

# Reject health bill attacks on abortion

Sarah Wrack

The last couple of weeks has seen to-ing and fro-ing from all wings of the political establishment over Nadine Dorries and Frank Field's amendment to the Health and Social Care bill. The amendment calls for all women seeking abortion to be offered counselling from an organisation that doesn't provide abortion services itself. Pressure has forced Cameron and the health ministers to U-turn, saying they won't support the amendment.

Dorries and Co try to claim that the amendment is very simple and very innocent - the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (Bpas) and Marie Stopes get money from the government to provide abortions and so have a 'vested interest' in women deciding to go ahead and therefore cannot provide unbiased counselling.

This is ironic considering the bill they are amending is almost entirely designed to open the NHS up to private companies which will certainly be making decisions based on what will make them the most profit. The interests of businesses, or charities, have no place in our NHS.

## NHS investment needed

If the government invested in the NHS rather than attacking it, it would be able to expand its abortion facilities and there would be no need to pay Bpas and Marie Stopes the £150 million a year they currently receive.

But unfortunately, Dorries' amendment does not stem from her concern for keeping the NHS in public hands. She claims that offering 'independent' counselling would reduce the number of abortions by 60,000 each year. This is based on the completely false idea that most women rush into abortion without thinking and then find themselves trapped on the "conveyor belt" while independent counselling would offer them an escape route.

Tory Liam Fox has said he will vote for the amendment because he will "back anything that makes people think twice". To assume that any woman who decides to terminate a

pregnancy makes the decision without a great deal of thought is patronising and sexist.

## Myth

In fact, it's a myth that we have abortion 'on demand' - women have to have 'permission' from two doctors. And as 10% of GPs are 'conscientious objectors' to abortion, many women have to talk to more doctors before they can get an appointment. What other medical procedure requires such jumping through hoops? And, criminally, abortion is still illegal in Northern Ireland.

It's not true that the process is 'too fast' to allow time to reconsider either. In fact, the waiting lists in some areas are so long that women end up having a surgical rather than medical abortion, which means surgery rather than a pill. At every stage of the process, professionals are on hand to talk to women about their options and about what the procedure involves. 20% of women who seek an abortion with Bpas decide not to go through with it after seeing in-house counsellors.

Tory Liam Fox has said he will vote for the amendment as he 'wants people to think twice'. To assume that any woman who decides to terminate a pregnancy makes the decision lightly is patronising and sexist

The idea of 'independent' counselling is a smoke screen. What it would really mean is that women find themselves being 'counselled' by religious or other anti-abortion groups. For example, at the moment the biggest provider of such counselling is CareConfidential whose

training manual includes such advice as: "Abortion is undoubtedly a wickedness that grieves God's heart... this point is to deny the life of the human being - a most grievous sin in the eyes of God."

Although this amendment is unlikely to be passed, attacks on women's right to choose will continue.

Dorries is a long-term campaigner against abortion rights, backed by right-wing Christian groups who oppose abortion on all grounds. In 2008 she led a bid to reduce the time limit on when women can have abortions from 24 to 20 weeks. As with many anti-abortion campaigners, she argues that too many women have late abortions and that at this stage the 'baby' could now have a decent chance of survival.

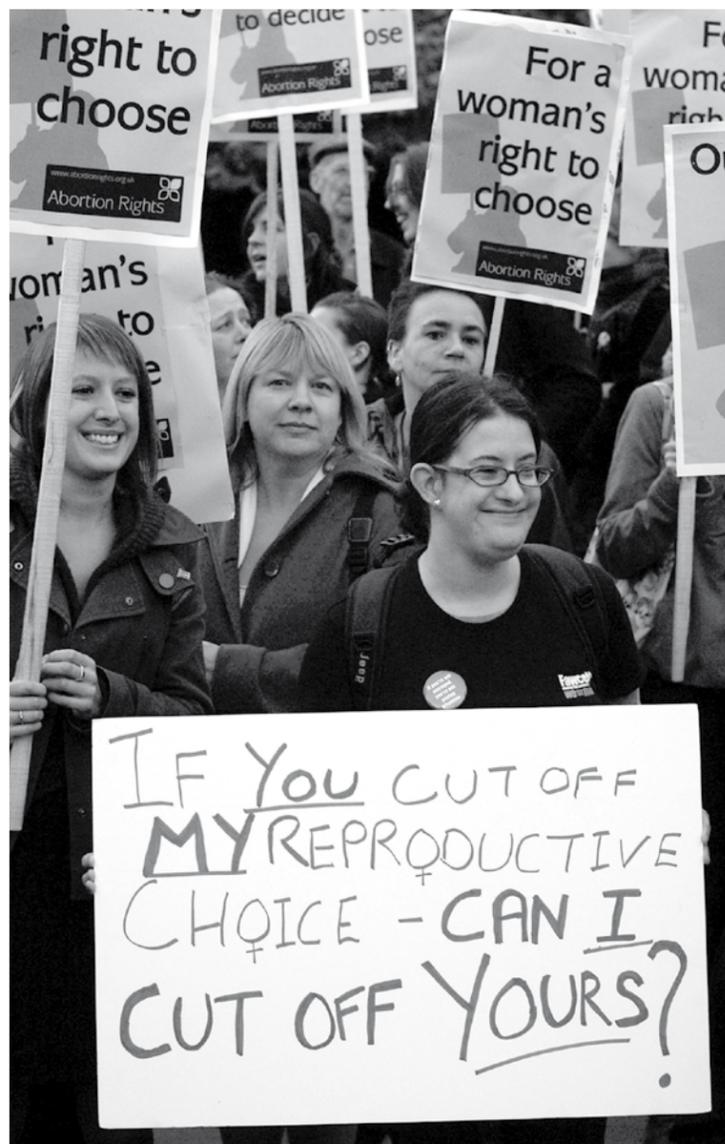
However, there has been no significant increase in the survival rate for premature births under 24 weeks. 90% of all abortions take place in the first 12 weeks. Many of the women who have abortions after this point didn't realise they were pregnant - often because they are young or are going through the menopause and so have no or irregular periods, or are in distressing circumstances.

