

Notes on the NQ for the NC discussion

- 1. Introduction** - We have agreed it is appropriate and necessary to review and develop our position re the NQ in Ireland. We do this in the understanding that it is always possible to learn and improve our approach, and in recognition that some mistakes are inevitable, the key point is to learn and move forward. That's how revolutionary parties develop. We have achieved a lot and played a unique role regarding the NQ in Ireland. We haven't capitulated to the sectarian pressures as unfortunately others on the left have, being able to point a way forward along a grounded working-class, labour movement and socialist perspective. Based on this we have won important positions and played key roles in struggles, and at critical times were vital in ensuring the mass mobilisation against atrocities and sectarianism. Our writings re the NQ, particularly those by Peter Hadden (PH), are of great value. In recent years, while we have produced important material, including republishing important pamphlets, this material has more had the character of updates or restatements, with the last time we had a more fundamental and detailed review and assessment being the mid 1990s, as the peace process was gaining momentum. "And, as neither conditions nor consciousness are fixed or static but are constantly changing, so demands need to be re-evaluated, fine tuned and altered. What was correct 30 years ago...may no longer be appropriate" - PH from Troubled Times 1995 (TT). On top of these comments that indicate why reviewing is an essential part of Marxism, it is also appropriate given that there was more than a blind spot in the CWI regarding issues of oppression which inevitably at minimum points to the danger of adopting underdeveloped or superficial positions. On top of this, the situation in Gaza and Palestine represents a turning point on these issues and has had a huge impact on consciousness globally.
- 2. These notes are for the NC discussion. **These are not comprehensive notes**, not referenced etc. Instead they should be viewed as an attempt by some comrades who were asked to facilitate this discussion, to raise relevant questions regarding our analysis and approach, and issues that need more discussion now and into the future. They are however, based on what we have written and said over a period of years. Comrades should read them as raising points for a discussion which we have just started, and which needs to involve all comrades. We should be confident that through discussion, and given the firm methodical basis we have from the past, that we will deepen and strengthen our approach and sharpen our ability to move forward. Given everything we have experienced over the last seven years, it is very important this discussion really breathes, and is not cut across by comrades being fearful, knee jerk reactions or defensiveness which was such a hallmark of the CWI/ISA. The NQ is a complex question and these issues are very heartfelt by all comrades, so a careful and considerate approach is necessary.**
- 3. Position of British Imperialism/state** - TT deals with the approach of British Imperialism to the north, who continue to bear the fundamental responsibility for the situation. It outlines that as part of the peace process, there was a confirmation and acceptance that since the 1950s, they would have preferred to withdraw from the north and have a united Ireland, which they would continue to dominate remotely. In turn we pointed out that this revealed what we had always explained, that it wasn't so much the British State was the main barrier to unity, but the existence and

opposition of up to 1 million Protestants. So on the one hand the peace process and ceasefires etc, could open up opportunities for class struggle and class politics, it also brought forward the reality that in the likely events that sectarianism would worsen, it would more likely be more directly community against community, and could be even more brutal than before. This change was potentially important for the future, but TT also made the point that the attitude of British Imperialism could change again, citing that events and the rise in national sentiment in Scotland and Wales could be a factor. Now we need to register that is precisely what has happened, i.e. the British establishment now fearful of the break-up of the UK - a body blow to its prestige - means they now have adopted a defensive approach to the NQ in these islands, including re the north. We haven't registered this change enough and need to tease out what it will mean in practice over the next few years. We will have to see, but clearly the prospect of denials of demands for a Border Poll and at least in that sense a movement by Britain and Unionism away from the GFA, would need to be considered.

