

International Debate Material: Women's Oppression & Identity Politics

Members Bulletin #101

February 2nd, 2019

Contents

Women's Oppression and Identity Politics – Our approach.....pg 02

International Secretariat

November 2nd, 2018

Response to the IS document from the NEC in Ireland.....pg 15

November 14th, 2018

Response to the IS document from Belgian IEC members.....pg 35

November 20th, 2018

For a Marxist approach to struggles against women's oppression.....pg 41

Document from Faction 'In Defence of a Working Class Trotskyist CWI/CIT'

January 31st, 2019

The logo for Socialist Alternative, featuring the words "SOCIALIST" and "ALTERNATIVE" in a bold, white, sans-serif font. To the right of the word "SOCIALIST" is a white icon of a raised fist. The text and icon are set against a dark red background that is part of a larger graphic element consisting of a red triangle pointing upwards from the bottom left corner of the page.

SOCIALIST
ALTERNATIVE

Women's Oppression and Identity Politics – Our approach in Ireland and internationally

*Submitted by the International Secretariat to the IEC
November 2nd, 2018*

Introduction

1. This brief document is dealing specifically with issues relating to how we take up identity politics in Ireland and internationally, which the IS thinks needs to be discussed. It does not attempt to give an overview of our general position on a Marxist approach to the oppression of women. Most recently this was summarised in the resolution unanimously agreed at the 2016 World Congress, which can be found here: <http://www.socialistworld.net/index.php/other-topics/women/7485-CWI-11th-World-Congress-2016--Women-and-oppression-in-class-society>.

2. The CWI has a proud history of campaigning for the rights of all oppressed sections of society. In many countries we have intervened, and played a leading role, in movements against racism including via Youth against Racism in Europe in the early 1990s on a continent-wide basis. In Britain we also initiated Panther in the early 1990s, aimed specifically at young black workers. We have also led numerous campaigns against women's and gender-based oppression including the Campaign Against Domestic Violence in Britain, and now Rosa in Ireland, Libres y Combativas in the Spanish state, any many more. At every stage we have correctly fought to try and make sure the most oppressed in society are fully represented at every level of the CWI.

3. Today, as we go onto outline, there is an important radicalisation taking place around issues relating to women's and gender-based oppression on a global basis. In some countries radicalisation has resulted in mass movements. This is particularly where the ruling class, significant sections of it, or individuals like Trump, have a more openly reactionary attitude towards the rights of women, which has inevitably

come into sharp conflict with women's aspirations for equality.

4. Clearly, where movements relating to women's oppression are posed it is vital that we turn to them, intervening and, where possible, playing a leading role as the comrades have in Ireland North and South, and in the Spanish state. Such movements can represent the first steps towards collective struggle by previously unorganised layers of women and can be an important step forward. In many cases initially their leadership is dominated by bourgeois and petit-bourgeois feminists who try and divert the movement, for example as a means to win support for big-business Democrats in the US.

5. Our task is to skilfully link the immediate demands of the struggle to the need for a united struggle of the working class for socialism, as the only means by which genuine liberation can be achieved. Historically and today, our record on this is second to none. Other Trotskyist organisations have tended either to ignore movements against women's oppression or, more often, to have acted as uncritical supporters for them, without any attempt to win them to a working-class standpoint. Attempts to find a short cut to winning mass support have resulted in the wrecking of many organisations.

6. In recent movements against gender-based oppression the weaknesses of the workers' movement, and a relatively low level of consciousness, has meant identity politics has often had considerable influence. In one sense, identity politics can be an inevitable part of the political awakening of many members of oppressed groups within society. Recognising that you are oppressed, and that you can fight against your

oppression through a common struggle with others who share the same oppression, is a vital first step.

7. However, the identity politics that currently has influence emanated from the capitalists via the universities over recent decades. At bottom these ideas are used by the ruling class to obscure class divisions, and play a divisive role. They have also seeped into the workers' movement in many countries. They put an overwhelming emphasis on cataloguing and describing different forms of oppression, tending to emphasise differences rather than common interests. The toxic discussion on trans rights currently taking place in the British trade unions, with sections of feminists wrongly arguing that improving trans rights undermines the rights of women, is an example of the consequences of seeing different oppressed groups as in competition with each other rather than campaigning for a united struggle against all oppression. We have consistently intervened in the debate defending trans rights, while fighting for a class approach.

8. ID politics also tends to lay the blame for oppression on the behaviour of individuals rather than fighting for changes in the structure of society. Whenever we are intervening in a milieu where such alien class ideas are widespread it is inevitable we will come under pressure to make concessions in that direction. The answer, of course, is not to step back from intervening but to guard consciously against the dangers, patiently explaining the central role of the working class in the fight to transform society. We are concerned that the comrades in Ireland have not done this sufficiently.

9. It is our duty, as the elected leadership of the CWI, to raise our concerns in order to strengthen the work of the whole international, particularly as these issues and pressures are arising in many sections of our international. This has always been the approach of the CWI. We are striving to build the embryo of a world revolutionary international, not a series of national organisations linked together in name only. We should

welcome all comrades – including the Irish comrades – feeling free to raise doubts and differences about any aspect of our international's work.

10. In order to engage in a discussion on these issues the IS wrote to the Irish IEC comrades on 31 August 2018 proposing a meeting to discuss a series of issues, starting with the question of Identity Politics. Unfortunately, the discussion on this crucial issue has not yet begun-although it is now scheduled to do so at an Irish NC meeting on 17+18 November. However, given, in our view, the urgency of starting to discuss these issues – with the aim of reaching principled agreement – the IS has here outlined our central concerns. We would ask that this is circulated to the Irish NC and we also propose to circulate it to the IEC. We propose comrades respond in writing which we will also circulate.

11. Before we come to outlining our concerns it is necessary that we reiterate our recognition of the tremendous victory that was scored in the Repeal Referendum, the important role the Irish section played in achieving it and, in particular, the section's role in helping to ensure the referendum resulted not only in the repeal of the eighth amendment, but in the winning of abortion on demand up until twelve weeks. The referendum was an important victory for women and for the Irish working class, and inflicted a serious blow on the Irish state and the Catholic Church. Kevin McLoughlin said at the recent NC that in his opinion we were hesitant about the work the Irish comrades have done among women, giving as an indication that there had only been one article on it on the CWI website between Savita's death and the end of 2017. As Tony Saunio explained to the October Irish NC we are keen to give prominence to the comrades' role in this work, as was shown at the CWI school, and would happily have published more articles had they been submitted. In fact, at the time of the Irish NC there were eight articles and videos on the CWI site relating to the comrades in Ireland's work on women.

How we respond to radicalisation of women

12. Kevin McLoughlin has argued that the IS has not “engaged in a serious way with the women’s movement as it has emerged over the last two years” and has been “hesitant” about it. We reject this and ask what concrete measures the comrades think we have failed to take. At the last World Congress we had a discussion on women’s oppression and unanimously agreed a document. We have considerably stepped up our coverage on the CWI site of issues relating to women’s oppression, particularly but not only linked to IWD when we have always carried special material.

13. However, we think there is a difference in how we assess the movements that have and will take place, and how we see them in relation to other struggles which are likely to develop. As part of this we think the comrades could be in danger of overstating the importance of the victory on abortion rights. At the recent CWI school for example, Laura Fitzgerald, replying in the commission on the issue, said, “There will never be an issue like this again which poses so clearly the kind of society we want in people’s minds.” The referendum victory is a real step forward for women, and is very important, but it will nonetheless be dwarfed by the experience of collective action in the class battles that will develop in the coming years, let alone a conscious struggle for socialism.

14. In our view a tendency has also developed of some leading Irish comrades seeing all struggles through the prism of the women’s movement, rather than seeing how it interconnects with other struggles. It is important that we have a balanced approach, recognising that working-class women can also move into action on many other issues, as well as those directly related to their specific oppression and that moves towards ‘sectional’ struggle are not, always, in all circumstances, a step forward. If, as we are concerned there could be a tendency to do in Ireland, comrades put the issue of a movement against women’s oppression above all other trends, there is a real danger we could miss important opportunities to

win the most thinking layers now, but particularly in the future when mass movements develop on other issues.

15. For example, we understand that the public meeting advertised on the recent very important 10,000-strong housing demo was a ROSA public meeting entitled ‘Why Housing is a Feminist Issue’. We know that party meetings have now been organised but think it was a mistake to make a ROSA public meeting the cutting edge of the intervention in the demonstration and, if you did decide to do so, to have that meeting title. Surely any good young people who had been attracted to ROSA during the referendum campaign would have seen the need to campaign on housing without us highlighting it as ‘a feminist issue’, when in reality it is a much broader issue?

16. In addition, in 2018, every one of the monthly public meetings advertised on the Socialist Party Ireland Facebook Page has been related to women’s or LGBTQ+ oppression. Clearly these have been important issues over the last period, and should have been given prominence, but we think that is going too far. In Ireland due to our long record of struggle, and the relatively high public profile the party has as a result of the TDs’ positions, we have been able to win a base among important sections of the working class. There is a danger that – as a result of the overwhelming turn that has been made to issues relating to women and gender oppression – we could become perceived by a layer of workers for whom that is not the only or primary concern as ‘not for them’. This can obviously include layers of male workers and older women, but also young women and non-binary people who – while partly radicalised by their specific oppression – do not consider it to be the most central issue for them.

Global radicalisation of women

17. The radicalisation that has taken place is primarily, but not exclusively, of young women. In Britain, to give one example, only 36% of women would describe

themselves as feminist, but among 18-24 year olds a majority (54%) do so and among younger teenage girls and women the figure is even higher – around 70%. We would also agree that the younger generation who are radicalised by women's oppression tend to reject the rigid gender norms imposed by capitalism.