## Hypocrisy

Every woman should have safe and free access to abortion if they choose it. The hypocrisy of these politicians stinks! They've voted for cuts to child benefit, privatised council housing, sacked hundreds of thousands of public sector workers (mainly women) and made hundreds more attacks on working class women and families. The Con-Dems are also slashing funding for mental health services. All of these cuts will limit the right to choose when and whether to have children.

To give women real choice we need:

- No cuts; scrap the Health and Social Care bill
- Free abortion on request; end the need for two doctors' agreement
- A fully publicly funded, democratically controlled National Health Service - no privatisation
- Access to free fertility treatment on the NHS for all those who need it
- Public ownership of the pharmaceutical industry



Tory Dorries and Labour's Field claim their bill is 'simple and innocent' photo Paul Mattsson

- Access to free, safe contraception including emergency contraception; a reversal of the cuts in family planning services and a massive investment into sympathetic youth advisory centres. Reopen Connexions
- Improved Sex and Relationship Education in all schools
- Information campaigns on contraception
- A decent living minimum wage and investment in job creation
- A network of publicly funded, good quality, flexible childcare facilities
- Re-instate maternity and child benefit for all, and raise levels to reflect the real cost of pregnancy, childbirth and bringing up a child
- The right to adequate parental leave
- A massive increase in spending on housing, education and other public services
- A democratically run socialist society, planned to meet social needs rather than the profits of a few

# Stop the Dale Farm evictions

Dave Murray  
Basildon Socialist Party

Since 31 August residents of 52 "un-authorised" plots at Dale Farm Travellers' site in Essex are under threat of forcible eviction, which Basildon council say will take place after 19 September.

Water and electricity supplies to the site are to be cut off, and roads around the site are to be closed to "non-residents" by the police.

Senior council officials have set up a "war room" in Basildon Town Hall from which they will direct an operation involving a small army of bailiffs and police officers whose sole aim is to render several hundred people homeless.

If past evictions in other areas are anything to go by then many of these people will also be left destitute as their homes and personal effects may be destroyed during the eviction.

According to the local Tories, who run the council, they are taking this

action to protect the green belt. This is laughable given that the disputed part of the site was formerly used as a scrap yard. And the Con-Dem government is attempting to slash planning regulation, putting the green belt at the mercy of profit-hungry developers.

The Tories' concern for the environment will also be news to hundreds of residents of Basildon New Town who have protested in recent months at the sale of public green space - including playing fields and children's play areas - for housing development.

It is more likely that the Tories are pandering to what they perceive to be widespread prejudice against Travellers. So confident are they of this that Tory leader Tony Ball pledged to resign if the evictions, costing £18 million, were not carried out.

This is not a local issue, but the result of government policy since 1995 when councils were relieved of the duty to provide sites for Travellers by the 1995 Criminal Justice Act.

In theory, Travellers were to buy land and apply for planning permission to set up their own sites.

In practice, 90% of such applications have been refused, with most local authorities taking the hard-nosed approach of shutting down unofficial sites and moving families on.

Residents of the Dale Farm site have pledged to resist the evictions; not least because the alternative would be to rely on the tender mercies of the Homeless Persons Act.

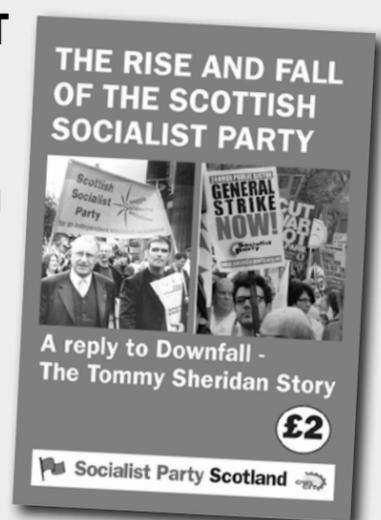
They are joined by a group of activists who have set up "Camp Constant" at the entrance to the site as a human rights monitoring base. Dale Farm Solidarity is appealing for support in maintaining a round the clock presence, as well as organising activity days on Saturdays.

On Saturday 10 September at 1pm there will be a march from nearby Wickford railway station to the site in protest at the evictions.

For further information go to: [dalefarm.wordpress.com](http://dalefarm.wordpress.com)

## NEW PAMPHLET The Rise and Fall of the Scottish Socialist Party

Email info@[socialistpartyscotland.org.uk](mailto:socialistpartyscotland.org.uk) to place your order or visit [www.socialistpartyscotland.org.uk](http://www.socialistpartyscotland.org.uk)



This pamphlet is a response to the book Downfall - The Tommy Sheridan Story, written by Alan McCombes, which was released in June 2011.

The latter's publication came five months after the jailing of former Scottish Socialist Party leader Tommy Sheridan for three years on charges of perjury. The author of Downfall and the leadership of the SSP played a central role in the prosecution of Tommy Sheridan. At its height the SSP had 3,000 members and six Members of the Scottish Parliament. Today that success lies in ruins. The key political lessons of the SSP's collapse are important for a new generation of activists and those looking towards socialist ideas today.