

Defend abortion rights in Scotland and globally

Abortion rights are under attack across parts of the world including here in Scotland, *writes Mike Picken*.
[Photo Edinburgh abortion protest US Consulate 14 May 2022, photo: Gillian Mackay]

The recent leak of the imminent decision of the US Supreme Court to [overturn the 50 year Roe v Wade decision](#) that made abortion a right across the USA has provoked [anger and outrage across the States](#), with a coordinated series of rallies and demos on 14 May 2022 (reports [here](#)). Across Europe we have had a series of steps forward in recent decades but more recently [Poland has joined Malta in outlawing abortion](#).

A [solidarity rally](#) against repeal of Roe v Wade was held at the US Consulate in Edinburgh last weekend by pro choice groups and attracted publicity and support (though unfortunately clashed with three other major protest events on other issues in Glasgow).

The attacks on abortion rights by the right wing in the USA have also encouraged anti-abortion activists in Scotland to scale up their intimidation of women attending clinics, with recent [reports from the Back Off Scotland campaign](#) of up to 100 protesters appearing at venues around Glasgow for example. These protestors intimidate women attending the clinics, whether for abortions or other reproductive rights and health support.

[ecosocialist.scot](#) is pleased to see the start of a robust response, both by pro choice organisations in Scotland and by sections of the Scottish government and parliamentary representatives of Labour, SNP and Scottish Greens. At First Minister's Questions in the Scottish Parliament recently,

Scottish Labour backbench MSP [Monica Lennon](#) raised the attack on abortion rights and received strong support from First Minister, SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon, who also offered to chair personally a summit on defending abortion rights.

Speaking at First Minister's Questions, Ms Sturgeon insisted that "women have the right to access abortion without fear or intimidation", adding that demonstrating outside healthcare facilities was "deeply wrong".

She added: "I strongly support the introduction of buffer zones and the government is actively considering how this parliament can legislate in a way that is effective and also capable of withstanding legal challenge."

Turning to calls for her to chair a summit on the issues, Ms Sturgeon said: "I am very happy to convene and indeed, I will personally chair a roundtable summit to discuss buffer zones and indeed any other matters that need to be addressed to ensure safe and timely access to abortion services in Scotland within the current law."

Ms Lennon said she would “warmly welcome the First Minister’s agreement to convene an urgent summit that more than a dozen women’s organisations have called for”.

<https://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/20134691.nicola-sturgeon-chair-abortion-clinic-buffer-zones-summit-deeply-wrong-protests/>

Scottish Greens defend

abortion rights



Green MSP and ecosocialist Maggie Chapman defends abortion rights on Twitter

This week, Scottish Green MSP [Gillian Mackay](#) launched a Bill in Parliament to create a 'buffer zone' around healthcare facilities offering abortion services. Mackay has made clear that unlike measures introduced by the Tories in the UK parliament against protest, her bill was not suppressing civil rights for legitimate protest but was aimed at giving women freedom to exercise their right of choice without fear of intimidation. Other Scottish Green Party MSPs gave their full public support (see picture) and the Party wrote individually to all its members and supporters asking them to campaign in defence of abortion rights.

The consultation phase of the Bill introduced by Gillian Mackay has now opened and we urge readers to indicate their support for defence of abortion rights.

<https://www.bufferzones.scot/>

Campaign needed

The Scottish Government have yet to indicate their formal support for the Bill, though it is welcome that Nicola Sturgeon has indicated her personal position.

Nevertheless pressure needs to be brought across Scotland both widely and within the SNP for the Scottish Government to take defence of abortion rights seriously.

Similarly, although Labour MSP Monica Lennon has campaigned strongly and rightly on this, the full weight of the front bench of Scottish Labour needs to be deployed to back abortion rights. This is particularly important given the seemingly increased presence among Scottish Labour's ranks of members of the Orange Order, with [the former "world leader" being selected and elected as a Scottish Labour council candidate](#) recently to serve in a council administration where Labour [appear](#) to be doing a backroom deal with Tories. The Orange Order are an important political force in Scotland and are just as [virulently anti-abortion](#) as the Catholic church worldwide.

Trade Unions defend abortion

Trade unions are a key part of the campaign to defend abortion rights as well: working class women will always be the first

to be affected by any weakening of state abortion health services and don't have the resources to seek private treatment. Time after time has shown that restricting or obstructing access to free state abortion services simply results in a rise in backstreet abortions, with all the misery, suffering and death that causes working class women.

The [statement by the Unison national women's and international committee chairs](#) is an important first step in this regard.

With over a million women in our union, we believe passionately in defending the right to choose. Access to abortion is a trade union issue.

Abortion is also a class issue. Rich women can always access abortion, whatever the legal status where they live. It is working class women who always suffer.

Abortion rights are high in the priorities for our [Unison] national women's committee.

As the UK's largest organisation representing women, UNISON ran a webinar about defending abortion rights as part of our programme of events around International Women's Day earlier this year.

It's brilliant to see bold local leadership on access to abortion from Ealing, Manchester and Richmond Councils. They are to be congratulated for putting buffer zones in place to protect women from the protestors handing out leaflets and harassing vulnerable women.

UNISON wants to see a change in the law to see buffer zones to protect women in all such places.

Anne McVicker, chair of national women's committee, and Liz Wheatley, chair of the international committee, Unison



<https://www.unison.org.uk/news/2022/05/legal-abortion-under-attack-why-this-is-a-trade-union->

[matter/](#)

The [Fourth International](#) has been part of the worldwide movement for women's rights and defending abortion globally for many decades as an integral part of the struggle for [Women's Liberation](#). As Fourth International supporters in Scotland, [ecosocialist.scot](#) gives our full support to campaigns to defend abortion rights both here and across the world.

Mike Picken, 21 May 2022