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Women

France: 50 years of the Veil law: abortion, a right never won

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On 17 January 1975, the Veil law was promulgated in France: voluntary termination of pregnancy (abortion) could now be carried out legally and in a safe environment. The right to contraception and abortion was a victory won by the struggles of the feminist movement in the 1970s, in France as in many other countries.

Mass mobilisation won a right that is vital to women's freedom, the right to control their own fertility and thus to take control of their own destiny, a right that had been denied them for centuries by all the established powers, including in France.

The far right against women's rights

Banning abortion kills. Before the Veil law in France, on average, one woman died every day as a result of a clandestine abortion. In the United States, where the Supreme Court ruled on 24 June 2022 that access to abortion was no longer a constitutional right, it has been banned in a dozen states, with dramatic and even fatal consequences for women's lives and health. Wherever the far right comes to power, it restricts the right of women and gender minorities to control their own bodies. In Italy, for example, it has authorised anti-abortion groups to enter clinics. Hungary has voted to make it compulsory to listen to the foetal heartbeat before an abortion.

A right that is still fragile in France

In France, in 2024, the Macron government attempted a seduction operation by incorporating into the constitution, albeit with very serious limitations, the 'freedom guaranteed to women to have recourse to voluntary interruption of pregnancy'. In reality, this incorporation is not a sufficient guarantee, because it is up to the legislator to establish the conditions under which this 'freedom' can be achieved. In concrete terms, a right-wing or extreme right-wing government or parliament could shorten the legal time limit for abortion, cut subsidies to family planning, or ban certain abortion methods, without this being unconstitutional. And speaking of the right: the 'new' Bayrou government, like the previous one, includes many ministers who voted against constitutional entrenchment, and others who abstained.

Against the destruction of public services, redevelop abortion clinics

Today, access to abortion is already being seriously undermined by the destruction of the public health service. There is an urgent need to defend women's right to control their own bodies, by defending the extension of the waiting period for access to abortion. We must demand and fund the reopening of abortion centres that have closed over the last 20 years. Improve training for doctors and midwives so that they know how to carry out this procedure and provide non-judgemental support for people having abortions.

We need to develop a nationwide network of abortion facilities and professionals to guarantee access, while allowing women and the people concerned to choose their abortion method. 50 years on, we still have to fight for the right to

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abortion, in France and throughout the world. So that all women and people seeking an abortion can do so free of charge, wherever they want, without judgement, and so that they have a choice of method wherever they live.

[L'Anticapitaliste](#), 16 January

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