4. **No solution on a capitalist basis** - Not just in TT, but a hallmark of our analysis and informing our programme, is that there is no solution to the NQ in Ireland on the basis of capitalism. This is not based on our ideological preference but on the concrete conditions and relations, and is consistent with the ideas of the Permanent Revolution. It remains that any genuine solution that satisfies both Catholic and Protestant communities in the north and people in the south, and leads to stable and secure conditions seems beyond capitalism suffering economic and social decay. However, are there illusions in supposed "solutions" that would operate within the existing capitalist framework? Or are there initiatives that could represent an interim change or a move "forward", that may not be a "solution" satisfactory to all, but could still come into being for a time? A fairly constant question has been raised, in part informed by Republican narratives but also by results in opinion polls, over whether a majority of Protestants, if push comes to shove, will resist a United Ireland. For example, could Protestants, while not happy about it, be forced or cajoled to go along with a yes vote in a border poll has been raised. Some moves such as these are possible, even likely. But there is a difference between something being a theoretical possibility and the concrete reality where the communities are more separated than ever before, which can develop further and engulf society in conflict if/when conditions become sectarianism. However, it is important to tease out these questions more.
5. It is also important to consider what position to advocate publicly regarding initiatives the different forces may take or what actions British Imperialism may take, including any such "capitalist solutions" like a border poll. In this it is also necessary to consider the difference between analysis and perspective on the one hand, and what is your public commentary and programme on the other. TT and indeed all of our material mentions again and again that there is no solution on the basis of capitalism, sometimes in quite a bald/blunt fashion. This is a key aspect of our understanding and approach and is one of our distinguishing features. TT says, "There is no road to a capitalist United Ireland and it is not the role of socialists to sow illusions one can be found." Yes, this is true but we also need to be careful that blunt presentations or summations may be ok or necessary for our members, but we should consider if on occasion this high level or complex political point has been put forward in a way that isn't explained and may jar with consciousness. For example, we say we are opposed to capitalist solutions, that we are opposed

to a capitalist United Ireland. If posed baldly this could come across as if we are opposed to a United Ireland because it isn't socialist, because we want and insist on socialism, not because we understand that a stable, secure United Ireland on a capitalist basis is actually not feasible or possible. That runs the risk of being seen to be diminishing the national aspirations of many. In TT, the point is made that it is a huge failure for the Republican movement that they have not been able to show a credible path to overcome partition. At that stage the details of the GFA didn't exist, but the basic outline of a process or agreement based on consent was already a key aspect of the engagements. Our view was that a deal that was a fudge was possible or likely. One that supposedly held the prospect of unity for Catholics because now the principle of consent was accepted; but also supposedly contained the prospect of maintaining the status quo for Protestants for exactly the same reason, the principle of consent, which Protestants would not give. But now, many years later, the framing of the GFA has shifted and is seen to now open up the possibility in the context of demographic changes, of a vote [i.e. a capitalist path or solution] to end partition and to unity. Reminiscent of the past where there was a certain socialist and class consciousness, and where there was a consciousness that on the basis of the status quo, the conflict seemed intractable, perhaps we can be blunt in our ruling out of capitalist solutions, as for instance, clearly they are huge illusions that a border poll points a way forward. Or making political points that in a capitalist United Ireland, there would not be a significant or fundamental change in the material conditions of the Catholic community. Such points may feel like we are cutting to the chase and are being impactful, but likewise run the risk of being seen as sectarian, as understandably many would see a UI as progressive and historic, even if it didn't mean an improvement in living standards or otherwise. The point is that we need to consider the best ways of exposing and showing how and why the system and anyone who operates within its limitations will not be able to deliver on the national or social aspirations of either community.

6. **Perspectives and analysis** - The analysis and outline perspective contained in TT was very important and acted as a guide for the party for a whole number of years, coming as it did at a crucial turning point, the ending of The Troubles after 25 years. Some of the main points included - the division after 25 years of The Troubles was much further along than in the late 1960s; Protestants, in significant measures because of the nature of the campaign of the IRA, had come more full square in support behind the northern state; unity of workers had been maintained industrially but there was no political unity, whereas 25 years hence the NILP had obtained 100,000 votes; the unity in the workplaces was thin but it was "likely" there was "every prospect" it could be rewoven and strengthened, and that could be further enhanced by strikes; a more positive perspective was "quite" a "strong possibility" including a likelihood of cross community campaigns on issues, cuts etc, and the prospect of a revolt of young people against conservative politicians now that the threat of sectarian assassination was lifted and young people came out of their areas etc.
7. There was a particular focus on the Republican Movement, i.e. on Sinn Fein and the IRA. This was understandable as they were in many ways the main movers and dynamic in the process that was unfolding at the time. We understood the ending of the military campaign to be quite a decisive indication that such tactics could not defeat the state, in contrast to the declarations and propaganda of the Republican movement over many years, who had pronounced imminent