18. In our view, while of course there were struggles prior to 2007, this radicalisation flows from the experience of a generation who have grown up in the age of austerity. Prior to then, at least in the economically-advanced countries, capitalist propaganda peddled the ideas of 'post-feminism' – suggesting women were on the verge of winning equality. While this was never true, there was a grain of truth in it in many countries. Over the previous decades women had been drawn into the workforce in many countries on an unprecedented scale. This was a central factor in the increased confidence of women and the improvements in social attitudes that resulted.

19. Under pressure from the workers' movement, and from women's struggles, women had taken significant steps to equality in law, although reality lagged far behind. At the same time the hollowing out of manufacturing industry in much of Europe and the US, and the overall driving down of workers' wages, meant that it was no longer so clearly 'the norm' that men had better-paid work than women and, increasingly, it was vital for both parents to work in order to make ends meet. All of these factors meant that – before the economic crisis – young working-class women were, in general, more confident of their prospects than young working-class men.

20. That confidence then came up sharply against the effects of the economic crisis which, of course, has hit women particularly hard. At the same time, all the problems of sexual harassment and violence remained and were in sharp conflict with the propaganda of women's equality. It is therefore no surprise to us that young women have been to the fore of the general radicalisation that has taken place, and also feel

strongly on issues relating to their own specific oppression. Nor should it be a surprise to us, given the block created by the right-wing trade union leaders, that there is sometimes more confidence to struggle on social questions than on economic issues. In Ireland, for example, the accumulated anger at austerity has had very limited outlets as a result of the role of the trade union leaders but could be expressed via the referendum.

21. The #metoo phenomenon has, on a global basis, highlighted an increased determination by women to refuse to accept sexual harassment and abuse. While in many countries it has, so far, remained mainly at the level of a social media campaign, in others it has led to movements on the streets. In a whole series of countries, from Ireland to Argentina to Spain and now India, very important movements against different aspects of women's oppression have taken place and are still taking place.

22. However, in our view it is not the case that movements relating to women's oppression will be central to struggle in every country in the next period. In addition in many countries where such movements occur the working-class elements within them can quite quickly become part of broader struggles of the working class (although of course the demands specifically relating to women's oppression would remain an important aspect of those movements).

Varying approaches of the capitalists

23. We should expect movements to take place wherever significant sections of the capitalist class attack women's rights or have an openly reactionary approach to gender-related oppression. In the US for example, following the appointment of Kavanaugh, it is very clear that there is the speeding up of the development of a mass movement against the blatant sexism of Trump and his allies, and in defence of abortion rights which face attack. Trump is also attempting to unravel all the gains made by trans

people over the last period, which will also inevitably trigger a movement on the streets.

24. In Spain, the remnants of Francoism, with its brutal repression of women and dominance of the Catholic church, means that the issues of women's oppression are particularly strongly felt. In that sense there is a similarity with Ireland, where the state has since its inception been intertwined with the Catholic Church, meaning that movements on these issues were inevitable and fuelled by the deep-seated anger with the capitalist establishment. The response to the Pope's visit, in the wake of the referendum, showed the deep-rooted revolt against the Catholic Church. At this year's CWI School the comrades vividly described how young people had convinced their families to vote for Repeal. The contrast with the Brexit referendum was striking – there the majority of young people tried to convince their parents to vote for Remain, and largely failed. Clearly there are many differences between the two referendums, but one factor is surely that in Ireland young people were convincing their parents to strike a blow against the Irish 'establishment' – which they were happy to do, whereas in Britain, the way to strike a blow against the existing order was to vote for Brexit.

25. In Britain, by contrast, while clearly there is a radicalisation around women's oppression – which it is important we respond to – it is not automatic that this mood becomes a movement. If the government was to launch an attack on abortion rights – for example – it would ignite mass struggle. However, at this stage Theresa May continues to pose as a defender of women's and LGBTQ+ rights – making speeches against domestic violence, wearing 'I'm a feminist t-shirts' on IWD, proposing changes to make it easier for trans people to self-identify and so on. All these are cynical – and cheap – ways in which she can try to make the Tory party appear more socially liberal, whilst at the same time slashing expenditure on refuges for women fleeing domestic violence along with other public services. The England and Wales section has initiated a

new campaign on this important issue. In the past comrades in Britain led the successful Campaign Against Domestic Violence, which succeeded in winning legal changes, and getting policies in opposition to domestic violence adopted by the trade union movement. Today, however, the economic difficulties facing women fleeing violence are worse than ever. It was the devastating cuts to domestic violence services, often implemented by Labour councils, which pushed even a Labour shadow minister, Dawn Butler, to make positive comments about the record of Militant-led Liverpool City Council at this year's Labour Women's conference.

26. Nonetheless, in Britain and a number of other countries, the lack of a social base at this stage for launching new attacks on women's or LGBTQ+ rights means that the major capitalist parties are unlikely to move in this direction in the short term. Even the far right in Britain is forced to dress up its reactionary ideas in the clothes of falsely claiming to defend women and LGBTQ+ people against the supposed threat of Islam. In Ireland the capitalist parties have also been forced to bend to the mood in society. Varadkar's calling of the recent referendum to remove the blasphemy laws from the statute books is part of his pose as socially liberal. Of course, the continued role of the church in education and the health service are real obstacles to Irish capitalist parties' ability to bend on these issues, but we should still not underestimate how far they can go under pressure. Ultimately, while capitalism can never provide real equality for women or LGBTQ+ people, it can nonetheless be pushed a considerable distance in terms of legal changes while continuing to attack the living conditions of every section of the working class.

What is a transitional approach to the struggle against women's oppression?

27. In every struggle in which we intervene, we aim to have a transitional approach, linking current demands to the need for socialist revolution, led by the working class. The decade-long capitalist crisis has led to

enormous accumulated anger against the existing order. Nonetheless, the legacy of the preceding period has not yet been fully overcome. Globally the working class entered the era of austerity ill-prepared, with a low level of socialist consciousness and of organisation. While this is changing, under the hammer blows of brutal experience, aided by our intervention, the scissors – the gap between the objective crisis of capitalism and the consciousness of the working class – remains wide. Nonetheless, we have to strive to connect with existing day-to-day struggles in the way we formulate our programme. However, the starting point when deciding what programme to advance is obviously not existing consciousness but objective reality and then how we engage with it. If we were starting programmatically from existing consciousness we would not be putting forward a programme for the socialist transformation of society.

28. We are concerned that the Socialist Party recruitment leaflet the comrades have produced aimed at those who were involved in the referendum campaign talks about a “grass roots movement from below with young people at its beating heart” and “anti-capitalist struggle” but does not make even the briefest attempt to explain what socialism means or, as we said previously, the role of the working class. The final page of that leaflet, which puts the case for joining, entitled “organised for change”, states:

“Repeal was not an isolated event. It was part of a global revolt against sexism and misogyny. This has given rise to the #metoo phenomenon; the thousands who took to the streets of Ireland to say, ‘I believe her’ after the acquittal of Paddy Jackson and other Ulster rugby players in April; the six million-strong feminist strike in the Spanish State on International Women’s Day; the #NiUnaMenos movement against gender-based violence in Latin America.

“This global revolt is a new generation of young people saying ‘enough is enough’, Opposition to sexism, racism, homophobia and transphobia is linked to an aspiration for a truly equal society and

a growing opposition to a society run in the interests of the super-rich elite.

“We can be truly proud of what we achieved in May, but we should register that if we organise together we can defeat the status quo. We can make real change. We can end all of the injustices and inequality in an anti-capitalist struggle.

“That is why you should be a socialist and this is why you should join us in organising for socialist change.”

29. Of course there is nothing wrong with referring to important movements that have taken place against gender-related oppression, but it is wrong in a Socialist Party recruitment leaflet to make no attempt to link them with other struggles of the working class or, in fact, to raise the role of the working class at all.

30. We are concerned that it could be the comrades’ approach to initially limits ourselves, when discussing with this layer, to anti-capitalist propaganda. We recognise that many workers and young people would consider themselves anti-capitalist but have not yet drawn all the conclusions that we have. This is never our goal, however. Our aim is to win workers to the full programme of the CWI. In some cases – particularly on the basis of the experience of struggle – workers who had not previously drawn anti-capitalist conclusions can be drawn very quickly into our ranks.

31. What measures were necessary, when intervening in the struggle for abortion rights, to win the best layers to the CWI? Clearly, the militant and campaigning stance taken by the comrades – for which they were attacked by a layer of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois feminists – was an important positive factor. It was also necessary, however, to combat the ideas of petit-bourgeois feminism. Central to this is arguing that the organised working class could play a potentially decisive role in fighting for the right to abortion and other women’s rights.

32. An essential part of doing this would be pointing to the significant mass working-class movements that we have led in Ireland – on the bin and water charges. In addition we should point to the potential power of the trade union movement which, despite their overwhelmingly rotten leadership and having being weakened, continue to be the largest working-class organisations in Ireland. Many, probably a big majority, of the young people who became politically active for the first time during the Repeal movement would not have seen the trade unions as relevant to their struggle. Nonetheless, as part of educating them about the role of the organised working class we think it would have been important to have had a concerted campaign to put demands on the trade union leaders to organise campaigns and action for the right to abortion, along with campaigning in the workplaces. We could, for example, have used the positive work on this done by the NIPSA comrades in the North as an example of how to put pressure on the union leaders in the South. This approach could also have helped us reaching a wider layer of working-class women.

33. Obviously, the comrades in Ireland do not have the valuable political weapon of the students' union (SE) which the comrades in the Spanish state were able to use so effectively as a lever to force significant sections of the trade unions to take strike action on 8 March 2018. Nonetheless, were measures taken to put demands on the tops of the trade unions, combined with direct appeals to the rank and file? Appeals to anti-capitalism or even socialism in general, if not linked to the role of the working class in achieving it, are of limited value in winning radicalised young people to our approach.

