

WOMEN'S STRIKE – OUR UMBRELLAS MUST STAY UP!

We've all had enough of disrespect, contempt, and violence against women. Poland's governing Law and Justice (PiS) party's support of the barbaric amendment to the existing abortion bill and the party's awaiting the Polish Episcopate Conference's 'approval' to withdraw proceeding of this law has offended and outraged us all, women and men alike, as citizens of a democratic state. We also strongly oppose the proposed drastic changes to the Polish education system, which will affect schools, universities, and vocational training (including e.g. the police force and other public services). Taken together, these proposals only serve to further the governing party's unacceptable political agenda, which is to restrict our democratic freedoms. Since the mass national protests on a rainy Monday, 3rd October, the ruling party representatives and their supporters have shown nothing but contempt for the protesters, some even going as far as to call for violence against us, and more draft proposals that seek to limit our rights are being brought to the Parliament. We must not let this come to pass. We must not fold our umbrellas!

On October 3rd 2016 women and men in almost 200 towns and cities in Poland and abroad took to the streets in protest against the proposed barbaric anti-abortion bill, which PiS (Law and Justice) party had recently advanced to parliamentary debate. The first call for a nationwide Women's Strike came only a week earlier (made by Marta Lempart at a rally in the Polish city of Wroclaw). Within days, a nationwide strike committee was formed, and it went on to support the organisation of almost 200 citizen-led events in Poland and around the world. A vast majority of the protesters are not members of any organised groups and prior to the **#womensstrike** have never been publicly involved in social and political affairs.

Although three days after the **#womensstrike**, the Law and Justice party backtracked on the anti-women and anti-abortion bill, the parliamentary majority has clearly not grasped the significance of the Women's Strike. But we know that a civil rights movement was born on that rainy day in October, and the umbrellas must stay up!

As we celebrate the 41st anniversary of the Icelandic national women's strike on October 24th, it's time for us to stand up and be counted!

Let us say:

NO to contempt and violence against women!

NO to Church and religion in politics!

NO to an education system driven by political agendas!

Gudrun Jonsdottir, one of the leaders of the Iceland strike over four decades ago, has recently reached out in support of the **#womensstrike**. About the strike in her country, she said: 'This event has shaped Iceland (...) Many women tell me that such a thing would be impossible in their

countries. How do they know that? Have they ever tried it? (...) When I stood in the centre of Reykjavik, arm in arm with 25,000 women, I realised that nothing would be as it was. (...) Polish sisters, do all you can to change the situation in your country."

In Poland, too, nothing will be as it was. We, the brave sisters and the wise men who support us, will change our country. AND OUR UMBRELLAS WILL STAY UP UNTIL WE DO!

HOW ARE WE GOING TO DO THIS?

As part of the strike we protest, we march, but we also hold debates and carry on with our work. As before, we operate locally, and we work at the grassroots: 90% of the towns participating in the Women's Strike on 3rd October have fewer than 50,000 inhabitants. Importantly, we're moving from the internet into the real world – our presence is our biggest strength!!

WHEN ARE WE DOING IT?

On Monday, 24th October we celebrate the 41st anniversary of the Icelandic national women's strike. As such, most events will take place on or around 24th October, but it is up to each local organising group to schedule and plan their local and regional events to fit their circumstances.

IMPORTANT: In Warsaw, the main Women's Strike rally will take place on **Sunday, October 23rd** in front of the Parliament building at 15.00.

ABOUT THE WOMEN'S STRIKE ORGANISING COMMITTEE

We are a group of a dozen or so individuals, mainly from Wroclaw, where the idea first came to life, but also from other Polish towns and cities. Together we form the National Women's Strike Organising Committee and a web admin support group. Marta Lempart is the Strike Leader; Natalia Pancewicz is the Chief Coordinator; Paulina Maciejewska is the Local Groups Coordinator. We offer support to local committees to organise events, collect and process data, liaise with the media, and we secure the presence and activity of the strike online.

INVOLVEMENT OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND CIVIC ORGANISATIONS

At the national level, the Women's Strike is a 'No Logo' movement. Yes - some members of the Organising Committee are active in civic organisations. No - the **#womensstrike** which swept the nation on October 3rd (with thousands of people in the streets and many businesses closed or business logos changed in support) was **not** conceptualised, organised, or led to success by any specific organisation or political party, even though such organisations have offered their support at the local level.

At the local level, there is only one rule: 'Your area, your rules'! This means that local organising committees (which may or may not be led or supported by members of NGOs or political parties)

make all the decisions regarding their preferred collaborations. They also make the rules regarding the use of banners and signage at their events, and decide who may attend or be invited to speak.

PETITION SIGNING

At events throughout the country, we will be collecting signatures for a petition to support women's rights in Poland, drafted by the local organising committee in Warsaw. In addition, local organising committees may prepare their own petitions to distribute. These petitions won't be available online – only during the real life protests and meetings.

OUR GROUPS AND WEBSITES

1. Women's Strike FB page (summary of key info):

<https://web.facebook.com/ogolnopolskistrajkkobiet/?fref=ts>

2. Nationwide strike events: <https://web.facebook.com/events/183872815352754/>

3. National discussion group: <https://web.facebook.com/groups/1600548686912853/?fref=ts>

4. Herstory blog: jestesmystrajkiemkobiet.blogspot.com – stories from women explaining their reasons for supporting the protest.

INTERNATIONAL COVERAGE

The Polish Women's Strike has been covered by news media around the world.

In South America, women are organising their own strike, following Poland's example:

WOMEN'S STRIKE IN LATIN AMERICA: WORLDWIDE CALL FOR SOLIDARITY ON OCT 19:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/599816086868312/>