victory over Britain at different points in time. This was an important blow to the basis of the physical force tradition. TT referred to the military campaign proving to be a **“huge cul de sac”** and that it was a **“failure of Republican ideology and strategy”**, **“thoroughly discredited”** etc. And clearly some IRA volunteers or former volunteers themselves commented and wrote in a similar vein, often reflecting regret or questioning if they had wasted their time etc. We also hinted at the idea that, if there was now a growing expectation that changing demographics would be the basis for the achievement of a UI at some point in the future, that the pendulum might swing more behind more constitutional nationalism rather than those associated with the military campaign. However, the text refers to a paradox, one that it would be important to go into now to see if it raises any points regarding the balance of our analysis. The paradox being, the reality that the Republican Movement had to accept its focus on the British state for 25 years as the main barrier to unity was completely wrong - meaning its whole ideological and strategic approach was completely mistaken - yet confidence and a more strident mood and momentum was indicated at this point in Catholic communities. Our reading of the situation, that the false perspective and approach of the IRA had worn them out, was opposed by the majority in society, and brought them to the belated realisation that their tactics couldn't defeat the British State, was not only accurate but a confirmation of warnings we had made over decades. We also understood the significance of the change in the republican movement, that any ceasefires would likely be serious and prolonged, and that the situation in the north had reached an historic turning point. Notwithstanding these strengths, it is appropriate to look to see if there were weaknesses or imbalances in our assessment and position.

8. **A fully correct assessment of the consciousness and perspectives?** - Obviously we explained many times that the main responsibility for the situation lies with British Imperialism. However, within that overall context it would probably be fair to say that there was a particular focus in TT and some other material on explaining developments and making criticism of the Republican Movement in an attempt to help prepare the organisation for the role they may try and play in the political arena. We should discuss whether an aspect of the apparent paradox is an underestimation by us of the base of the Republican Movement and of the sentiment in Catholic communities. Of course that most people wanted peace indicates that most people, and most Catholics also, wanted the military campaign to end, which is an implied critical view of the Republican Movement. In the general election of 1992, Sinn Fein didn't get anyone elected and got 10% of the vote. However, these are clearly very complex issues, and there are different elements and layers to what people think. What would people from Catholic backgrounds either at the time or today think of the characterisations we made of the Republican Movement and what the military campaign represented mentioned in the preceding paragraph. Would they feel they were imbalanced and lacking in understanding, given the role of the British army and the British state generally? While our points reflected an important and in fact decisive truth that had to be grappled with and understood, did they also reflect too much looking at the situation from a bit of a narrow focus? Focusing on, from a Marxist strategic point of view on what type of approach or forces are capable of defeating the British capitalist state. And potentially in so doing not take enough account of or reckon with the fact that the IRA and the Republican Movement also got kudos for taking on the state and resisting at great cost over many years, creating deep latent support that was only able to come out when the campaign finished. Today, given the

consciousness that has developed broadly against colonialism and imperialism globally, including here, and given that we are a big distance away from the fear and the misery that the IRAs actually meant for many, undoubtedly many young people, particularly from a Catholic background will be open to seeing that campaign in a positive way and as being successful. TT also correctly warns of the danger of potential emergence of a reactionary and sectarian nationalism, indicating that in the years ahead these aspects of nationalism, as opposed to its progressive elements, are likely to predominate. This helped prepare the organisation to challenge the approach of SF etc, and was important to ensure that the organisation and comrades also weren't affected. However, it is now reasonable to pose the question did this also potentially blind us a bit to the possibility, not within SF or organised republican forces, but among broader layers of young people that a more radical, progressive nationalistic sentiment could emerge both north and south? Where people may have sectarian attitudes but also at the same time have good and genuinely progressive attitudes, where there could be a basis to try connect and diminish the former and emphasise the latter. It seems there are such people north and south, pushed along and impacted by the movement on Gaza, but also that such layers - spanning potentially both some negatives of nationalism but also a left leaning radicalism anti colonialism / anti Imperialism - existed for a considerable time before the genocide in Gaza.