34. Of course, comrades may argue that they did take this approach and received no response. Either way we think more should have been done to explain our approach in our public material. ROSA, as far as we can see, did not make any demands on the trade union leaders in its #timeforchoice campaign. We fear that this is because such initiatives were not seriously

pursued and that this reflects a wrong approach to the trade unions, where the rottenness of the leaders is wrongly used as a reason not to put demands on them, or to sufficiently orientate to the ranks of the trade unions.

35. When Ruth Coppinger spoke at the England and Wales Socialism 2014 event the comrades who had organised it asked for any comments on the workshop on women she addressed. Ruth responded:

“I thought the session was very trade union focused and probably not aimed enough at young women. I know Britain is different to Ireland but I thought even for England it would be imbalanced. Most women wouldn't be in unions. Most young women wouldn't have seen unions doing much for women. I thought a lot of the contributions were from middle-aged women and were economic. Think the social issues, rape culture, sexism are now massive issues in society and could have gotten more coverage.”

36. As it happens, the workshop that year had a particular trade union focus that had not been the case in many other years. However, in our view it also reveals a misunderstanding about the necessity of us explaining how economic and social change can be won, and the role of the organised working class in achieving that, as well as an underestimation of the importance of economic issues for working-class women, including young women. This generation of petit-bourgeois feminists put very little focus on winning material gains for women concentrating overwhelmingly on individuals' experience of sexism. In that sense their ideas are a retreat from at least some of the feminist struggles of the 1970s.

37. We, however, while of course combating sexist attitudes in society, should continue to put central the issues of equal pay, freedom from sexual harassment at work, the right to free childcare, decent housing and so on. For the big majority of working-class women these are crucial issues around which they can be

mobilised into action. This has been graphically demonstrated by the fantastic Glasgow mass strike of women council workers fighting for equal pay, with CWI members playing a leading role. More than 700 women joined the union to take part in the strike, showing the pole of attraction the unions become when they organise action. And what better example of workers' unity in action than the predominantly male Glasgow bin workers coming out in unofficial solidarity action with them, showing that they understood that the fight for equal pay is in the interest of the whole working class.

38. Comrades may argue, as Ruth does in her comments, that Ireland is different to England, Scotland and perhaps other countries, with a lower level of trade union participation and struggle. Even if this is the case we don't think it should alter our basic approach. We would accept that the role of social partnership in Ireland has meant that the trade union leaders have, overall, played a particularly bad role. Nonetheless, we do not think there is a fundamental difference between Southern Ireland and other countries. In recent years Southern Ireland has seen a number of important strikes such as the 2017 transport workers', Ryanair and the mainly female Lloyd's Pharmacy workers. The fact that ICTU was forced to back the recent 10,000-strong housing demonstration, at least in name, is also an indication they can be forced to act under pressure from below. And overall trade union density is actually higher in Southern Ireland – at around a third – than it is in Britain – where it is now only a quarter. Union density – in Ireland and Britain – is also actually higher among women workers than among men. Of course, in both countries trade union membership among the young is very low.

39. However, as a new generation begins to get organised to fight for its rights at work, it is inevitable that they will look to some form of trade union organisation. It is a debatable issue whether, as greater numbers of young people begin to see the possibility

of fighting back in their workplace, they will found new unions or join existing ones. In our view, the general trend, at least in Northern Europe, is likely to be that workers first try and use the ready-made tools of the existing unions, only turning to found new ones if they are blocked by the union bureaucracies. This is the dominant trend in Britain, for example, although there are also some small 'new' unions, predominantly involving migrant workers. These can start to coalesce with the existing unions on the basis of a struggle for their democratisation. Regardless of what form such developments take, however, we have to explain to the young people we can reach the potential power of the organised working class. The US McDonalds strike against sexual harassment is a graphic illustration of how young women workers can see the unions as a means to fight back against the oppression they face as women. The same is true of the Google strike, which also represents the start of a new section of the working class, tech workers, entering the field of battle. While our approach will be instinctively understood more easily by working-class women, who are our main priority, we can also win some women from middle-class backgrounds, by convincing them that the only road to via which they can win liberation is via the struggles of the working class. We will not do this, however, if we do not put our arguments clearly and firmly.

40. Of course, we are in no sense suggesting that we should have pulled back from organising independent action in the referendum campaign and instead 'waited' for the trade union leaders. This has never been the approach of the CWI. For example, in the poll tax movement in Britain we put demands on the trade union leaders while at the same time organising a mass campaign of non-payment from below. In explaining to the young people we have met in the referendum the potential role of the working class, we should not only use the example of the trade unions but also the magnificent mass campaigns we have led in Ireland. It is surprising, therefore, that so little use is made of the water charges victory, which demonstrates graphically how united working-class struggle can win, and

crucially our role in leading it. The pamphlet that comrades have put together on socialist feminism to use as a recruitment tool from the referendum campaign does not, for example, include a single reference to the water charges movement.

41. In addition to specific demands on the trade unions to take action for abortion rights, in our view, the propaganda of the comrades on the issue would have been strengthened by a greater weight being given to the link between a woman's right to choose, when and whether to have children, and winning economic improvements for working-class women. These points are included in Rosa's 15-point programme, but seem to have been given little emphasis in day-to-day campaigning. We should always stress that – unlike the reactionary anti-abortion campaigners who do nothing to improve the lives of women and children – we are fighting for a real right to choose, meaning not only the right to high-quality safe contraception and to abortion but also the right to decent housing, pay, fertility treatment, parental leave and childcare. In this way we can have an effect on sections of working-class women and men who remain unsure about the question of abortion. This is also a way of drawing out that capitalism is increasingly unable to offer any real right to choose because, even when abortion on demand is granted, the economic and social gains made in the past are under relentless attack.

How do we recruit and politically consolidate the layer we have reached in the referendum campaign?

42. It is absolutely correct that we have turned to, and attempted to win, the layer of young people who have been radicalised by the referendum campaign. It is also correct that in doing so we have an open and welcoming approach, and attempt to use language which does not put up unnecessary barriers to them. We do not agree with the abstract 'purist' approach of the small groups like the IMT, for example, who refuse to use the terms 'Marxist feminist' or 'socialist feminist', both because, "nowadays the concept of

feminism has become so broad as to become virtually meaningless" and because "feminists often blame 'patriarchy' for most of the problems of society". We agree that feminism has become such a broad term that Theresa May can adopt it and also that feminist theorists usually consider patriarchy and not class to be the central division in society. Nonetheless, the vast majority of people who consider themselves as feminists see it as meaning simply supporting equal rights for women. It is therefore not incorrect to use the term, provided it is not on its own, but we also give an indication of our class approach with the addition of terms like socialist or Marxist.

43. However, even here we have to be clear ourselves, and with our periphery, what we mean by the term. There is a certain comparison with the decision in the 1990s of a number of our sections, including Britain and Ireland, to change our name to 'Socialist Party' or similar 'broad' names. We did so because at that stage the reformist and social-democratic formations which previously would have claimed the word had capitulated wholesale to neo-liberalism leaving us able in some countries to use the world socialist but give it a clear Marxist content. We had to guard, however, against the tendency of some comrades to think that in changing our name we were also 'blurring' our ideas. In claiming to be socialist feminists we are not therefore agreeing with the forces collected under that banner in the 1970s and 1980s that represented various strands of reformism. We should be careful about uncritically quoting left feminist academics who, while they may in some cases describe themselves as socialist feminists, do not have a rounded-out position on how to end women's oppression. Hester Eisenstein, to give one example, an academic who has worked for the government of New South Wales, is quoted uncritically in the 'Socialist Feminism' pamphlet.

44. We think it is a mistake to suggest that young people who are rebelling against the rigid gender norms of capitalism are automatically or generally the most radical section of society, thereby downgrading

the role of other sections of the working class and miseducating those young people. Of course, at this point of time, in Ireland, a layer has been radicalised around these issues. However, in general there is no automatic connection between individual rebellion on these issues and drawing conclusions about the need for collective struggle for a new society. To give an example from Britain, it would generally have been true in the 1980s, when the Tory government was implementing specifically anti-gay legislation, that LGBTQ+ campaigners were often anti-Tory and even looked to the workers' movement for support. Today, however, after capitalism has adapted to pressure from below and all the major capitalist parties formally stand for equal rights, being LGBTQ+ in itself is no indicator of political views. In the 2015 UK general election LGBTQ+ voters supported the Tories and Labour in equal numbers.

45. At the 2018 CWI School comrades in the leadership of the Irish section emphasised that young women and non-binary people are the most radical in Ireland at this point in time, and that we will cut ourselves off from the most radical young people if we didn't put issues of bodily-autonomy central. At the same time, they did not, in our view, counter the views put by a young Irish comrade in a commission that a rejection of gender norms is a rejection of the system itself. Nor, when a new young comrade argued that as a Solidarity TD candidate she would be representing "young queer women", was any attempt made by the three Irish NEC members who spoke afterwards to gently correct her mistaken approach by, at least, pointing out that she would be representing not only young queer women but all sections of the working class. Taken as a whole, we were concerned that a trend could be developing in the leadership of the Irish section of not adequately dealing with the issue of identity politics.

The use of language

46. If we adopt wholesale the language of petit-bourgeois feminism it will not help us in this vital task. We should use terms like misogyny and patriarchy with

care because they do not aid us in a theoretical understanding of the root causes of women's oppression. Misogyny – meaning hatred or contempt of women and girls – can be an accurate description in some circumstances but it does not point towards the reason such hatred exists or where it stems from, so does not help to raise the level of understanding of the layer we are trying to reach. The term patriarchy also has limited use. We live in a patriarchal society, in the sense that men have more power than women. Nonetheless, as Marxists, we understand that the oppression of women developed alongside and intertwined with the development of class society and it is class, not gender, which is the most fundamental division in society. Our language has to help the radicalised young women we can reach to draw that conclusion, not reinforce wrong ideas. Sometimes material produced by the comrades in Ireland seems to slip into calling for movements of, "young people, of women, of LGBT people, of workers", which goes too far towards the identity politics approach of listing 'class' as one in a series of oppressions without explaining its centrality. It is true comrades often emphasise in speeches that it is poor and working-class women who suffer most from the abortion ban, but this is not the same as explaining the potential power of the working class as an agent of change.

