



***Deleting on the Right to Peacefully Protest is an Assault on Civil Rights & a Liberal Democracy***

The right to peaceful protest is an integral civil right and a foundation of a robust democracy. It is as key to democracy as freedom of speech. One does not have to agree with a particular form of protest to still protect and safeguard the very right to protest.

Indeed, the idea that you support the right to peacefully protest on issues that you agree with but not on issues that you disagree with is a dangerous threat to democracy and minority rights. Below is a photo of a pro-abortion/Prochoice outside the Rotunda Hospital in Dublin. It was not condemned by the Green party; indeed it was actively supported by a number of Green and Sinn Féin elected representatives at the time.



The banning of peaceful protests that you don't agree with is a dangerous policy and previous iterations of the policy which led to the suppression of civil rights marches such as the one that took place on Bloody Sunday in the north of Ireland. The suppression of civil rights causes serious damage to the democratic process and the fabric of society, whether its in the north of Ireland or the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama.

The Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Bill sponsored by Green Party Leader Clare Bailey MLA seeks to suppress peaceful protest. This legislation explicitly and unapologetically seeks to curtail vigils outside of abortion clinics which end the lives of countless babies each and every day.

Its worth saying at this point that Aontú as a party has not participated in these protests outside of abortion clinics, however we support everyone's right to peacefully protest in the public space., even if we disagree with them.



Censorship zones anywhere reduce the diversity of views. It reduces the competition of ideas. Censorship zones reduces the pluralism of democratic discourse. It creates uniformity. It creates frustration among those who no longer have a peaceful democratic outlet for their opinions.

It is worth noting the role of the SDLP and Sinn Féin in supporting this Bill, and within the wider context of forcing an extreme abortion regimen upon the North. Its worth noting that the people of eth north have had no say in the introduction of the abortion bill and that the majority when polled stated that abortion should not be introduced by Westminster, but should be decided upon by the Assembly. This Bill seeks to censor not a tiny outlier, minority view but a human rights value that is hld widespread throughout the North of Ireland.

Its with deep amazement that the SDLP, formerly the party of John Hume and Civil Rights, is now supporting legislation to curtail civil rights and to detriment the most vulnerable members of society – the unborn child.

Regardless of opinion, citizens should always have the right to freedom of speech and the right to peaceful, respectful protest. Men and women sacrificed their lives so we could live our lives fairly, accessing these rights yet here in the present day we have parties now dictating when and where we can utilise these rights.

Indeed, our nationalist parties in particular might do well to recall the words of James Connolly; *“The liberty of the public meeting is also, rapidly becoming a thing of the past in Ireland, as far as it is or may be used for the criticism of the activities of the government or its functionaries; and yet it is this very right of the subject to criticise the governing bodies which is the very essence of freedom in a constitutionally governed country.”* This Bill and assault on our fundamental freedoms should be rejected by all regardless of their opinions on abortion, because this restriction would constrain everyone’s right to peaceful protest.