Throughout October and November, protests have taken place in Poland against the right wing government’s plans to restrict abortion rights. Poland has some of the tightest restrictions on abortion in the world.

What the new law would do

The plans of the right wing Law and Justice Party (PiS) are an attempt to outlaw abortions in their entirety. Currently there are fewer than 2,000 abortions performed each year in Poland. Those that are carried out are almost all due to the malformation of the foetus. The new ruling would outlaw this as well as in the event of rape, incest, or of a risk to the life of the woman.

Strike

Over 30,000 women took to the streets despite restrictions on gatherings of more than 5 due to Covid 19. They marched and gathered in town squares, picketed the homes of politicians, carried out banner drops in churches and marched on parliament. They were attacked by rightwing gangs and riot police.

Success

Last month, the government backed down on their plans, stating that they needed more time for dialogue. This is not the first time women in Poland have had to defend their reproductive rights. The government attempted the same thing in 2016 and was forced back by the women’s strike movement.

Beware

Women strikers are warning against complacency. This is a pause in the government plans but their intention, as with rightwing governments across the world, is that women should be clearly defined in their role as the production line for the future generation. Choice would be removed and democratic participation of women in society generally severely restricted. They are determined to stop this from happening.

Across the world

Donald Trump’s administration on 22nd October signed an international anti-abortion pledge along with its “core supporters” of Brazil, Egypt, Hungary, Indonesia and Uganda, and the 27 other signatories include Belarus, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Sudan, South Sudan, Libya.

Polish women lead the fight

The rightward trend across many parts of the globe poses a threat to democratic rights for citizens everywhere. Restrictions on women; attacks on LGBTQ identity; repression of workers’ rights to organise; the right to express dissent are all under threat by this trend. It is important that the women’s strike in Poland is successful.

Unity

Polish feminist Anna Oppenheim said, “I’ve been particularly happy to see the alliances of feminists and trade unionists, from farmers to miners, that are currently emerging”.

Polish Women Strike For Abortion Rights

Governement plans forced back but fight must continue.
No Class Peace. The Struggle Continues.

Rishi Sunak’s spending review brought plenty of unwelcome news, such as another public sector pay freeze and an increase in military spending to play into nationalist sentiments around Brexit. For us in the rail industry, it brought news that the planned budget for rail improvements was being cut by £1bn, amounting to 10% of what was previously planned. This is likely to be felt on the ground as continued delays, more frequent accidents and incidents and more demoralisation for everyone working in the industry. It is also likely to be used by industry employers to justify poor pay offers, continued casualisation or even job losses.

True to Tory form, the working class is being made to pay for the bailout of businesses necessitated by the pandemic and workers in our industry are no different. We’re going to have to overcome our unions’ reluctance to fight for us during the crisis. Employers and the government have no such qualms. We’re already seeing signs of willingness with various disputes taking place, for example at Scotrail and TPE. It’s time to recognise that the other side is never going to respect any sort of truce.

We have to go back to fighting for what we need as workers, pandemic or no pandemic.

Who said it?
(Answers at the bottom of the page).

“The model of privatization adopted 25 years ago has seen significant rises in passenger numbers, but this pandemic has proven that it is no longer working”. (our italics)

“Northern Ireland have the best of both worlds with access to both the EU and British markets”. (Hmm, isn’t that what we all had until recently?).

“The sign of a civilised society is how we treat the most vulnerable and our social care system is not up to scratch”.

Equal Pay For RG Staff

The EMR website boasts ‘enhanced cleaning’ on trains but RG staff, who have been redeployed to provide that service, are wondering when they might see their pay enhanced. Currently they receive the minimum wage on days when they clean trains but full time cleaners are on more than £10 a day. As key workers it seems only fair that ‘RG cleaners’ should receive the same pay for the same work.

Bring Maintenance In-house

The derailment of the freight train in the station on 11th November not only caused immense disruption to services, it will undoubtedly have resulted in enormous stress for the driver, the signaller on duty and many of those dealing with the immediate aftermath of the incident. The initial report from RAIB published 30th November says that a series of fastenings were broken, probably before the derailment took place, which allowed the rails to move apart and the wheels of the wagons to drop into the space in between.

Although the full RAIB report is still awaited, the questions that immediately occurred to us are around casualisation in railway maintenance. Network Rail is still contracting out track work to a web of subcontractors, many of whom operate zero hours contracts or bogus self-employment. Rail unions have been calling for maintenance to be brought back into house for years and last year Corbyn’s Labour Party took up that call in the Commons. As well as infrastructure failures, the casualisation culture is leading to tragic accidents - most recently in South Wales, leading to the deaths of two members of staff.

Even if the report into the Sheffield derailment ultimately finds no particular fault with maintenance, questions will remain about whether more frequent checks or enhanced maintenance could have prevented it.

With the current casualisation culture, plus Sunak’s new £1bn cut to spending on rail, who knows how many more of these incidents we’re going to see in the near future.