47. We also have to patiently explain to new members that it would be a mistake to use language in a way that put up unnecessary barriers to reaching out to other sections of the working class and is unnecessarily inaccessible to them. To state the obvious an essential part of the role of a revolutionary party is to aim to unite – via its programme – all the heterogeneous layers of the working class with their different needs and experiences. Of course, at this stage we can only reach a minority of the most thinking layers, but still aim to instil in them an approach which will allow us to reach the mass of the working class in the future.

48. Clearly, what language we use is not fixed. At every stage we have to attempt to use language which is

scientifically correct and which takes the consciousness of our audience forward, which reaches out to a layer who are radicalised on a particular issue, but does not exclude sections of workers for whom that issue is not central. This is a difficult balance which changes over time. When, for example, in the 1970s we proposed including 'housewives' in committees to plan nationalised industries it was a correct attempt to reach out to working-class women who were not in the workplace. But it would obviously not be correct today!

49. We also recognise that the best language to use will vary between countries. Nonetheless, we are concerned that it seems to have become commonplace to use terms which, while they might be understood among young feminist activists, can be off-putting or easily misinterpreted by broader sections of the working class such as 'cis-normative', 'toxic masculinity' and even 'rape culture'. The first is not understood beyond a narrow audience, and while the second is a description of a narrow, repressive idea of masculinity, which most men reject, to those who don't know that it can sound like being male is, in and of itself, 'toxic'. We should also, in our view, have some caution about how we use the term 'rape culture' so as not to be seen to be implying that all, or a majority of men are potential rapists.

50. And while we have to welcome all that is positive in current moods, we should be careful not to uncritically follow them and thereby make mistakes. For example, it is enormously positive that more women are beginning to feel confident to speak out against sexual abuse. We shouldn't, of course, exaggerate the extent of the progress that has been made. The accusations of sexual harassment and abuse are still far outnumbered by the number of incidents which go unreported because of a justified lack of confidence on the part of women that they will be taken seriously. We have to stand in clear opposition to the sexist character of the capitalist state and in support of the rights of all victims. The turnout of thousands of mainly young

women in opposition to the Ulster Rugby rape trial, shows the mood of burning anger that exists amongst an important layer against the blatant sexism of the court proceedings, as does the hundred thousand who marched under the banner of the SE in Spain against the court's treatment of the victim of the 'Wolfpack' rapists.

51. However, as we have discussed previously, in welcoming these movements, and understanding why slogans like 'I believe her' are used, we have to be careful not to go along with the conclusion of many petit-bourgeois feminists that every accusation of sexual assault made by a woman against a man has to be accepted as proven regardless of evidence. Our approach is one of sympathy and solidarity with the person making the accusation, but at the same time we support the right to a fair hearing and the right of the accused to a fair trial. Underlying the conclusion of those feminists who insist that the woman is always right regardless of evidence is a belief that the fundamental division in society is between men and women, with men responsible for all the ills of the world. That is not our starting point. We recognise that sexual abuse of women by men is extremely widespread, and often goes unreported, but we cannot draw a conclusion in each individual case from that. Aside from anything else, were we to do so we would be handing a weapon to the capitalist class, who would only have to make accusations against any effective male leader of the class struggle in order to discredit them. To be clear, that is not in any way to suggest we try to brush sexual abuse in the workers' movement under the carpet. On the contrary, it is vital we tackle it wherever it occurs if we are to effectively make the case for the workers' movement being the best vehicle to fight for women's rights.

Our attitude towards 'separate' organisations

52. In general, the attitude of the CWI towards organisations or parties of particular sections of the oppressed – whether black, women, LGBTQ+ or others – is not fixed but depends on the concrete

circumstances. We have to have a flexible approach, basing our position on the political direction of travel. Where a new formation is a step towards raising the consciousness and cohesion of the working class we should support it, but not if it is a step in the opposite direction. In Britain, for example, we did not support the foundation of black sections in the Labour Party in the past, as it mainly represented a section of black careerists furthering their own interests who emphasised separation from the rest of the labour movement. The opposition of Lenin and Trotsky to the Bund, which organised among Jewish workers in Russia, to give another example, was not based on its existence but its programme of 'cultural autonomy' which tended to emphasise the divisions in the working class. Of course, there is a difference between our approach to broader organisations and to a revolutionary party where, although sometimes transitional structures are necessary on a temporary basis, we always aim to organise all sections of our membership together in common structures.

53. Nonetheless, as well as sometimes participating in and supporting 'sectional' broader organisations we can in certain circumstances initiate them. The prominence Rosa has achieved during the referendum campaign has been enthusiastically greeted throughout the CWI. Inevitably as a result a number of other sections have launched versions of Rosa as a means to intervene among radicalised young women. Others have used different banners, particularly *Libres y Combativas* in the Spanish state.

54. As we said at the start, the CWI has a long history of initiating numerous campaigns, organisations and banners which are aimed at reaching out to a specific section of society that have been radicalised on an issue and winning them to Marxism. Nonetheless, we have to weigh up at each stage 'what we give' and 'what we get'. For example, comrades in Britain were involved in initiating Panther in the early 1990s, with the goal of winning black youth who were attracted to black nationalist ideas. Panther had considerable

success, mobilising large numbers on demonstrations and to meetings for a period. Bobby Seale spoke at a Panther meeting in Brixton, London with around 2,000 mainly young black people present. It was the biggest ever meeting of its kind in Britain. He also met with the leaders of Panther and the party. However, for a combination of reasons, primarily the very difficult period, after the collapse of Stalinism, and the weakness of our black and Asian cadre, the end result was that we lost people to black nationalism rather than winning new people from it.

55. At this stage we do not think there is one international model we can use as a banner for our work against women's oppression. Rosa, however, can continue to play a useful role in Ireland as can similar banners in other sections. However, we think it is vitally important that comrades adopt a clear, working-class orientated approach, if we are to win people from it.

56. We would also have questions about whether, during the referendum, the profile of the party lost out too much to the profile of Rosa. For example, we understand that the big majority of posters we produced for the referendum were in the name of Rosa, with a minority in the name of Solidarity, and none by the Socialist Party. Obviously, the TDs were known as Solidarity and/or Socialist Party members and had a high-profile in the referendum campaign, particularly Ruth. Nonetheless, in order to fully capitalise on that, we think it would have been better to have consciously had a higher party profile.

57. We also believe it is important now to draw a balance sheet of what we have achieved via our Rosa work, and what role we think it is going to play in the future. During the referendum we know that hundreds attended meetings called by Rosa and around 1,000 people gave their details to campaign with Rosa. Inevitably there has been a lull since the referendum result. However, it would be useful to get figures on how many are actively involved in Rosa at the moment.

Our understanding is that it does not have any elected structure and has relatively small numbers – maybe around twenty – attending its all-Dublin fortnightly meetings. We in no way suggest that Rosa therefore has no value, but if that information is accurate it is currently in reality a banner or campaign, rather than a more developed organisation with its own structures and life. Of course Rosa could fill out again, on the basis of the future struggles that will develop over the separation of church and state. However, in our view that is likely to be only one of numerous fields of struggle that will develop in Ireland, and may not be the most central in the immediate period. We therefore think that Rosa should not be the centre of the comrades' work to the extent it appears to be, and what resources are dedicated to it should be discussed accordingly.

Conclusion

58. In summary we are concerned that, in their anxiety to recruit as many as possible from a layer who have been radicalised by issues related to gender oppression, comrades in Ireland are in danger of making too many concessions to the consciousness of

that layer. To do so would be to attempt to take a short cut which would have negative consequences.

59. This is a road that many revolutionary organisations have gone down at different times, with disastrous results. Famously the USFI prior to May 1968 wrote off for decades the prospect of mass working-class struggle in the advanced capitalist countries and instead focused on 'liberation movements'. The US SWP also, in their desperation to give uncritical support to the Black Power movement, ended up lagging behind the most advanced elements within it, even criticising the Black Panthers for arguing it was possible to be black and racist and to be black and a capitalist.

60. We are not suggesting that the Irish comrades have taken this profoundly mistaken path but we are worried that some errors could have been made in that direction which need to be corrected. We hope by raising our fears openly it will enable an honest and constructive debate from which we can reach principled agreement.

A Response to the IS document from the NEC in Ireland*

*With all NEC comrades, bar Paul M voting for the document

November 14th, 2018

1. This is a response to the IS document, “Women’s Oppression and Identity Politics – Our Approach in Ireland and Internationally”. The IS document mostly focuses on our approach and methods in relation to our interventions on women and abortion in Ireland, including our approach in ROSA which we initiated nearly six years ago. We will make points:

- On identity politics and our battle against it
- On the importance of the global women’s movement, which we feel the IS seems hesitant about
- On the decisive role we actually played in the abortion rights struggle
- On whether, as the IS suggest, the Irish section has moved away from a working-class orientation and stand point

Part One – The Irish Section and Identity Politics

2. In Ireland, in contrast to what is implied, we have actually clashed considerably with the ideas of identity politics in the movement and have challenged these ideas, week in, week out.

Identity Politics

3. The IS says, “...identity politics can be an inevitable part of the political awakening of many members of oppressed groupings... Recognising that you are oppressed, and that you can fight against your oppression through a common struggle with others who share the same oppression, is a vital first step.” As a description, this is problematic. We shouldn’t give credence to the idea that fighting against oppression is in and of itself ‘identity politics’. When the IS argues that ‘sectional struggle’ is not always a positive, we understand this relates to the above view of identity politics.

