

Abortion Rights Answer to Nadine Dorries MP

On her personal blog Nadine Dorries has posted an article entitled 'Unison and Abortion Campaigns', saying,

"Maybe we should begin to ask more pertinent questions with regard to who funds the pro-choice campaign group, Abortion Rights. It is in fact UNISON and a number of other unions. If I were a union member, I would be asking why that is appropriate or relevant?"

She concludes:

"The pro-choice campaign is run by the unions. I think it's high time a few louder questions were asked about that."

This isn't the first time Ms Dorries has commented on our funding sources, and it is indeed the notion that we may draw support from trade unionists that excites her most.

We're happy to enlighten her about our financial arrangements, although she may be somewhat disappointed by the secrets we have to reveal.

Abortion Rights is a membership-based campaign. People or organisations join up, and that's where our money comes from. Individuals join for £20 a year, there's a concessionary rate of £10 and students can join for £5. Or an organisation can affiliate: local groups pay £40, national organisations pay £175. I'm sure readers will find this deeply shocking.

Our organisational links include student groups, like the NUS, feminist groups like UK Feminista and the National Assembly of Women and secular organisations - such as the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society. Some formally affiliate, others don't.

Many of our group memberships are from local trade union branches and union head offices too. It's not just UNISON. In the spirit of transparency here's a full run down: Unite, the TUC, FBU, GMB, PCS, ASLEF, NUJ, Bectu, the Musicians Union, (will add).

We're extremely proud of our trade union support. Unions have been at the forefront of campaigning for access to safe, legal abortion for many years. They are all too aware that when abortion is restricted it is working class women who are hit hardest.

Prior to the passing of the 1967 Abortion Act, it was women who were unable to afford the relative safety of a discreet doctor to help them end an unwanted pregnancy who were driven to risk their lives seeking out backstreet abortions.

Trade union women's campaigns are aware of the enormous impact that the availability of contraception and safe, legal abortion have had on the economic, educational and political prospects of their female members. They are part of a working women's equality movement that has played a vital, and often overlooked, role in the history of feminism.

It is fairly unsurprising that organisations with huge numbers of female members would seek to campaign for their reproductive and well as their employment rights. That Nadine Dorries seeks to question whether their support for our campaign is 'appropriate or relevant' suggests perhaps some confusion about the role of trade unionism on her part.

Let's clear up a few more issues too. It's fair to say that there is considerable support for our campaign among Labour Party members, but we have support from all political parties. We are proud to work alongside pro-choice Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, and will continue to oppose anti-choice politicians from whatever party – including Frank Field, co-sponsor of the current abortion counselling proposals.

In terms of funding we have received support from the Joseph Rowntree Trust, the Andrew Wainwright Reform Trust and the Feminist Review Trust in the past, although we currently receive no grant funding. Last year our largest single donation was £500, and that came from a retired person unaffiliated with any group.

While we're on the subject of funding, we should also make it clear that we do not receive any money from BPAS or Marie Stopes, although they do give us tea and biscuits when we see them at Voice for Choice meetings every other month.

So there you have it – the not very interesting truth. Now maybe Ms Dorries will return the favour by telling us who's funding the Right to Know campaign.

http://blog.dorries.org/id-1930-2011_8_UNISON_and_abortion_campaigns.aspx