9. **Equating Nationalism and Unionism** - A hallmark of our groundbreaking analysis of the NQ here was to understand that there isn't just one NQ in Ireland, but that there was also, for understandable reasons a national aspiration among Protestants that pointed to resisting a UI for similar reasons as to why the northern state is not acceptable to Catholics - that they would be a discriminated against minority on an all Ireland basis. Unlike all others, this sensitivity to Protestant consciousness is connected to the depth of our class analysis and approach and is a real positive feature of our capability and approach. As mentioned earlier, in TT the point is made that in the years ahead the negative features of Nationalism may come to the fore, but also that among Protestants and Unionism, an argument stressing more their just concerns and their democratic rights may emerge. There were elements of this perhaps initially with the first emergence of the PUP. However, this does not lead to the conclusion that Nationalism and Unionism are the same, and can or should habitually be coupled together for common condemnation. Both should be condemned, but in order to be effective and potentially chip people away from these blocs, criticisms need to be skillful and connected to real and actual situations and transgressions, which may have unique and separate features. This has come up as an issue and needs more discussion. For comrades info there are elements of this in TT, which people from Catholic or nationalist backgrounds might have issue with, for example, when mentioning Orange Parades, there is also mention of Hiberian parades, even though there isn't any real comparison re the impact; there is a basic equating of Adams and McGuinness with Paisley and Trimble.
10. **Some points on programme** - TT explains why we stopped using the slogan for a Socialist United Ireland, and outlined that we should continue as we were at the time, to advocate a Socialist Ireland, which perhaps implies a single state so therefore a united Ireland on a socialist basis, but its vagueness invites enquiry and explanation. TT also goes further and correctly says that there could be no coercion, and that we would have to be clear that Protestants couldn't be

forced into such a state, and if they decide they don't want to, should have the right to opt out and establish their own socialist state, though TT argues that this opt out should not be part of our public programme re the NQ at that point. Points are also made about a socialist federation with Britain on a free and equal basis within a socialist federation of Europe. We are not going to go into these latter elements, but just to say these are problematic in the term federation etc, are simply not understood today and come across as top down, potentially bureaucratic and repressive, which is the opposite of what we are trying to convey. The unity of the working class across previously contested borders is a key element of what we want to convey and the need for international socialism, but we should consider if there is more straightforward language that could be used. However, in its essence this position on the fundamental question of partition/the border etc, remains correct today - for one socialist state with full rights for any minorities, but no coercion, so the right to establish a separate state. However, there are a number of issues that could be considered which raise should this basic position be supplemented, how it's presented be reconsidered, and some clarity as to who we are speaking to. Is a "Socialist Ireland" now too vague and potentially for people from a Catholic background or affected by the ideas of nationalism, seems like an attempt to avoid commenting on the NQ at all, reducing everything to socialism. Would saying we favour 'a single socialist state' for everyone or a single socialist state for Protestants, Catholics and others, through agreement among the communities etc, be better. The question should be posed, 30 years on since our last real review is the slogan SUI as associated with the Republican Movement and therefore triggering for Protestants. If our main slogan is clarified and strengthened which is necessary for people from a Catholic background, then there is a follow on point, that it may also be appropriate to mention in our programme or demands about no coercion and the right of an opt out. In fact this demand can be impactful and be very clarifying as if someone won't agree that a community shouldn't be forced or coerced into a state, it undermines any democratic credentials, as in you can say yes but you can't say no.

11. Comrades may feel all this is becoming more detailed and explicit etc than is necessary. However, there is a strong argument that we need to be more explicit on the issues of sectarianism and the national question as this and related issues permeate daily life and this is likely to intensify in the years to come. The approach mentioned in TT, where we basically say we are consciously putting forward a vague slogan, is unusual, but indicates that sensitivity on the NQ is at a premium. But it also implies comrades at the time saw the programme as being geared towards activists or people we come into contact with regularly like workmates, union events, friends and family or people we come across on our own activities. A large part of our focus was indeed on trying to develop a programme that could develop support among the trade union movement and that via that it could potentially become a material force.
12. **Catholics and the northern state** - There are other comments in TT, which we have said many times elsewhere, relating to how we refer to attitudes of people from Catholic backgrounds to the current northern state. TT says, there is not an acceptance of the "permanence" of the northern state; there's a desire "ultimately" for unification and linked to a point made earlier in these notes, there is an expectation that changed demographics will lead to a UI but therefore an "acceptance" that one will "have to wait". There is a real issue here re how to refer to the northern state, as it exists and it's not going to be overthrown today or tomorrow, but that doesn't

