't deter the anti-choice witch hunters.

"Rights of the unborn" is anti-abortionists' global legal strategy. Based on the unscientific fallacy of a foetus's "personhood," it sets out, in law, to transform the foetus into an independent being and put its rights above the woman's. This has worked in states across the U.S., and the consequences for women have been horrific. In 2014, for example, a woman in Indiana, who had a premature stillbirth at home, was sentenced to 20 years' prison for feticide and child neglect. She won on appeal, but not all women do. The globally connected protectors of the profit system and traditional family "values" will stop at nothing to keep women domesticated.

Not the church, not the state, *WOMEN* must decide their fate! If women don't have complete control over their reproduction, they can't make real choices about *any* aspect of their lives. Bodily autonomy is *fundamental* to women's freedom!

The good news is: decades of hard campaigning has brought Queensland's parliament to this point of voting on the decriminalisation of abortion. If this bill passes, it will certainly be a step in the right direction. But it *still* doesn't place choice squarely in the hands of women. We mustn't lose sight of the real goal: women's ready access to safe, legal and free abortion on demand, at *any* point in pregnancy.

We need a strong feminist movement to *defend* this reform from inevitable far-right backlash and *extend* it to give women full control.

And we shouldn't stop there. All women need *reproductive justice*: the right to everything a woman needs in order to make genuine decisions about her body and her life, free from coercion and punishment. This includes:

- end state removal of children from their homes and communities on the basis of disability, race, sexuality or poverty
- no sterilisation of any woman without her consent
- freely accessible, state-of-the-art reproductive technology for all women
- positive and comprehensive sex education for all
- free, safe, reliable contraception for all women, of all ages
- compulsory training for medical students in abortion procedures and all other aspects of reproductive health in order to provide the full range of services for women
- all Centrelink payments be raised to a living wage
- equal pay, job opportunities and rights for *all* workers
- free education, end subsidies to private and religious schools
- free, 24-hour childcare
- employer-funded parental leave through a national fund paid into by employers according to their wealth
- affordable housing for everyone; restore and massively expand public housing
- free, quality healthcare
- the right for women and children to live free from the fear of violence and sexual assault
- state-funded, high quality shelter accommodation for women and children fleeing domestic and family violence.

If you agree, get in touch with Radical Women. We'd love to hear from you!

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