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Italy

Italian feminists defend abortion rights and women's self-determination

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Description:

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Mass feminist demonstrations in Italy have returned to the streets and piazzas thirty years after their earlier wave - taking on Berlusconi and Benedict to defend abortion rights and fight social regression.

In Milan, on 14 January 2006, some 250 000 demonstrators, mainly women, took to the streets, to defend law 194, the 1978 law decriminalising abortion, and the principle of women's reproductive, social and economic self-determination. As the Rifondazione Comunista daily *Liberazione* wrote: "The witches have returned, we have 'emerged from the silence' (as the banner opening the demonstration stated) and have no intention of returning".

The participants included women from towns throughout northern and central-northern Italy, from social centres, the Union of atheists and agnostics which called for an end to clerical interference and for the Church to "get out of our pants".



Some major delegations included Rifondazione, DS and a large delegation of CGIL trade-union women from Emilia, Romagna and Tuscany. But most of the demonstrators were women who had shown up by themselves or with friends, and were thrilled that so many others had the same idea. The general feeling was of power and joy to have emerged from demonstrations that were merely a "tired routine" with thousands of demonstrators continuing to dance for hours in still more photos of the demonstration the chilly evening air.

There was a lively and most varied participation in the demonstration, centred on defending the rights of women against the attempts to shore up the old moral order. It went far beyond the defence of the existing law, standing up for a secular state and society and the need to defend the freedoms of women and all citizens. The two slogans most heard were "nobody will decide in our place any longer" and "siamo uscite dal silenzio - we (women) have emerged from the silence".

Though the demonstrators' ire centred on Berlusconi's rightist coalition government and interference from the Vatican and the current papacy - reactionary even by Catholic Church standards - there were also many criticisms of the centre-left Union programme viewing women's rights as a simple "issue" among many others and not half the population expressing their collective strength over the years and the current months.

Moreover, they decried "treason" in the Union's backsliding on its earlier commitment to support civil unions for same-sex couples, a step back from secular and democratic Europe and self-determination of human beings, and a sop to the "family-oriented" (familist) tone of social policies, even among the centre-left.

The demonstrators insisted on the right to work, to choice and to health, not only defending Law 194, but the outlook that the right to control one's own body is a material basis for all freedoms and for freedom for all people. The

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prevailing theme of freedom, "liberty to choose, liberty to love, this movement won't be halted"; "freedom to live and live together", was accompanied by a call to memory of earlier struggles. "Today's women remember" and for a better future for youth "precarity is the contraceptive of the future" and migrant women.

Other demonstrations and actions have taken place in Rome and Naples and more are planned throughout Italy.

LINKS

Site of the coalition in defence of Law 94.

<http://www.usciamodalsilenzio.org/>

Photos

<http://www.usciamodalsilenzio.org/foto-gallery.php>

<http://www.usciamodalsilenzio.org/foto-gallery-altre.php>

http://www.socialpress.it/article.php3?id_article=1148