mean Catholics who are not immediately in open and active revolt against it, accept it. You could see how some of the references above, while being in a sense expedient, would jar with people from a Catholic background. This points to an important gap that has existed in our position for a considerable period. We have a position re opt out for Protestants, which is geared to trying to satisfy their fears in a sense of future oppression, but we don't have a demand or a slogan geared towards the discontent or oppression people from Catholic backgrounds felt and feel now, being imprisoned in the northern state. That is regardless of whether the formal discrimination of the "Protestant State" era doesn't continue. There is a powerful argument that we need a slogan that fills this gap, made more glaring after Brexit brought people who didn't want to leave, out of the EU, but a slogan/demands that's consistent with a class and socialist struggle linking the national question with the need to overthrow capitalism. Again comrades may feel such would be in danger of becoming too explicit, that we are elevating the issues related to the NQ too much, that they can be divisive etc. But these issues are already bearing down, either consciously or subconsciously in society broadly, as we indicated in Towards Division Not Peace [TDNP] - the conflict continues in a different form as one over territory - and so is becoming increasingly divisive in any case. If we have a programme that can raise sights and make people pause and think, that can be helpful. That we have been hesitant to overcome this gap may relate to the idea that your programme on the NQ should only be a negative programme. However, we should consider whether this idea has been misinterpreted, or is fully relevant in the current situation. Also we should recognise that this idea also tends to feed into a time when the trade union movement and the level of class consciousness constituted a conquest for the working class, posing a real threat to the system and the potential basis for how a struggle for socialist change could come on the agenda. Was the idea of a negative approach of defending rights rather than being more proactive, in any way connected in the minds of some to a fear of diverting focus away from that hard won unity and that struggle. Clearly the labour and trade union movement and consciousness is significantly knocked back compared to what was just described. In any case clearly there are many occasions where a struggle for national rights or liberation, as in the post war period etc, gives a positive impetus to a struggle against capitalism, as it did during the Russian Revolution. That is not to say that care should not be taken in formulating demands on the national question, in fact great care is necessary. And in TT times PH does outline that our basic approach is a negative one. However, re the criteria in judging a demand he also points to the need to be concrete, what is a demands concrete effect, "does it make it easier to gain the ear of nationalist-minded workers, does it advance the class struggle".

13. **Two stages / not transitional enough** - One of the dangers in considering somewhat proactive demands and slogans re the NQ is of a potential of a separation of immediate national questions issues and concerns for both communities from the need for a struggle against capitalism and the necessity for socialist change, which is the only way in which the aspirations of both can be approached and satisfied. A version of a two stages approach. But in any case we often struggle to bring in the need for a struggle for socialism relevant to today's conditions, whether they be related to national aspiration issues or other issues such as pay, conditions or public services. Certainly when explaining our position re the NQ overall, there can be a tendency to say things such as - in the struggle for socialist change, workers can unite around the issues of class struggle, and in this context the potential to overcome the conflict in national aspirations through

agreement etc. This might appeal to someone who is already leftwing and favours socialist change, but otherwise it more tends towards being abstract than being transitional or grounded, and is unlikely to have an impact or be convincing to broader layers. Subconsciously we all also can slip into a version of two stageism, where we tend to put a defensive programme re issues related to the conflict in national aspirations, in the hope of holding the line and keeping that conflict at bay, so that more obvious class or economic issues, that can serve to bring people together, including in struggle, come to the fore and hopefully move the situation. Such an approach would be to tailend the unfolding situation as the sectarian division deepens or as PH describes in *Towards Division not Peace* there will be ups and downs in sectarian tensions but they don't go back to the same level, instead there is often a retreat into the sectarian camps which is worse than before. Again from *Towards Division not Peace* there is the warning that 'Not one of the range of "solutions" from reunification at one pole to independence at the other will work. Each one is merely a different route, albeit at a different pace, to civil war and repartition. Nor will the status quo hold indefinitely. Unless the working class movement emerges to provide an alternative the current arrangements will break down as the demographic and political scales shift in one sectarian direction or another – with disastrous consequences.' We have to find a way, via a genuinely transitional approach, to try to link the concerns that both communities have regarding their fears and national aspirations to the general struggle against the government, corporations and capitalism and for ordinary people to resist the attacks and through their actions to become aware of their power and begin to exert control over society and their future. And all this needs to be posed as immediately relevant and urgent.