4. A group moving into struggle against their oppression is a positive development. What’s completely separate, different, and wholly reactionary

are the ideas of ‘identity politics’. There needs to be a skilful but very firm challenge to these damaging petit-bourgeois, reformist and postmodern ideas of individualism that can exist within movements that aim to fight oppression.

5. In a 2014 Socialist Party article, we described identity politics as “viewing society as comprising of interest groups. Sometimes the interest groups intersect and overlap, but there is not any overarching framework in which to analyse society.” We situated these ideas in the context of setbacks for the working-class movement, and the backdrop of the dominance of postmodernism in academia. We wrote:

Postmodernism... feeds into analysing oppression from a subjective or personal viewpoint. Needless to say, the voices and the personal experiences of those that are oppressed are extremely important. But to have the best insight into the nature and roots of oppression, as well as having the voices and experiences of the oppressed front and centre; a materialist analysis of broader social forces at work, that the oppression flows from, is necessary. We need to have a clear vision as to how to best challenge and end that oppression.

6. The article goes on to explain:

The centrality of class is not a denigration, relegation or denial of special oppressions. Crucially, is the fact that a united, organised and conscious working class has the most power to challenge the oppressive system of capitalism; a system that has a vested interest in maintaining oppressions, often for economic gains from them, but also from the point of view of dividing workers to cut across unity and struggle. Working class struggle is the most effective challenge to the ruling class...

Clash with Identity Politics in the Abortion Struggle

7. The claim made by the IS that we are adapting to identity politics, is somewhat contradicted by their criticism of our focus on anti-capitalist arguments.

Demonstrating the role of capitalism is actually a key way to introduce the need for a socialist alternative, thereby presenting a fundamental challenge to identity politics. In a more specific sense, the approach that ROSA took to abortion pills, meant that we clashed with those who subscribe to 'intersectional feminism'.

8. In the 2010s, the use of abortion pills on the island of Ireland was silently increasing. We saw the significance – namely, that people had an alternative to travelling abroad and more and more were having abortions on Irish soil. We saw that this could change the situation and consciousness.

9. ROSA's abortion pill train and later, the abortion pill buses actively flouted the law, and received major national and international media coverage – drawing attention to the existence of the pills and increasing the usage through WomenOnWeb.org by 200 per year up to 2017. ROSA and the Socialist Party were isolated within the pro-choice movement by these actions. They prompted a slew of attacks and at least one attempt at sabotage. It was argued that these actions would alert the state to the use of the pills and that this would put the supply in danger and put the most vulnerable at risk. We countered that if the supply of pills was affected, we would find other ways to get them in. We correctly believed that the actions would increase the knowledge of and use of the pills.

10. The attacks on our actions were a real example of identity politics. Its myopic individualism meant a complete focus on individuals getting the pills in the present, without any vision whatsoever for the building of a movement to pressurise the state to legalise and provide the pills, or using the pills as part of a political struggle. Identity politics meant accepting the status quo or minimal progress. Any broader focus on the class balance of forces, was posed as being oppressive in and of itself.

11. Our actions were based on a firm belief that the majority of the working class were on our side, albeit passively. Even though the actions were breaking the law, we felt that it was likely that the state would turn a blind eye, as any repression could shift that passive support into a much larger active movement. Our

optimism in the attitudes of working people contrasted starkly with the philosophical pessimism of identity politics, in which the potential for working-class solidarity is at best underplayed, at worst, completely discounted. Challenging identity politics was key to the role we have played in the historic securing of the 12 weeks on request victory.

Other Clashes with Identity Politics – The Sex Industry

12. The IS document could give the impression that the Irish section is soft on, and friendly with the forces of petit-bourgeois feminism. The truth is we are largely treated as pariahs by these forces, and our opposition to the sex industry has been the centrepiece of a series of vicious campaigns of online attacks over a number of years. We've been effectively 'no platformed' on some demonstrations because of the stance we have taken on the sex industry, illustrating the anti-working class, anti-socialist nature of identity politics.

13. One spate of online attacks happened after the referendum victory. "ROSA are SWERFS" (anti-sex worker) trended on Twitter Ireland. A significant section of the hundreds of young people activated in ROSA's Yes campaign were knocked back by this attack, which was consciously orchestrated by 'intersectional feminists'. They did this because the unashamedly pro-choice and socialist Yes campaign that ROSA had run was popular (an academic researcher has revealed to us that ROSA's Yes posters were by far the most popular amongst a cross section of society). We had exposed how those who claim to be radical had needlessly gone along with an utterly bourgeois and tame official Yes campaign.

14. Within the identity politics framework, the question of the sex industry is posed on a solely individual level, focusing on the rights of sex workers not to be stigmatised, not to suffer state repression, and to be affirmed and accepted. Of course all of this is valid, but it is one-sided. It fails to recognise the reality of the sex industry: the nature of this sexist, racist and oppressive, as well as exploitative industry; the role that it has in fostering macho culture and the harmful social impact of this; the impossibility of making such a

dangerous industry safe; and how this plays into the sanitising of the industry and the magnates who profit from it.

15. When this came up in the Dáil, we strove to forge an independent class position. We did not support the (highly neoliberal version) of the ‘Swedish Model’ being brought in by the Government. Neither did we succumb to the tremendous pressure from forces rooted in identity politics to eschew any criticism of the sex industry and to support decriminalisation of pimping. We engaged in a very detailed way with all aspects of the legislation as it went through parliament, advocating numerous amendments. Most importantly, in our material and comrades’ speeches in the Dáil, we explained that there is no reformist solution:

It’s a pertinent comment on capitalism today that the sex industry is a massive, global, billion dollar industry. Capitalism turns everything into a commodity to profit from. The sex industry moguls profit from a visage of sexual liberation, but the industry is, in fact, extremely backward, old-fashioned, and sexist gender roles are dressed up as modern and shiny. Real sexual and human freedom is impossible in conditions of poverty and wealth inequality.

It’s also impossible when women’s oppression remains. The struggle against all oppression and inequality has to be an anti-capitalist struggle, based on solidarity, with the working class linking with all the oppressed and exploited to challenge the ‘masters of the universe’... In short, a socialist struggle is needed. (“Socialists on the sex industry: Opposing pimps & traffickers, Supporting sex workers’ rights & safety”, Socialist Alternative journal, May 2017)

16. In contrast, PBP/Socialist Workers’ Network (formerly SWP) deputies in the Dáil took no such stance, making absolutely zero criticism of the nature of the sex industry profiteers in a complete opportunist submission to identity politics.

Challenging Bourgeois Identity Politics

17. Most of the above refers to the petit-bourgeois identity politics which is prevalent in movements

against oppression and can have the most impact on radicalised youth. There is also a more ‘out and out’ bourgeois form of identity politics that we have taken head-on. This is from the Sunday Times from 29 January, 2017 entitled ‘Rebuff to Fake Sisters of Dáil’:

Socialist deputy Ruth Coppinger has refused to join a cross-party women’s caucus in Leinster House, saying “there’s not much point in pretending there’s a fake sisterhood in the Dáil”. Coppinger was the only female politician who rejected an invitation to attend a meeting last week about setting up the group. “I don’t really want to spend any time in a forum with women like Joan Burton and Frances Fitzgerald who have imposed austerity on other women as government ministers,” said Coppinger...

18. Again, in contrast, the PBP/SWP female deputy attended the above meeting.

Part Two: Global Feminist Revolt – Some points of Perspectives & Analysis

19. How we challenge identity politics needs more discussion. However, it’s a negative side of what has been an overwhelmingly positive development – the emergence of a global feminist movement that has had an impact on all continents.

20. There has been a belated and partial recognition of the global feminist movement in recent years in CWI material. A tendency to understate the significance of this development inevitably has an impact on concrete initiatives and interventions, or lack thereof. The tendency for the comrades to reference campaigns and initiatives from a quarter of a century ago, albeit very important ones like the Campaign Against Domestic Violence, underscores this point.

21. In the 2014 International Women’s Day statement, when there clearly was an outline of significant sections of youth identifying as feminist and open to left politics, and struggles like the ‘Rage Against Rape’ in India in 2013 had taken place, there were only two allusions to the new feminist movement. The first is negative:

This year the so-called 'fourth wave' of feminism gets an airing but fails to offer a way out of the very practical problems of the women workers and poor farmers who make up half of the world's population.

22. The second is a factual point that fails to venture any significant conclusions or perspectives:

Mass demonstrations in Spain against attempts to reverse progressive legislation, allowing abortion in the first 14 weeks, have shown the deeply felt anger on this issue and the preparedness of young women to fight. Socialists in Ireland have played an important role in maintaining the pressure for legal reforms that came into sharp focus after the death of Savita Halappanavar who was refused a life-saving abortion at the end of 2012.

23. In the 2016 International Women's Day CWI Statement itself, there is no mention of the women's movements and no points about violence, sexism or abortion.

24. ROSA was established because we had a perspective, not only for a significant abortion rights struggle but because we identified increasing sections of young women in particular, identifying as 'feminist' and open to socialist politics, and we also felt that this would be an international phenomenon. In summer 2016, before #MeToo or the idea of the global feminist strike, we wrote in our journal:

The Stanford rape case that went to trial in June 2016, had a colossal resonance, globally. This is because one in three women around the world will experience physical or sexual violence during her life. It's also because globally, there is the outline of a new women's movement. A new generation of young women are being radicalised by continued women's and LGBTQ oppression, identifying as feminist, and in some instances engaging in political action.

25. This has significantly deepened since. In Latin America, especially Argentina, and in the Spanish state there has been mass occupations, feminist strikes and mass mobilisations of a militant character – 'class struggle feminism' as the comrades so aptly call it. In Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Tunisia, campaigners

have successfully reversed or blocked 'marry-your-rapist' laws. In the US, the 'Women's Marches' after Trump's election were some of the biggest demonstrations in US history. In late 2017 the #MeToo phenomenon saw the hashtag trending on Twitter in one day in 85 countries around the world. On Facebook 12 million people responded in the first 24 hours.

