

Thousands take part in pro-choice #Strike4Repeal in Ireland

Main bridge in Dublin blocked for two hours

Andrew Flood

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International Womens Day in Ireland saw thousands take to the streets in a sequence of ‘in work time’ protests under the heading ‘Strike4Repeal’. Abortion is illegal in almost all circumstances and the protests were an attempt by pro-choice activists to forced the government to stop delaying a referendum to repeal the anti-choice 8th Amendment placed in the Irish constitution in 1983. Workers Solidarity Movement members took part in organising the day and in the aftermath produced a number of articles and videos detailing what happened.

In January WSM explained that the demand was ‘A referendum on the 8th or #strike4repeal on March 8th’ explaining that “The newly formed group, Strike for Repeal, are preparing to ‘strike’ if a date is not set for a referendum to repeal he 8th Amendment by International Women’s day on March 8th. In a press release the group has said “The strike will not be an industrial strike in the traditional sense but could include taking an annual leave day off work, refraining from domestic work for the day, wearing black in solidarity or staging a walkout during your lunch break. We also encourage any business owners in a position to close their services at no cost to workers, to do so for all or part of the day as a solidarity action.”

In the context of the farcical attempt of the government to delay any efforts to Repeal the 8th through the Citizens Assembly a strike should certainly cause concern for our anti-women TD’s. The strike is the greatest source of leveraging power that workers have; as workers we are exploited, as women workers we are exploited further. A gendered pay gap of 20% currently exists in Ireland, meaning that for every euro a man makes a women earns 80 cent. Outside of the workplace women still do the majority of the house and care work. This work is unrecognised, often termed an invisible form of work and it means women are working a double shift for the wage of one.

The 8th Amendment is barbaric, forcing 9 people a day to travel for an abortion, countless more taking illegal pills at home, one women given a forced c-section at 24 weeks, another who was brain dead being kept on a life support machine despite her families wishes because she was pregnant, and resulting in the deaths of Bimbo Onanuga and Savita Halappanavar. It is a tool used by the state to control women and pregnant people; to force either pregnancy or exilt upon them. Having control of our reproductive systems, choosing if and when we have children is

fundamental to our freedom. Having control over our bodies is essential to gaining control over our lives, not having them dictated to us by bosses or politicians.

We spelled the situation in Ireland out in more detail a few days beforehand in '8 reasons to Strike for Repeal this 8th March

1. World-Class Tyranny

Ireland has one of the most restrictive abortion laws in the world more so than places like Syria and Afghanistan. Only Malta is more restrictive within the EU.

2. Democracy & Equality

No woman of child-bearing age has been allowed to have a say in her reproductive rights. The last vote was in 1983. This country claims to be democratic yet denies women basic medical services and control of their bodies. In the Irish law a woman's life is equal to the foetus. This is not equality.

3. Exile

Up to 12 women a day travel abroad for an abortion but not every woman can travel. Migrant women and asylum seekers, women with disabilities, minors and predominantly working-class women are discriminated against here. The abortion ban only increases class divides and helps to perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

4. Abortion Pills

The other option is to use abortion pills but it is illegal to obtain them, and increasingly pills are being seized by customs, women who take them are at risk of being reported to the police if they have complications or need follow up care.

5. Trans, Non-Binary, & Intersex people

Trans-Men, non-binary people and some inter-sex people need access to abortion too. For some trans men, being forced to carry a pregnancy to term (or at all) is in serious conflict with their identity as men and can be traumatic as it forces them to do something with their bodies that feels alien to them. Trans people are invisible in Irish law and their struggle for bodily autonomy is a part of the struggle for reproductive rights.

6. Rape

If a woman is raped in this country and is caught having an abortion she will do more time in prison than her rapist. A woman faces a jail sentence of 14 years if she has an abortion whereas the maximum jail term for rapists is 10 years. Women who are raped are not entitled to abortions and face the trauma of being blamed for assault by a patriarchal police which assumes that it's a woman's responsibility not to get raped (i.e. don't wear the wrong clothes, don't drink too much, don't go out alone, etc.)

7. Fatal Foetal Abnormality

A woman is not allowed to have an abortion in Ireland even in cases of Fatal Foetal Abnormality. Instead Ireland offers prenatal hospices where women can wait out their pregnancies as they wait for the foetus to slowly die inside them. Moreover, unless the pregnancy itself is a direct threat to the mother's life she may not have an abortion and can be refused treatment for other conditions if it threatens the health of the foetus. Pregnant women with cancer have been refused both abortion and chemotherapy at a doctor's prerogative.

8. Cruel and Unusual Punishment

Forcing a woman to carry a pregnancy against her will has been called 'cruel, inhumane and degrading' by the UN Committee on Human Rights. Abortion is legal in Ireland only if there is a high risk of death to the woman. Suicide is grounds for an abortion but the woman has to be

assessed by up to 6 doctors. These doctors have the power to decide if a woman will be allowed an abortion. These doctors must be HSE approved and this panel only includes 1 psychiatrist. And the Ms.Y case has proven that the 'protection of life' provision offers no protection at all to suicidal women.

Ireland has one of the highest rates of migration to other countries in the world, partially for that reason solidarity protests took place in many countries across the globe. In the days beforehand though there was particular interest in solidarity gestures from Rojava in the form of a number of images of women there holding #Strike4Repeal placards. Accompanying an album of photos like this one they say "The revolution here in Rojava is a women's revolution. From the front lines of the fight against ISIS, to running the cantons to trade unions that ensure all working women have their voices heard. International women's day has special significance here, with events and demonstrations taking place all over the region. We stand with women worldwide in the struggle against patriarchy, and today we stand with the women of Ireland. We call on the Irish Government to repeal the 8th amendment and allow women rights over their own bodies! Today news reporters, trade unionists, HPC (civilian self-defence units) heard about the strike and stood in solidarity. Today women across Qamishlo support #strike4repeal Strike 4 Repeal"

The day itself started with statues all over the capital, Dublin, being covered and then rolling pickets of government offices. This built up to a large midday protest when thousands of people, many dressed in black, occupied the main bridge in the city centre. Smaller protests took place in cities and towns across Ireland including some in the north of Ireland – still ruled by England – where abortion is also mostly illegal and where police have been raiding homes and offices in the search for abortion pills.

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