



Protests, Parades and Marches: activism and extending abortion legislation to Northern Ireland

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Abstract

This chapter considers the protests and activism led by the Alliance for Choice movement, an organisation that campaigns for the extension of the 1967 Abortion to Northern Ireland. The role of women in the movement is considered with particular focus on its most recent period of activism which began in the months preceding a proposed debate in Westminster in 2008 where a tabled amendment to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill by Diane Abbot MP sought an extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to NI. In response to this a series of events and activities were held to raise awareness amongst MP's, trade unions and the wider public. The Alliance for Choice campaign took a strong pro-choice approach, focusing on the issue of equality with women in the rest of the UK. The campaign included lobbying MP's and political parties, public protests, petitions and seminar sessions. Despite the withdrawal of the amendment to the Bill in late 2008 the movement has continued on with its campaign, including preparation of a submission to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). As the awareness raising nature of the movement grew, it focused on range of methodologies including lobbying at party political conferences, a pilot training programme for the women's sector and film nights showing documentary films depicting how abortion is dealt with in South Africa, Poland and America. Motions have been tabled at trade union conferences, book launches supported and participation in May Day parades have occurred. The movement also sought support from sister organisations in the South and in the rest of the UK, sharing information, ideas and providing mutual support. This chapter reviews the actions of the Alliance for Choice movement, during the period 2008-2010, considering the motivations for participation in the movement and reflections on its impact.

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 LEGISLATION SOCIAL SCIENCES	 LEGISLATION SOCIAL SCIENCES
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Northern Ireland's highly restrictive abortion ban lifted at midnight on Monday after legislation was brought in by MPs at Westminster. Same-sex marriage was also legalised under the change to the law. The historic law change marks the beginning of a new chapter in Northern Ireland, bringing to an end the country's 158-year-old restrictive abortion law. The momentous change comes after years of campaigning to extend abortion access to Northern Ireland in addition to the #NowForNI social media campaign. Under a 1967 act, abortion is legal in England, Wales, and Scotland, but this piece of legislation does not extend to Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom. Until this day, women in Northern Ireland faced up to life in prison for having an abortion. Northern Ireland has long been the dirty little secret of the UK. Rallies and protests were organised as part of passionate grassroots campaigns, but often with a weary sense that few people outside of the region knew or cared. Social media gave women and the LGBTQIA+ community a platform to speak out about their experiences and be heard, and with each story, the stigma slowly began to erode, and Northern Ireland's outdated laws became increasingly impossible to ignore. Abortion-rights demonstrators march through the streets of Belfast ahead of a meeting of the Stormont Assembly on abortion rights and gay marriage on October 21, 2019. © Charles McQuillan/Getty Images. Parades Commission Website, providing information about Parades in Northern Ireland. The form 11/3 is the notification form which anyone wishing to organise a protest against a parade must submit to the Parades Commission via the PSNI. This notification must be given not less than 14 days before the date on which the parade is to held. Download. Bloomer, Fiona. 2013. Protests, Parades and Marches: Activism and Extending Abortion Legislation to Northern Ireland. In *Performing Feminisms in Contemporary Ireland*, ed. Lisa Fitzpatrick. Dublin, Ireland: Carysfort Press. Google Scholar. Bloomer, Fiona, and Eileen Fegan. 2014. Critiquing Recent Abortion Law and Policy in Northern Ireland. *Critical Social Policy* 34 (1): 109–120. CrossRef Google Scholar. Bloomer, Fiona, and Kellie O'Dowd. 2014. Restricted Access to Abortion in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland: Exploring Abortion Tourism and Barriers to Legal Reform. *Culture, Health & Parades and marches*—held mainly but not exclusively by Protestant groups—often have heavily sectarian undertones. The same is true of flags and emblems, displayed by all sides on lampposts and buildings. Moreover, Northern Ireland's leaders have never developed a comprehensive approach to the legacy of past violence, as some other postconflict societies have. The Johnson government is seeking to minimize such a distinction, but the extent of disruption to Northern Ireland's economy and politics remains to be seen. The final details of the United Kingdom's economic relationship with the EU—including how intertwined it will be with the EU single market—are still being worked out in trade talks.