

Polish women hold nation-wide strike against abortion ban

October 3 2016

Tens of thousands of black-clad women protested across Poland Monday against a proposed near-total abortion ban in the devoutly Catholic country, where the law is already among the most restrictive in Europe.

Protesters flooded central squares in major Polish cities for the "Women strike" campaign, as solidarity protests sprang up in European capitals including Berlin, London and Paris, among others.

Organisers used social media to launch the country-wide action—one of the largest-ever pro-choice events in Poland—urging women to stay away from work and school to attend street protests.

"What's happening is sick!" Anna, a 30-year-old who declined to reveal her surname, told AFP in the pouring rain at a huge rally in front of Warsaw's Royal Castle.

Earlier around 2,000 people rallied outside the Warsaw headquarters of the governing rightwing Law and Justice (PiS) party, forming a "wall of fury" human chain, an AFP journalist saw.

French actress Juliette Binoche joined protesters in Krakow, tweeting out a picture of herself holding a poster with the campaign's #Blackprotest hashtag.

'Like Afghanistan'

PiS lawmakers in late September pushed ahead with a controversial bill that would allow terminations only if the mother's life is at risk and increase the maximum jail term for practitioners from two years to five.

The citizens' initiative tabled in parliament by the Stop Abortion coalition would also make women who have terminations liable to prison terms, though judges could waive punishment.

Poland's influential Catholic Church gave the initiative its seal of approval earlier this year, though its bishops have since opposed jailing women.

"I don't like what the Polish government is doing to women," protester Jolanta Bienicka told AFP in Warsaw.

"Unfortunately, we're going in the direction of countries like Afghanistan and the worst countries in the world."

Protester Katazyna Goluch, a 17-year-old Warsaw high school student, told AFP that "no one has the right to decide what I am supposed to do with my uterus".

"If this law comes into effect and I'm raped and I get pregnant, I'll have to give birth. It's the same thing if the foetus is deformed, so we just have to say no."

Passed in 1993, the current law bans all terminations unless there was rape or incest, the pregnancy poses a health risk to the mother or the foetus is severely deformed.

A poll published this week by the Newsweek Polska magazine showed that 74 percent of Poles want to keep the existing law.

'Civilisation of death'

PiS government Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski drew the ire of protesters when he wished them "a good time" during Monday's strike.

He also said the European Parliament's planned Wednesday debate on the state of women's right in Poland would mark "a new step on the path of disgracing" the body.

Polish Bishop Marek Jedraszewski told the TVN 24 news channel that the "black protests are a terrifying manifestation of the civilisation of death."

An EU country of 38 million people, Poland sees less than 2,000 legal abortions a year, but women's groups estimate that another 100,000-150,000 procedures are performed illegally or abroad.

PiS lawmakers have also proposed a bill intended to severely limit in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), the so-called "test-tube baby" treatment that involves fertilising an egg outside a woman's body to produce an embryo that can then be implanted in her womb.

The measure would notably make it illegal to freeze embryos, which its proponents say are human beings from the moment of fertilisation.

It would also only allow women to fertilise one egg at a time, thus considerably reducing the chances of a successful pregnancy.

© 2016 AFP

Citation: Polish women hold nation-wide strike against abortion ban (2016, October 3) retrieved 14 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-10-women-nation-wide-abortion.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.