

Polish Parliament approves ban on abortion

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Last Friday, the Polish parliament, the Sejm, approved a draft law in a first reading that provides for a near-total ban on abortion and criminalises both women and doctors involved in abortions.

The bill was introduced by an ultra-right, Catholic lobby group and bans all abortion with the exception of those facing the imminent danger of death. Even underage girls who have been raped are denied a right to abortion. Women who abort face a charge of “prenatal murder” and a prison sentence of between three months and five years. The same applies to all and any “helpers”. This also means that even women who suffer a miscarriage run the risk of being charged on suspicion of abortion.

The bill stems from the citizens’ initiative “Stop Abortion” (Stop Aborcji), which collected 500,000 signatures for their petition. The ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) has openly supported the draft from the onset. In its election manifesto for the parliamentary election in 2015, PiS had already included a total ban on abortion.

In the first reading on Friday, 267 deputies voted for the bill, 154 voted against and 11 abstained. The draft will now be forwarded to the Human Rights Committee and the Justice Committee of the Sejm. The same meeting also endorsed another draft law tightening up rules on artificial insemination significantly. Accordingly, the freezing of embryos is to be banned and only a maximum of one fertilised egg can be transplanted per operation, thereby greatly reducing the chance of pregnancy.

The existing law is already extremely restrictive. Currently, abortions are only allowed if the woman was raped, incest was involved or the fetus has severe deformities. As a result, the total number of legal abortions per year in Poland is listed at 2,000. Experts, however, estimate that in fact between 80,000 and 150,000 women undergo illegal abortion in Poland or

other European Union (EU) countries annually. According to one survey, one third of all women in Poland have had at least one abortion.

The latest ban on abortion is deeply reactionary and represents an attack on the democratic and social rights of the working class. In a country where one in four lives below the poverty line, including 1.4 million children and youth under age 24, a ban on family planning not only undermines self-determination for women, but is directed at the rights of the working class as a whole.

The PiS is seeking with the bill to consolidate its base amongst right-wing and church-based organisations and mobilise them to attack the rights of working people, as tensions grow within the Polish bourgeoisie over foreign and domestic policy. The PiS government plays a key role in NATO’s preparations for war against Russia, and in its first year in office has moved rapidly to build a police state aimed primarily at the working class.

The mobilisation of religious backwardness to enforce austerity measures and social attacks is not new. Following the collapse of the Stalinist regime in Poland in 1989-1990, the president at the time, Lech Walesa, repeatedly restricted abortion rights and worked closely with the Catholic Church to suppress massive opposition to his so-called shock therapy, destroying millions of jobs and the existing social system.

There is mass opposition to the new abortion laws. According to a survey by *Newsweek Polska*, which has links to opposition parties, 74 percent of the population opposes a tightening up of the abortion law.

But this sentiment finds no expression within the political establishment. The largest opposition party, Civic Platform (PO), which had ruled until 2015, defended the existing reactionary abortion law as a “compromise solution”. At the same time, the party

declared that the bill is a “matter of conscience” and lifted party discipline for the vote. Four PO MPs voted on Friday for the abortion ban. The new liberal party Nowoczesna, founded by an influential banker and businessman, shares the line of the PO on this issue.

Protests against the new law, mainly by the pseudo-left Razem (Together) party and the organisation Ratużmy kobiety (“Let us rescue women”), do not reflect opposition to the law within the working class but rather the interests of wealthy layers of the middle class. Representatives of the PO were often allowed to speak at the latter’s demonstrations.

Several thousand people participated in protests in the largest cities of the country over a period of several months, and a Twitter campaign under the hashtag #czarnyprotest (“black protest”) was organised with many pop stars, actors and opposition politicians signaling their dissent.

The party Razem, which was founded in early 2015 along the lines of SYRIZA and the Spanish Podemos, has made every effort to suppress the central political and social issues. It divorced the new legislation from the militarist and anti-social agenda of the PiS government and limited its protest solely to the issue of women’s rights, above all from the standpoint of privileged layers of the urban middle class.

In fact, Razem’s stance, like that of other parties, does not differ fundamentally from the PiS line. The party supports NATO’s aggressive policy against Russia in Ukraine, which is being massively promoted by the Polish bourgeoisie. Like its sister parties in Europe, Razem also backs austerity and social cuts.

Razem is hostile to the social and democratic rights of the working class. The party merely represents a wing of the Polish elite, which seeks closer links with the EU. It is using the protest against the tightening up of abortion law to mobilise the upper middle class for this pro-EU policy.



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