14. **Border Poll** - The issue of a border poll is NB, but we have struggled to develop an approach or position that comrades feel confident of advocating and discussing with people, particularly people from Catholic backgrounds. Mindful of some of the points made at the start regarding the changing approach of British Imperialism, it may not be so much just the idea of a Border Poll taking place, but the denial of one and of that clause or right contained in the GFA, that can become the central issue. The reference to a border poll as being "coercion by ballot", contained *Troubled Times*, is of course correct in a sense, but particularly if you are from a Protestant background. Understandably people from a Catholic or nationalist background are unlikely to appreciate or affiliate to such a characterisation. A border poll will be seen as democratic by Catholics, but increasingly more likely to be seen by Protestants the closer one potentially comes on the agenda, as thoroughly undemocratic. It will be posed as the fulfilment of the right of nations to self determination, which has a political and historical weight. At the same time, for Protestants, if they are in a minority in a poll, they will legitimately say they are being forced into a UI against their will. However, it is more likely that before that ever became an eventuality, that some class of opposition and even resistance would be mounted or mobilised. As said in *Towards Division Not Peace*, the idea that facing demographics that point to losing a vote, and seeing that the game was up, that would not be a basis for surrender but much more likely lead to a revolt in the Protestant community. Objectively a border poll and any campaign associated with one, will deepen sectarian tensions and the division in society. In our position, it is necessary for us to bring out this reality, and point to the kind of programme and struggle mentioned in the paragraph immediately above. A key issue is the danger of taking a position that cuts you off from one or both communities, making it impossible to build a base for the kind of socialist

solution to the national question that is necessary. However, there is a difference between being cut off definitively or long term, and putting forward a position that people don't agree with but which contains credible arguments because it is grounded in a real and accurate assessment. In that case, people's actual experiences can mean after a time, they can once again become open to our arguments and ideas on the basis that what we outlined actually previously came to pass, a very important means by which revolutionary parties make connections and bring up support and gain the confidence of different layers. In such a situation it can be a case of trying to be as skillful as possible, but holding an unpopular position for a time, before some level of vindication and an ability to move forward again. The possibility of arguing for a critical yes vote in the event of a poll was raised in the previous NC discussion. It is correct for comrades to raise whatever points or ideas they have, as it is vital we have a full discussion so there is clarity. Clearly a border poll does not constitute a way forward, but poses a very difficult situation for us given the consciousness of people from Catholic and nationalist backgrounds. We need to be careful, the original headline on a developed article on a border poll, like the characterisation of coercion by ballot box, was problematic as it just said, "Why socialists oppose a Border Poll", which is not transitional or sensitive enough to people from a Catholic background. Different opinions have been expressed in discussions so far ranging from the question of a critical support for a yes vote to the need to oppose the calling of a border poll. The need to call for abstention has also been raised with some pointing out it would potentially be seen as even more leaning towards the Protestant or Unionist position. In material we have emphasised that a border poll would not be a solution. In one article from 2016 we wrote "The Socialist Party is opposed to a border poll and, in the event of one being called, we would actively campaign for a boycott of the vote." This issue has to be a key part of this review discussion.

- 15. Developments in Gaza and Palestine** - The unfolding situation in the Middle East has posed specific issues in terms of the NQ here, but at the same time, given their significance, these developments actually can help clarify some issues re approach. The unprecedented movement that has developed throughout many parts of the world on Gaza / Palestine registers again the vital importance of issues of oppression, and should reinforce our changed approach regarding the same which necessitated our departure from the CWI and from the ISA. Obviously in a sense Palestine and Israel is a more complicated issue in the north, where in the past different forces have served to sectarianise the situation and try to connect it to the local situation, and view it exclusively through or subordinate it to, the dynamic of the sectarian division in the north. Perhaps this can create a nervousness about fully embracing and supporting the struggle of the Palestinian people for fear of putting off Protestants, or of possibly reinforcing nationalist consciousness. But given the unbelievable developments and the extent of the horrifying genocide, our starting point on this issue and in approaching this new movement must be our full support for the struggle not only for liberation, but of helping to mobilise to actively resist the mobilisation, linked with our attempts to skillfully show the need for internationalism and a struggle against all the undemocratic capitalist regimes in the region and for a socialist solution. At a previous point (2014), when there were other attacks by the Israeli state, there was a call made by the trade unions in the north, that people would not bring Palestinian or Israeli flags on the marches. That idea today would be a reactionary twist against the heartfelt desire of people to demonstrate solidarity. We should also consider, was the trade union request made years ago