26. To varying degrees, questions of gender-based harassment and violence on the street, in the home, and at work are aspects of women's (and gender non-conforming people's) lives at some point in time in every state. Amongst many working-class and young women, being radicalised on this question is inter-linked completely with all the other aspects of their lives under capitalism – unequal pay, precarity in work and housing. Furthermore, a growing section of the young working class are following and radicalised by struggles in other parts of the globe.

27. These are all features of the global feminist movement that has deepened in recent months by women workers taking questions of harassment and abuse into the workplace. Working-class women are putting their stamp on the movement, making it a potentially dynamic aspect of the working-class movement as a whole.

28. The IS seem to imply a rigid distinction between those who are radicalised on economic questions, and those who are radicalised on social questions. There is no Chinese Wall between radicalisation on social and economic issues, and drawing a false dichotomy fails to recognise the processes of radicalisation unfolding in many states on questions of oppression and the potential interplay of questions of oppression, and the economic realities of capitalist crisis.

29. The "#MeToo" McDonalds strike in ten US cities is an inspiring example of this radicalisation. In the South of Ireland, the Repeal victory has helped propel an important section of young people into protest activity on housing.

30. Furthermore, the worldwide Google walkouts in November, organised in opposition to management

was indicative. In Dublin, up to 1,000 Google workers walked out. There are many multinationals with largely unorganised workforces, so this was particularly seminal and the impact of the Repeal movement was clear. Alongside demands in relation to sexual harassment, other demands of the walkout included points about equal pay, illustrating the interaction of the economic and social.

31. Comrades organising young workers in Unite the Union in Belfast have taken up the issue of sexual harassment at work. The Boojum workers who recently unionised also simultaneously got active with ROSA because of their concern on this issue. Then there's the inspiring equal pay strike in Glasgow, Scotland. Surely this development, led by a section of workers that importantly continues to embody important class traditions, is not divorced from the broader radicalisation among women, generally? This can in turn inspire and educate the younger radicalised layer who see the power of the organised working class and learn important lessons about solidarity.

The Material Basis for Radicalisation of Young Working Class Women

32. What's fuelling this radicalisation and mass feminist movements? The IS document cites the entering of women into the workforce en masse, increased confidence and expectations, and then the disproportionate effects of austerity and the ravages of the Great Recession. This is all valid. However, the en masse entering of women into the workforce, globally, also means that women workers are concentrated in some of the most militant, or potentially militant sectors, globally, and are likely to continue to be at the forefront of struggle.

33. The trends of neoliberalism over decades have many features that impinge in specific ways on proletarian women. The shift of manufacturing to the East has seen masses of girls and women entering into factory work. Simultaneously, the expansion of the service sector in the West has been accompanied by record numbers of women workers taking up these lower-paid, less secure, often unorganised forms of employment. The privatisation drive has also

disproportionately affected working-class women, both as workers and as users of services.

34. In our Southern Perspectives document in 2015, we said:

Since the movement against the water charges really emerged as a mass and active struggle in October 2014, it's been very noticeable that working-class women have become central organisers in the movement. As with the activity around homelessness and the housing crisis that happened in 2014, this includes working-class women in their 20s and 30s...getting active for the first time... The emergence of working-class women as organisers...shows the potential for the intertwining of the building of a working-class revolt against austerity, to a women's movement that has a strong involvement of working-class women.

35. In Ireland and in many other states, young people and young women in particular have developed an impatience for change that's characterised by an unwillingness to accept inequality or any further vestiges of sexism, and this means they will likely continue to clash with the system.

Women's Oppression and Capitalism – Inextricably Linked

36. A point is made in the IS document that in the West, the impact of deindustrialisation on traditionally majority male sectors, alongside a simultaneous increase in women in the workforce meant that: "before the economic crisis – young working-class women, were, in general, more confident of their prospects than young working class men." This seems one-sided, not taking into account, for example, that there has been a significant rise in sexist propaganda in the mass media in this period, which also had a detrimental impact on the confidence and mental health of young women, as well as the continued persistence of violence, pay inequality etc.

37. The point is also made that there was "grain of truth" in the 'post-feminist' idea that "women were on the verge of winning equality" in many countries.

Again, this seems one-sided when considering the experiences of the very many working-class women even in the advanced capitalist countries at that time, or of any women who suffered intimate partner violence and abuse. In fact, the burning and impatient desire for equality, which can't be achieved under capitalism as women's oppression is stitched into the fabric of the system – the Oxfam wealth report estimated that the unpaid labour women do globally amounted to \$10 trillion in 2017 - is likely to continue to be hugely radicalising.

38. Furthermore, there is reference made to the capitalist establishment in a number of countries, including Ireland, that will implement 'feminist' and LGBTQ-friendly measures in order to drum up support. While this will be true in some cases, it can also tend to understate the impact of the movements that have developed. While Varadkar in Ireland has gained kudos among some for Repeal, it was an enormous battle and struggle against him and the whole political establishment 'from below' that won the right to a referendum. Working-class people have an understanding of this. Also, the threat that the ascent of right-populist and far-right political forces poses to oppressed groups and existing rights needs more emphasis. This is a reactionary system and gains from decades ago can be threatened – as evidenced by the threat to Roe vs. Wade in the US.

The Question of Macho Violence

39. Gender-based violence and harassment are very important factors in the radicalisation. In the context of the Belfast rape trial and presumably in reaction to the "I believe her" slogan that emerged from below, the IS document cautions, "we have to be careful not to go along with the conclusion of many petit-bourgeois feminists that every accusation of sexual assault made by a woman against a man has to be accepted". The IS are intimating that we just follow petit-bourgeois feminists. This is inaccurate to say the least. The facts are that when we called the demonstration North and South regarding this trial, we purposely called it under the general title/slogan of "Stand with Her & All Survivors".

40. When a 'Not Guilty' verdict was delivered, "I Believe Her" became the rallying cry. This slogan was a challenge to the mistreatment by police and the victim blaming by the courts and media. This slogan was a genuine cry of solidarity from below to the woman, and to validate all survivors of sexual violence.

41. The key point is that if we were overly legalistic or cautious in our approach, we would not have taken the initiatives and these important developments and potential would have passed us by. The sentiment behind the slogan was hugely progressive and thousands of angry young women marched through cities North and South irreverently chanting "Sue me Paddy", after the acquitted rugby player threatened to sue those saying "I Believe Her".

42. Under the banner of ROSA one thousand joined the demonstration in Belfast and 8,000 marched in Dublin. Subsequently, the "I Believe Her" slogan has manifested itself in the Wolfpack case in the Spanish State and in the US during the appointment of Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court.

#MeToo

43. In reference to the #MeToo phenomenon, the IS document says that every accusation cannot just be automatically believed, and that everyone has the right to a fair trial. It goes on to repeat that many petit-bourgeois feminists advocate: "that every accusation of sexual assault made by a woman against a man has to be accepted as proven regardless of evidence".

44. Just to be completely clear, we agree that there can be no automatic acceptance of guilt and believe we do have to be careful. Being careful also means being careful not to be insensitive to women, precisely because the facts speak so overwhelmingly to the general lack of justice for victims of sexual violence. A movement that's throwing light on this social scandal is valid and important, and we should not be seen to equivocate on supporting it publicly or in our own ranks. Similarly, the point made about the potential for the state to orchestrate a false accusation against a male leader a trade union or in the revolutionary party to try to do damage, is something that could happen.

However, that possibility is not a reason for us not to register the positives of the #MeToo phenomenon, and more recently #MeToo being taken into the arena of struggle by workers.

45. Points are made against the terms ‘rape culture’ and ‘toxic masculinity’. When ‘rape culture’, was popularised after the ‘Rage Against Rape’ in India in 2012, we had a discussion on whether it was correct for us to use the phrase. Precisely because the phrase denotes how rape occurs in a social context of sexist culture, victim blaming, perpetuation of myths about rape, and as it rejected petit-bourgeois ideas about the ‘nature’ of men etc., we decided it could be a useful phrase. When, a number of years later in Germany, the far-right invented the horrid phrase, “rape-fugee”, we pulled back from the phrase for a period.

46. Regarding ‘toxic masculinity’, we have used it. However, more often we use the phrase ‘macho culture’. The main issue is the idea or social phenomenon depicted. When intervening on questions of intimate partner violence, harassment and abuse, we have to have a rounded-out approach that both chimes with the mood of the most militant layers, but also connects with a working-class struggle against the system. In doing so, of course we must highlight the life endangering lack of resources in relation to affordable housing, rape crisis supports, refuges, access to free counselling etc . However, we absolutely must also challenge macho culture / machismo / toxic masculinity, including when it manifests itself inside the working class and working-class movement.

Rigid Gender Roles

47. The whole question of macho culture and macho violence should be placed in the context of the nature of capitalism. The perpetuation of rigid gender roles is a tool for capitalism that has damaging consequences. Macho culture is also rife in the ‘armed bodies’, the police and armed forces, and is in this way a certain ideological aid for the perpetuation of capitalist rule. This quote from the US comrades’ is a very good example of how to expose the system:

The Kavanaugh sexual assault allegations have exposed the culture at the elite, private high schools and Ivy

League university fraternities and societies. This is a horrifying, misogynistic world where there is literally a culture of raping women that is passed from generation to generation of ruling-class youth. This is the culture that future judges, politicians, CEOs, and presidents are steeped in, one in which rich, white men make a game of objectifying, humiliating, and assaulting women.

48. On these issues, if we overwhelmingly or exclusively focus on questions of cuts and austerity alone, but don’t agitate against capitalism as a breeding ground for violence, our intervention would be weakened. It’s also in some ways behind the best working-class youth that aspire to a world free from interpersonal and state violence – a world that only socialists have a vision for, and only the working class, organised and conscious, can create.

49. In some of the IS document’s formulations around violence, the correct and important points about austerity / neoliberalism / services are not accompanied by points about macho culture . We would ask whether the IS comrades think it’s correct that some points on macho culture should be raised? In our view, we have to be careful of a potentially overly economic approach.

