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# Irish politician to take abortion pill in Dublin in defiance of republic's ban

Socialist TD Ruth Coppinger, along with 30 other pro-choice activists, bought tablets from Marie Stopes clinic in Belfast

[Henry McDonald](#) in Dublin  
[The Guardian](#), Tuesday 28 October 2014 14.19 GMT  
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Pro-choice supporters hold placards in front of the Irish parliament building in Dublin. Photograph: Peter Muhly/AFP/Getty Images

An Irish MP is to take an abortion pill in Dublin to defy the continued ban on most terminations in the Republic.

The Socialist party's TD Ruth Coppinger travelled to Northern Ireland on Tuesday along with 30 other pro-choice activists to buy abortion pills from the Marie Stopes clinic in Belfast.

The Irish state still bans abortion pills and last year the republic's customs service seized more than 1,000 tablets that were posted from Britain and Europe to Irish women seeking to terminate their pregnancies.

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Despite recent reforms that allowed for limited abortions in the state where a woman's life is in danger either through medical complications or if she is in danger of killing herself, most Irish women seeking terminations still have to go abroad.

Women who are raped and those whose babies will be stillborn are not entitled in law to have abortions in Irish hospitals.

The pro-choice group has branded their action as the "abortion pill train", named after a similar protest in the 1970s when a group of Irish feminists travelled on the Enterprise express train to Belfast to buy condoms. They challenged the state to have them arrested when they arrived back in Dublin's Connolly station with the contraceptives. At the time condoms were illegal in the republic.

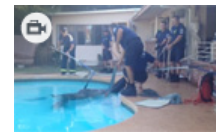
Coppinger said most Irish people were now far ahead of politicians in terms of liberalising the country's abortion laws. She said she would take one of the pills herself, stressing that they were safer than taking Viagra.

"They [politicians] continue to give Catholic beliefs centrality when a large majority now favour allowing abortion to protect women's health, both physical and mental," Coppinger said before her trip north.

The women will travel back from Belfast to Dublin on Tuesday, where they will attend a rally to mark the second anniversary of the death of Indian dentist Savita Halappanavar. [She died in Galway University hospital](#) after being refused a termination even though she knew the child she was carrying was dead and that she would suffer severe blood poisoning if the pregnancy continued.

The Marie Stopes Clinic where Coppinger and the pro-choice campaigners are buying the abortion pills has been the subject of sustained protests by anti-abortion activists in Belfast.

Staff working at the clinic in Great Victoria Street have resorted to wearing mini-cameras on their clothing to record alleged threats and incidents of intimidation against them by radical anti-abortion groups picketing the premises.



NatalieRio, 29



Paskavich\_wisdom, 44

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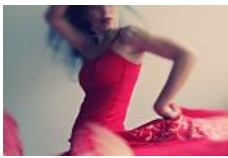


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52 comments. Showing  conversations, threads  sorted

3 PEOPLE, 3 COMMENTS



**onalongsabbatical**

28 October 2014 2:31pm

67

Good for them. The death of Savita Halappanavar was preventable, awful, and unforgivable.

Ireland needs to change, over so many things.



**labowe** onalongsabbatical

28 October 2014 3:21pm

12

Yes indeed but as long as the RC church has ANY say in Irish society there will be limited progress. Gombeen politicians, Gombeens people being led by the nose, holding on to the past, and that's speaking as an enlightened Gombeen!



**rodneyt** onalongsabbatical

28 October 2014 7:22pm

What other things?

7 PEOPLE, 9 COMMENTS



**TylerBurden**

28 October 2014 2:34pm

16

Does this all just boil down to religion?



**AlanTyndall** TylerBurden  
28 October 2014 2:47pm

20

Possibly religion-enabled conservatism. If you want to boil it down further, you're left with conservatism, not religion.



**hdtvdaly** TylerBurden  
28 October 2014 3:16pm

5

There are some in depth works regarding Irish attitudes to reproduction that are unique even amongst other formerly uber catholic countries and are better explained with reference to the legacy of the famine.

Roughly 800,000 under 12's died in the Irish famine in four years. A generation of children was removed from Ireland and this has had a funny impact on Irish culture. Even as the country became exceptionally wealthy and the power of the Catholic Church dwindled to nothing Ireland retained fertility rates more akin to developing nations than OCEC countries.

Show 6 more replies

Last reply: 28 October 2014 5:39pm



**GMonet**  
28 October 2014 2:34pm

48

Good for them. Public defiance is a fine way to demonstrate to the cowards in government that we are no longer living in the 1930s. Ultimately we can never again allow another woman to die like Savita Halappanavar did.