appropriate, or in effect was an example of the diminishing of the significance of the oppression of Palestine, under a false or unpolitical guise of being non or anti sectarian. Denying or diminishing the suffering and opposition of the Palestinian cause is complicated here or complicates things here, would not only be incorrect, but would cut us off from the best people, both Protestant and Catholic. What Israel is doing, linked to the fascistic actions in the US, should and can be raised with Protestants and can begin to help challenge the false narratives of Unionism. It is correct to speak the truth and it is necessary to try to raise the level, rather than in any way adopt a middle but weak, minimal position. Being anti-sectarian is not the same as only saying or advocating something that is acceptable to an average consciousness in both communities.

16. **In summary** - While we clearly have fundamental strengths on the NQ, inevitably it is possible to also identify weaknesses and mistakes. We were an important part of the CWI since its inception and in that capacity inevitably the major weaknesses that we identified with the CWI - a crude, bad approach and attitude to issues of oppression - inevitably exist in Ireland too. Connected to that, we have identified a tendency for those linked with the CWI to be a bit reductionist and economicist re class. The quote below is from TDNP 2002, and comes after points made in the text contrasting the attitudes in Catholic areas in the early '70s, with those of the early '90s. It said, "This does not mean that the Catholic community did not – and do not – have grievances. Above all the issues that created anger and discontent in the working class areas were the problems of poverty, low wages, inadequate services and, on top of this, the social problems of crime, drugs, joyriding that breed out of poverty. They were the problems of working class life under capitalism and were no different from what existed in Protestant areas." Does this quote not illustrate the points made above it in this paragraph? One comrade referred to these points as CWIism! By having no reference to the oppression Catholics would have experienced and felt, still being forced to live in the northern state, this has to be understood as diminishing the national oppression felt by the Catholic community. It seems on the basis of reviewing it is appropriate and correct to say that there were occasions when we were not enough focused on or sensitive to the moods and concerns in Catholic areas. This can be understood as being connected to the politics of the CWI, and us within it. But we need to consider were there other factors? A hallmark for us and what brought us into conflict with many, was our ability to appreciate the concerns and aspirations of the Protestant working class people. This meant we were often in political conflict with the republican movement, who in general played a rotten role. It is important to distinguish between ordinary working-class people and young people in a community, and those who are developed activists within organised Republicanism and Unionism. Our assessment of the republican movement and the trends within nationalism and the Catholic community was that the negative and reactionary elements of nationalism were likely to come to the fore and dominate. We did not allow for what seems to have developed, both north and south over the last number of years, yes of course the existence of sectarian attitudes towards the Protestant community, but at the same a national sentiment that also includes an anti-colonialism and anti-Imperialism which is left-leaning or radical. It is important these issues are considered as part of this review and any imbalances or mistaken approaches corrected. There is sectarianism and sectarian attitudes towards the other in both communities, which have to be assessed in their own content and then appropriately challenged. At the same

time, both communities are becoming more sensitive and focused on the national conflict and on their own aspirations. It is vital that we fully fill our politics and approach with a deep sensitivity so that we can connect with and build a basis in both communities, as well as utilising the important new positions we have won to try to build a real base across both communities for a united working-class struggle against capitalism and for an agreed, socialist solution from below to the national question. The key thing now is to have a fruitful discussion over the next months that strengthens us and our capacities on the national question. Inevitably there will have to be a focus on what we should say publicly on the different questions, and what is our programme. Without in any way prejudging the discussion, our basic fundamental position and programme remains strong, however at minimum it is clear we need additional lines of argument, and a more developed programme on a host of other key related questions to fill gaps and to act as a bridge to our main position of fighting for a single socialist state however we describe that, without any coercion and with rights for all minorities guaranteed - working-class unity and socialist change!