Tackling Homophobia and Transphobia

50. In her article on identity politics from 2015, Hannah makes the important point that the campaigners from LGSM (LGBT support group of the British miners’ strike from 1980s) did not tell miners who displayed some homophobic attitudes to “check their privilege”. Of course, one cannot help but shudder at the mere thought of such condescension being shown to this heroic group of workers engaging in a seminal class battle! In this way, it’s a useful point. However, LGSM campaigners did challenge homophobia. They did it in a comradely way that was combined with an implacable active support for the miners that had an inspiring and transformative impact.

51. Similarly, within any working-class struggle today, there will be challenges posed by working-class women and youth to prejudiced or oppressive attitudes and

behaviours. If this is done in a sensitive and balanced way, in the spirit of solidarity in which the primacy of working-class unity remains central, this does not have to be a problem. It also bears no relation to the ultra left, patronising, divisive and ineffective “call out culture” of privilege theory and identity politics – that favours moralising over solidarity and struggle; fundamentally reinforcing the status quo.

52. We must stand in opposition to the dangerous and discriminatory anti-trans ideas that have been whipped up by the right-wing in many states, who are preying on the trans community eg through the ‘Bathroom Bills’ in the US. Where these ideas have manifested themselves in parts of the trade union and feminist movements, they are often in part a remnant of elements of second wave feminist ideas (and are often backed up by Stalinist lefts who have backward ideas on gender), ideas which have for the most part been rejected by radicalised youth. Transphobic attitudes can also sometimes be hidden behind arguments that resources are scarce and that vital social services are already overstretched etc., as a justification to deny trans rights.

53. We need to be sensitive of course, as broad attitudes catch up with changes in society -- we reject the ‘call out culture’ and ‘no platforming’ moralistic approach of those rooted in Identity Politics. However, it is absolutely crucial we are also understanding of the accumulated and justified anger that gender non-conforming people feel about the oppression they experience. Neither should we underestimate the potential for working-class solidarity on these issues.

Working Class Solidarity Against Oppression

54. The IS document seems to suggest that the abortion vote was also an anti-austerity vote. It says that “...the accumulated anger at austerity has had very limited outlets as a result of the role of the trade union leaders but could be expressed via the referendum.”

55. It is unintended but this a significant understatement and diminishing of working-class attitudes on these issues. The Marriage Equality “Yes”

was at base, a vote to support and affirm LGBTQ lives. The “Yes” for Repeal was a consciously pro-choice vote. (67% on exit polls cited “Choice” as reason for their “Yes”). In the deprived working-class community of Jobstown, there was an over 90% Yes for Marriage Equality. In Dublin’s, Stoneybatter, populated by young newcomers and traditional working-class, inner-city residents, there was a 92% Yes for abortion rights. The working class has the greatest propensity to show true solidarity.

56. There is only one reference to Ruth C in the IS document and unfortunately it’s a negative reference. The comrades quote Ruth’s comments that a commission at the England and Wales Socialism event didn’t feature enough young women and their concerns such as sexism, violence etc. But Hannah’s comment immediately after, that that commission that year had a particular trade union focus, actually gives credence to the points Ruth made, yet the comrades make a definite criticism out of it. The IS then immediately go on to say that petit-bourgeois feminists today focus on sexism and sexist attitudes and ignore concrete economic questions. Are the IS trying to imply that this is the approach of the comrades in Ireland?

57. Suffice it to say, all our interventions, agitation and propaganda on questions of oppression should deal with both the economic and social questions. They should also show due sensitivity to oppressed layers, their experiences and their concerns, while we expose and agitate against capitalism and illustrate the need for a united working-class struggle as the way forward. In the words of James Connolly, “none so fitted to break the chains as they who wear them, none so well equipped to decide what is a fetter... But whosoever carries the outworks of the citadel of oppression, the working class alone can raze it to the ground.”

Part Three: ROSA & Abortion work in Ireland

58. There is unfortunately misinterpretation, misinformation and misunderstandings in the IS document regarding ROSA. No IS member, as far as we can ascertain, discussed with any comrade involved in organising ROSA to check any information for the document. The strong impression is given is that ROSA

constitutes a large majority, or even all, of our work and interventions, the reality is ROSA work has not been given a large amount of resources.

59. Since ROSA was initiated in the South we launched the AAA as a broad left movement for working class people; got 14 councillors elected; stood in the Euro elections; stood in three by-election and won two of them; maintained/won three TD (MP) positions in parliament and stood in a number of other areas in a general election; played a key role in a victorious and historic water charges struggle; played an important role in a number of strikes; relaunched the AAA as Solidarity; scored a tremendous victory against the capitalist state in the Jobstown 'Not Guilty' verdict and produced *The Socialist*, journals, pamphlets and three books on many issues, not least on the National Question. Substantial resources and the party itself was only directed into ROSA in the first six months of 2018, in the run up to the Repeal / abortion referendum itself.

Huge Victory for Working Class Women

60. The IS document says we are in danger of overstating the abortion rights victory. Unfortunately, the IS are understating it. Winning, not only repeal of the abortion ban but also abortion up to 12 weeks on request is the single biggest blow struck for women's rights and against the Catholic Church in the history of the state, and was celebrated most of all by the working class.

61. The IS document criticises our orientation in the abortion struggle. We are not fully clear of the point being made regarding young people in the IS document when they contrast the role of young people in the Brexit referendum to the role of the young in the abortion referendum in Ireland. In any case, our primary orientation over the years of the abortion struggle was to working class youth. We weren't awkwardly forcing an agenda, as these have been the major activating issues for the young for a time. Neither was there any deviation from a class perspective in this; actually we were working in the best traditions of the CWI, where youth work was always understood as being essential to building the

revolutionary party, particularly among working-class youth.

62. ROSA's Yes campaign was active on the streets, in the schools and on the doors in working-class communities. On-street city centre campaigning connected us with with a huge cross section of the working class, including retail and other city-based workers. Many took bundles of the campaign literature for their colleagues. In Limerick, we helped a group of hairdressers organise a protest against anti-choice campaigners. In Dublin city centre, we had some joint activity with the Nurses and Midwives for Choice Campaign. This group of workers had to organise outside union structures as their union did not support a 'Yes' in the referendum. Door-knocking saw us intervene broadly into the mass in the run up to the referendum. We received a hugely warm response on these activities and were often getting canvass returns of 80-90% Yes in our heartland areas.

Concerted Campaigning and the Trade Unions

63. The IS document says that we should have had a 'concerted' campaign to put demands on the trade union leaders on abortion. In point 31, they also say we should have argued, "that the organised working class (i.e. trade unions ed.) could play a potentially decisive role in fighting for the right to abortion". The implication is that this should have been an important part of our campaign.

64. Later we will show what we did regarding the unions. However, we did not have the concerted campaign envisioned by the IS directed at the unions either for the first phase, the legislative process to agree the outline legislation that would be implemented in the event of a yes, or in the second phase, the referendum campaign itself.

65. Such a campaign would have gotten bogged down in bureaucracy, and opposition by some to a Yes stance and in demands to tone down discussion on the use of abortion pills and the demand for full abortion rights . Both of these were crucial if we were first to force acceptance of 12 weeks on request and in winning the Yes in the referendum. Put simply, the unions were not

a mechanism to have a broad impact around a strong pro-choice position as they were way behind the general population on this issue. Such an approach would have used up a lot of energy and resources needed for the main lines of battle.

66. In the actual struggle that was unfolding, we needed first to mobilise as much direct pressure from the broad working class and the young activists on the political establishment to force their hand in the legislative process that was unfolding. It was necessary to bring people into struggle through the street activities, protests and demonstrations that were growing progressively bigger. Given that we had very limited resources, a concerted campaign on the unions would have run the considerable risk of weakening our ability to organise and mobilise that direct political pressure in society.

67. The points made by the IS re the unions are formally correct on paper, but in terms of the facts on the ground in this case, they are actually a bit abstract and therefore incorrect. The assertion made by the IS comrades in point 31, that the unions could play a potentially decisive role in achieving abortion rights was a wrong assessment of the actual situation.

68. While a small handful of unions formally backed a Yes vote, others refused or voted down that position, like the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation and Fórsa. There was simply no drive in the trade unions to fight for pro-choice legislation or a Yes because the leadership adopted a conservative position of not 'rocking the boat'. And there just isn't an active rank and file that we could have connected with to try to alter or overturn that position.

Fighting on the Actual Front Line

69. It was ROSA's actions with abortion pills that opened up the potential in the situation. The massive growth in the use of the pills afterwards, in effect, meant that there was abortion in Ireland up to 12 weeks organised by people themselves using pills. This made the ban illogical, but as mentioned, we still had to maximise political pressure to force the political establishment down the path we had carved out. In

terms of the battle in 2017 mobilising activists to directly build up such pressure was the key task. A vital aspect of this was also our tactics in using the deliberations and investigation of the parliamentary committee to bring out the reality of the change that the pills were having and try to force them to make the recommendation for legislation for 12 weeks on request. This was an enormous victory for working-class women in particular, and the reality is, it would likely not have been achieved if we had focused in a significant way on the trade unions.

70. The IS document refers to the water and bin charges struggles. These, as well as the seminal campaign against household charges in 2012, which achieved a 52% national boycott, were all struggles that our organisation played a crucial role in. But they further illustrate the points above as they primarily took place outside of the trade union structures. The fact that these mass working-class movements happened in this way was because it was easier for the working class to construct and participate in an independent campaign/movement, than to force the union leaders into a fighting stance.

