

Knoxville, Tennessee abortion clinic fire ruled arson

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The New Year's Eve fire that burned down Planned Parenthood in Knoxville, Tennessee was intentionally set, officials investigating the incident have determined. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) is among the agencies still working to identify those responsible for the fire. A \$10,000 reward is being offered for information leading to the prosecution of individuals involved in the crime.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* previously reported, the clinic was destroyed by fire in the early hours of December 31, 2021. The attack on the clinic came less than a year after a masked gunman unloaded a shotgun into the front doors of the building on January 22, 2021, the 48th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court's landmark decision legalizing abortion in the United States. While no one was injured in either incident, it is significant that the destruction of the clinic in Knoxville occurred as legal abortion is increasingly under attack in the United States.

In early December, the Supreme Court heard arguments on the legality of a Mississippi abortion law which bans abortions after 15 weeks. *Roe v. Wade* prohibits states from restricting abortion before fetal viability, around 23 weeks.

The court is set to rule on the Mississippi case this year. Many court-watchers expect the conservative and reactionary majority on the bench to decide in favor of the law, a decision which could severely weaken or simply overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

Should the court rule in favor of the Mississippi law, the decision on the legality of abortion would be left to individual states. Currently, at least 22 states are set to either ban abortion or place strict limitations on the procedure. These states have "trigger" abortion bans which will go into effect immediately if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned.

Last month, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) preemptively lifted the in-person requirement for dispensing mifepristone, commonly known as RU-486, or the abortion pill. This move allows the mifepristone to be prescribed via telemedicine and mailed to women. However, 19 states already have bans in place against receiving the abortion pill through the mail. Women in those states are required to be present at a clinic to get the medicine.

Abortion has always been a class issue. If abortion is banned, wealthy and middle-class women will continue to have control over their bodies and life decisions while working class women will lose the right to make life-changing decisions in their own best interests. Before *Roe v. Wade*, women who could afford it were able to travel to states or countries where abortion was legal. Poor and working class women either carried an unwanted pregnancy to term or risked their lives undergoing illegal abortions. If a woman did not die from an illegal abortion, she risked any number of complications, such as incomplete abortion, hemorrhage, infection, uterine perforation, and damage to the genital tract and internal organs.

According to a 1976 report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in the year prior to the passage of *Roe v. Wade*, 130,000 illegal abortions were performed across the US and 39 women died from the procedure. By 1974, illegal abortions dropped to 17,000, with five deaths. As of 2020, the death rate from abortion in the United States is 0.6 per 100,000 procedures, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Banning abortion does not stop women from attempting to end an unwanted pregnancy. The Guttmacher Institute reports that in countries which only allow abortion for the mother's health, the

abortion rate is 37 for every 1,000 women. In countries with no restrictions on abortion, the rate is 34 for every 1,000 women.

Anti-abortion laws are being pushed by right-wing Republicans who sit in state legislatures and governor's offices throughout much of the South and Midwest. These are the same states that have banned or restricted mitigation measures against the spread of COVID-19 and from which Republican officials and activists joined the January 6 coup attempt in Washington D.C. While anti-abortion laws are rooted in backward religious doctrine, they are ultimately about keeping the most vulnerable layers of society dependent on low-wage jobs and prey to the exploitation of the ruling class.

Despite decades of attacks, the Democratic Party has done nothing to protect the democratic right of women to an abortion. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained: "The Democrats have spent the past two decades accommodating and adapting to the right-wing attack on abortion rights."

The Biden administration has embraced the criminal precepts of the Great Barrington Declaration which promotes the unscientific "herd immunity" approach to the pandemic, allowing COVID-19 to spread without control. In late December, Biden told governors, "There is no federal solution. (The pandemic) gets solved at the state level." The White House's abdication of federal responsibility to end the pandemic, from Trump to Biden, has resulted in 836,000 needless deaths and is currently responsible for a record number of children being hospitalized as the Omicron variant runs unchecked throughout the country.

Similarly, the current administration is content to hand over decisions about the health and safety of millions of women to state governors, at least 22 of whom are set to cut off access to abortion as soon as the Supreme Court hands down its decision.

As the WSWS noted when the Supreme Court heard oral arguments last month challenging the right to abortion: "The fight to defend abortion rights cannot be waged through the political parties representing any faction of the capitalist oligarchy or the affluent upper-middle class. As with all democratic rights, it requires the mobilization of the working class as an independent political force in opposition to the ruling class and the

capitalist system." Only through a mass movement for socialism will the working class defend fundamental democratic rights and win the struggle against the regressive and criminal policies of the ruling class that threaten our rights and our lives.



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