

After Berlusconi's election: Women's Rights, Sex and the Pope

Interview with an Italian anarchist

Italian Anarchist Federation

1994

ITALY SEEMS all bad news these days with the new government coalition's that is a mix of the neo-fascist party National Alliance, the separatist Lega Nord and Forza Italia the party of the media tycoon, Berlusconi. What we hear less of in Ireland is the opposition to these forces. A member of the Florence affiliate of the Italian Anarchist Federation tells us of some of the problems facing progressives in Italy.

"The annual anti-clerical conference organised by several anti-authoritarian associations and anarchist groups took place as usual in Fano, a small town next to the Adriatic sea in central Italy. With the elections it appears the clerical-authoritarian side of Italian society has won for the moment over the progressive/democratic side.

"The new government is planning to attack all the laws concerning those civil rights that have been won in the last 20 years; sexual and racial discrimination, divorce, abortion and the No.180 Act, which prevented people in need of psychiatric help from being confined in mental asylums or jails.

"There have been no laws against homosexuals and immigrants in Italy since WWII, however this may soon change. But, it's only since 1974 and 1978 that referendums were called by the people to have laws for free access to divorce and assisted abortion. (In Italy it is possible to get a referendum by collecting signatures.)

"The 1978 referendum, concerning abortion rights, had been called mainly by the feminist movement together with anti-authoritarian movements, including the anarchist and gay movements. Initially the law was accepted as a necessary experiment in limiting the damages caused by back street-abortions, i.e. permanent personal injuries, haemorrhages and deaths caused by phoney doctors or doctors concerned only with money making.

"Along with the abortion law Italy has seen the widespread growth of gynaecological advisory boards which, in a state heavily influenced by Catholic fundamentalism

along with all its sex phobic taboos, offer chances for solidarity among women, medical examinations and advice about contraception.

“In preparation for the UN conference on Demographic Growth which to going to be held in Cairo next September, the Catholic hierarchies are intensifying their campaigns against the right of women and couples to decide and make their own choices. However there are inner conflicts and differences within the Catholic world itself.

When visiting Italy, Frances Kissling, president of the American association “Catholics for Free Choice” took a firm stand on the Pope’s policy: “Vatican city is a state, the only town without women and children. But still on what concerns sexuality and reproduction it pretends to know more than the women it’s supposed to represent.”

“The Pope’s words are particularly destructive in his motherland and in Spain. In Poland it’s still difficult to find condoms on chemists shelves, while we are still waiting for Lech Walesa to resign as promised on the enforcement of the ‘pro-abortion act’. In Spain abortion is restricted to a very limited number of cases such as deformity of the foetus or serious danger of the mother’s life.

“In this international scene population control policies are being turned into instruments for political control. The Vatican appeal against contraception and abortion in the less developed countries means keeping millions of starving children and families under the ruling thumb of western economics.

“As libertarians, we hope that no single child will become a new fetish in society of either straight couples or alternative communities. We hope individuals will always remain a loving deed born from free choice. We think it better to get rid of the bigotry of clerical hierarchies and of the boasting headlines of hired mass media which are turning a deed of love into a living oddity to be shown at the circus, to be peeped at on TV screens, even sold at markets.”

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