2 PEOPLE, 3 COMMENTS



**Underminer**  
28 October 2014 2:43pm

35

Its amazing that in the 21st century - and in Western Europe too - that such state-sponsored idiocy still continues. Time to get religion out of Irish politics and bring the country up to date.



**hdtvdaly** Underminer  
28 October 2014 4:41pm

7

Monarchy, knights, duchesses, baby princes getting their arses changed in a castle, a House of Lords who has a functional role in the running of your state...would you feck off with your 21st century it's like living next door to a lord of the rings novel.



**Underminer** hdtvdaly  
28 October 2014 5:05pm

7

Oh, I completely agree with all your points and would happily move to a republic tomorrow.

But that doesn't excuse Ireland's medieval treatment of women or theocratic tendencies!

Also, I could make analogies about The Shire vs. Mordor, but that would be childish.



**YorkerBouncer**  
28 October 2014 2:55pm

36

Good, it should be a womans right to choose. Any civilised society should agree.

7 PEOPLE, 8 COMMENTS



**WilliamMurdoch**  
28 October 2014 2:56pm

6

Their is still a roman catholic dominance over the Republic of Ireland, they will grow as a country when they are released from it yolk.



**LiviaDrusilla** WilliamMurdoch

12

28 October 2014 3:11pm

when they are released from it yolk.

Eggs-actly!



**hdtvdaly** WilliamMurdoch

13

28 October 2014 3:30pm

Really? I'm actually from the place and can tell you this is absolute drivel as opposed to holding opinions about as relevant as my imagining London is permanently foggy, all British people wear bowler hats and to a man and woman have terrible teeth.

You come from a place with a House of Lords - that can actually delay laws passed by your elected representatives! - and a "royal family" who live in palaces and castles in the middle of your capital city! But I'm bright enough to realise this doesn't mean you're living in Narnia.

Ireland has had a historic link to Catholicism, however, it never acquiesced to all its decrees (if it did the IRA would have folded in the 1920's and the modern Irish state would not exist in the 26 counties). The power it held was challenged in the 70's and 80's and absolutely wiped out in the 90's.

Show 5 more replies

Last reply: 28 October 2014 4:39pm



**Bren Jamin**

28 October 2014 2:57pm

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**JPWREL**

28 October 2014 2:59pm

20

Good! Anything that annoys the Roman Catholic Church is likely good for humanity's freedom.



**LeonardL**

28 October 2014 3:05pm

23

It is embarrassing that these protests are still necessary in a first world country. Ireland is a progressive and liberal country but on this one topic, it seems to be hamstrung by Catholic dogma, a doctrine that only an insubstantial minority still follow.

Let's have a referendum that addresses the real issue and in the interim immediately introduce legislation that allows for abortion in cases of rape, incest and fetal abnormality. That is the least that the women of this country and the memory of Savita, deserve.



**hardatwork**

28 October 2014 3:24pm

Careful Now

2 PEOPLE, 2 COMMENTS



**Peter1312**

28 October 2014 3:47pm

It all seems a bit Irish to me.



**Jimbtho** Peter1312

28 October 2014 4:29pm

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2 PEOPLE, 2 COMMENTS

**MarcusClarke**

28 October 2014 3:53pm

4

God are the Irish still stuck in a 1950s time warp? Priest ridden country indeed.

**Barcalrish** MarcusClarke

28 October 2014 4:18pm

That's where the contradiction lies

4 PEOPLE, 7 COMMENTS

**spavin**

28 October 2014 4:08pm

7

I'm a Brit living in Ireland, and my views on abortion have evolved somewhat in that time.

The legal status of abortion in Ireland represents the will of its people. It has been the subject of referendums and, while public mood has recently shifted post-Savita towards a more liberal approach to abortion, there is not widespread desire for abortion-on-demand.

There aren't many people in Dublin who are influenced by the Catholic church anymore. It's more that the illegality of abortion for so long makes the prospect of legal abortion feel a bit alien. I've lived here for less than a decade, and even in that time I've begun to see it as slightly weird that it's completely legal in the UK.

That's not to say that living in Ireland has made me become anti-abortion - far from it - but 'normal' is relative. The suggestion that the status of abortion in Ireland is church-led and / or 'backwards' is a somewhat myopic reading of things.

**NJS1964** spavin

28 October 2014 4:19pm

3

Yes but that "normalcy" feeling you mention is due to history and no doubt stronger preaching when the church did have more influence.

I would be willing to accept it's more of a legacy type attitude but that doesn't excuse criticism.

**Jimbtho** spavin

28 October 2014 4:26pm

3

I'm an Englishman living in West Belfast. I agree with you, anti-abortion sentiment over here can't be dismissed as some kind of religious hangover. I can think of two atheists who are very anti-abortion (one of them can argue very coherently for his views on this issue...and no, he's not anti-feminist, before someone starts that up).

That said, I get the feeling that a lot of people are anti-abortion but if push comes to shove their pro-life credentials aren't all that strong... That's what annoys me about the Irish position on abortion (on both sides of the border) - people want to keep 'nasty abortion' out of their country, but the more liberal English position is just too convenient... Even if they moved to a fairly restrictive legal abortion regime (e.g. with a 16-week limit), it would be an improvement.

[Show 4 more replies](#)
[Last reply: 28 October 2014 5:02pm](#)
**Artemis13**

28 October 2014 4:14pm

4

The pills are not sold at Marie Stopes in Belfast. The abortion pill CANNOT be bought legally for ones own use in Northern Ireland. They are bought illegally online by hundreds of women in Ulster each year in the absence of access to the same thing legally and with medical aftercare on our shores. Please correct this article. Marie Stopes operate within the very restrictive law on abortion in Northern Ireland and this article is inaccurate.

**Artemis13**

28 October 2014 4:17pm

6

Remember -the pills are illegal in Northern Ireland too. Women in Northern Ireland cannot access abortion on the NHS despite being UK tax payers, even if cases of rape or fatal foetal abnormality. The 1967 Abortion act was never extended to cover NI, where the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act still criminalises abortion. This is an all Ireland problem. Repeal the 8th, extend the 1967 act.

**spavin** Artemis13

28 October 2014 4:30pm

1

Had no idea about that.

It's a tricky one though, because many citizens of NI are self-declared as Irish, possessing Irish passports.

Laws on some fundamentals will invariably be fudged. That doesn't excuse it of course. Not sure if there's a ready solution that won't profoundly upset a large amount of people.

**Artemis13** spavin

28 October 2014 4:35pm

4

They still pay National Insurance and are entitled to free healthcare on NHS. Last week Amnesty International survey showed 7/10 people in NI agree with abortion in certain circumstances. Our politicians are not keeping up with public opinion. <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/belfast-and-beyond/amnesty-release-poll-showing-majority-ni-back-abortion-law-reforms-doj>

[Show 2 more replies](#)
[Last reply: 28 October 2014 4:53pm](#)
**ThePlathDiaries**

28 October 2014 4:18pm

13

For those making remarks about the "priest ridden" and "backward" Irish, I would remind you that Northern Ireland, in UK jurisdiction imposes these archaic laws upon women here. Northern Irish women pay their National Insurance yet must pay for abortion services on the "mainland", unlike their English, Scottish and Welsh sisters.

A recent poll suggests 2/3 of the UK population are unaware of the oppression experienced by Northern Irish women, which might go some way to explain why there has been little to no support from the UK in helping Northern Irish women have bodily autonomy. So before you decry the "poor, pitiful Irish", take a look at the plight of Northern Irish women, marooned in limbo with no solidarity from across the water.

**NJS1964** ThePlathDiaries

28 October 2014 4:21pm

2

Different flag, same religious legacy.

**aquarious** ThePlathDiaries

28 October 2014 4:59pm

2

Northern Irish/Southern Irish - all Irish. The really sad thing is that both North and South have no autonomy and birth control is still frowned upon. In the 90s, Virgin Megastore in Dublin was closed so many times for selling condoms. There was no divorce referendum until 1995 (slightly off tangent I know). I don't think it can be attributed to just the RC religion because Italy and Spain for example do not have these issues. I would suggest that as a previous poster said, that the whole of the island is subject to conservatism and in the case of the north, well if you vote these idiots in, then this is the type of shitty policy you get whereby men still seek to control women's bodies. Vote for someone else next year!

**bojimbo261**

28 October 2014 4:52pm

Northern Ireland and the Republic are different places .



**Artemis13** bojimbo261  
28 October 2014 4:54pm

3

Both have restrictive laws around abortion.



**fredgladys**  
28 October 2014 5:33pm

1

"They [politicians] continue to give Catholic beliefs centrality when a large majority now favour allowing abortion to protect women's health, both physical and mental," Copping said before her trip north."

I'm surprised, I thought that the Catholic stranglehold on political decisions was a thing of the past, obviously not.

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