71. The Irish section recognised that forcing the unions to act would be difficult after they were able to defy the anti-austerity pressure and decisively sell-out, in late 2010. However, we also recognised that there was a possible alternative way forward if a movement, made up of working-class people, could emerge independently of the unions. We were instrumental in fomenting this movement, and we had the perspective that this could in turn create a new active base to fight to reclaim the trade unions. Without the pioneering work we put in, in the Campaign Against Water and Household Taxes, it is questionable whether the later water charges movement would have developed. So there have been issues with the role of the trade unions for many years, but that hasn't meant that we turned away from the working class. In fact, the Irish section has turned directly toward the working class in all of our campaigns.

72. These struggles, despite not being conducted through the labour and trade union movement, were class battles. The abortion rights struggle in Ireland

also took place outside of the trade union structures, but that doesn't mean it was not a working-class struggle. On one level, it's a valid point that the former are on economic questions and therefore relate very directly to class interests – namely over who possesses the wealth in society.

73. However, there are other aspects of class struggle that are not primarily economic based, that are or can be part of the broader class struggle -- eg anti-war movements, movements for voting or democratic rights -- because they challenge important aspects of capitalist rule, and by extension the ability of capitalists to extract profit. Sexism, repression, and in Ireland the Catholic Church, are all important aspects of how capitalism rules over working-class people and society, generally.

74. But there is an important economic aspect of the abortion rights victory. At least 150,000 have travelled from Ireland for abortions since 1980, with costs of anything up to €800 or €1000. Now there will be access to abortion for free at home. We saw the potential for a real victory to be achieved and we formulated nuanced, concrete tactics that played a key role in realising this victory.

The Trade Unions

75. Through the radicalisation and struggles of the water and abortion movements, new activists for the working-class movement have been formed, who can in turn play a role in redeveloping fighting trade unions, which is always a part of our political argumentation.

76. The IS document says that we have adopted a wrong approach to the trade unions, basically saying that we don't place demands or orientate to the unions because of the rottenness of the leaders. This is not true. We have limited resources and many demands, but we do feature union work, although we need to do more. However, the comrades can see that there are real problems with the leaders and where the unions are at right now.

77. Crucially, the IS have made a mistaken assumption,

that there is a baseline active rank and file in the unions that we could orientate and build amongst. This might exist in a few workplaces, in the transport sector for example, and we do indeed have important connections and support there. However, the exception proves the rule, in general it is the absence of an active layer that is the main problem. In many unions the bureaucracy organise the structures to keep people out. Essentially this means that currently, there isn't an active layer or a mechanism to really put the leadership under significant pressure.

78. The IS cites the fact of the ICTU backing the recent housing demonstration, as a sign or proof that they can be pressurised. The ICTU backed the recent housing demonstration, true, and every small step should be welcomed. But the IS should not overstate its significance. The majority of the union leaderships do not want a real fight with the government on Housing or other issues; were willing to endorse the October protest in significant measure so as to "put it on their CV"; and refused to back the upcoming December protest. The student unions with far less resources mobilised up to 10 times the numbers on October 3 2018.

79. A few months ago we agreed and discussed a workplace and trade union strategy in all the branches in the South. We also held a special aggregate meeting in Dublin, that emphasised the need to recruit more workers, build a base in some key workplaces and unions, and yes, these meetings were a means to educate all the comrades in the Party as to the crucial role of the organised working class in the struggle for change.

Anti Capitalist & Socialist Agitation & the Central Role of the Working Class

80. As well as the Irish section not orientating to the working class in its abortion work, the IS says we make concessions to current moods, which implies political opportunism to some degree. On the other hand, the IS makes light of the fact that we actually have engaged in anti-capitalist agitation, saying we just limit it to that and/or we don't link it to highlighting the role of the working class, so is of little value. We hope to

illustrate that this is completely imbalanced and inaccurate, and that in our work we have emphasised the issues that are key radicalising factors today. We have not just critiqued capitalism, we have argued for socialism, and crucially we have defended the key role of the working class.

81. We engage a lot in anti-capitalist argumentation consciously as a key way to raise the need for socialist change and the centrality of class. The more convincing an argument is made as to why it will be impossible for capitalism to deal with the issues people face, the more the material necessity for each person to get involved in a collective struggle is clarified. This not only exposes reformist ideas, but raises the urgent need for an organised working-class movement. Unless the nature and inability of capitalism is discussed and understood, it is very difficult for someone to really comprehend how the working class will get active and fight for socialism. A failure to apply this method can descend into an abstract presentation of socialist ideas.

82. The quotes in the IS document give a skewed impression of our approach. From the Socialist Party leaflet from the ‘Stand with Her’ protest in Dublin in March 31 2018:

WHAT’S CAPITALISM GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Capitalism inherited the oppression of women and honed it to a new level. It will never willingly grant full rights to half the population for fear the inequality which the system is based on will be challenged. The objectification of women's bodies and sexuality that is pushed by the beauty, fashion and sex industry make billions in profits annually by pushing old-fashioned gender roles.

This means the feminism of Hillary Clinton and establishment figures like Katherine Zappone is meaningless – because it doesn’t challenge the system.

“A woman’s place is in the revolution” - liberation and the struggle for socialist change

It’s no accident that last year, 82% of all wealth generated went to the richest 1% of the population.

This shows how unequal the world is but also what could be achieved if the wealth and resources were used in a planned way for the benefit of people and the planet.

There needs to be a socialist feminist challenge to capitalism in Ireland and victory on abortion rights can give a huge impetus to fight for such fundamental change.

Tomorrow belongs to those who prepare today

If organised and united, women, workers and the young have the power to overthrow capitalism in Ireland and its history of misogyny and backwardness.

83. And more examples from this Socialist Party leaflet from November 2017 on abortion rights:

a. James Connolly called socialism, ‘the great anti-theft movement’. We stand for a challenge to injustice and wealth inequality and homelessness. We stand for free quality education and healthcare and putting people’s needs and that of the planet before profit.

b. Now is our time. Young people have been the backbone of the movements that propelled Corbyn and Sanders forward in Britain and the US – we need such a mass movement here that breaks with capitalism and institutes real democratic socialist change, including the full separation of Church and State.

Bringing People Closer - Winning New Recruits

84. From a Socialist Party recruitment leaflet & intervention leaflet for ROSA’s Bread and Roses Festival Sept 2017:

The wealth and resources exist on our planet to end poverty and to provide a good living standard for all. But capitalism as a system is concerned solely with the drive for profit for a tiny few, which means that the needs of people and the planet are trampled on. Ridden by economic chaos and political crises, this system offers us only a future of war, inequality and environmental destruction.

If we are to have meaningful change this system must go. It is working-class people who create the wealth in society, but this is being squandered by the 1% elite

who own and control it. We need to build an anti-capitalist and socialist movement of workers, young people, women and LGBTQ people, a movement that fights to take the wealth producing sectors of the economy out of the private ownership of this parasitic minority. On this basis we can invest in affordable homes, decent jobs, a national health service free at the point of use and free education for all.

85. The ROSA programme states that “Feminising the ruling class is not real change. Build a socialist feminist movement to challenge the oppression that stems from the private ownership of wealth. For a mass working-class movement that unites workers, women, LGBTQ people and all oppressed to challenge capitalism’s rule of the 1% super-rich and the destruction of the environment.”

86. On 31 March, 2018, addressing 8,000 on the “Stand With Her Demo” that Ruth and ROSA called, Ruth C talked about 14% pay inequality, unpaid labour of women, and the need for free childcare. RC said that she’s a “a TD, a socialist and Socialist Party member. None of the above “are possible in a system that is profit driven”, she declared. RC went on to say that, “Inequality is the DNA of capitalism and its doing very well promoting rigid gender roles, promoting racism, promoting division between people” and that “Capitalism is honing the level of oppression of women to a new level than before”.

87. In a Socialist Party leaflet from August 2013, we raised the need for “A mass sustained campaign of pressure, rooted in every community and workplace for the availability of free, legal and safe abortion facilities provided through the public health service – for a woman’s right to choose”. The first newsletter of ROSA in 2013 stated:

The hoarding of wealth by the European and global elite must end. We need a mass movement of ordinary working [people], unemployed and young women and men for the public ownership of wealth and resources.

It’s vital that women participate at the front and centre of such a movement ensuring that issues of reproductive rights, equal pay, free childcare, and an

end to the macho culture that permeates capitalism that promotes rape and violence, are all taken up by the movement as a whole – in the tradition of the great socialist and suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst who, in Britain over 100 years ago, campaigned to ensure that the suffragette movement promoted votes for all women and men, not just those who owned property, by linking up with the Labour movement, supporting strikes of male and female workers, promoting women’s rights and issues in the context of the quest to build a movement of all ordinary women and men against the exploitative capitalist system.

88. In trying to concretise the question of linking up anti-austerity and pro-choice struggles, ROSA’s leaflet for 2015’s Pride raised the need for “a left political force that can, in unison with the anti-water charges, anti-austerity struggle, build the basis for a left government that would consciously and fully break the links between the Irish state and the church in all its guises.”

Defending the Working Class

89. There was an infamous incident in 2015 in which a Labour Party Government Minister engaged in scaremongering that the Marriage Equality referendum would be defeated by anti-water charges campaigners who would vote ‘No’ to damage the Government. We made a massive deal of this, defending the working class and using it to ridicule Labour. The quote below is from a Socialist Party article after the Marriage Equality referendum:

a. *Despite these stereotypings of working class people, the highest Yes votes in the country were recorded in the most deprived and neglected working class areas. As reported in the Irish Times for example, in Dublin Coolock voted 88% Yes, Jobstown 87%, the Liberties 88%, Cherry Orchard 90%. In Limerick, Moyross voted 70% Yes and South Hill 72%. The very people mobilised and politicised by the anti-water charge movement went on to register a powerful statement in support of LGBT friends, family and neighbours and for equality and social change. Grainne Healy, chairperson of Marriage Equality and co-director of the main “Yes Equality” campaign herself explained that “When we were out canvassing in areas like Finglas, there was an*

overwhelming Yes. Once we moved into Glasnevin, there would be more resistance. It seemed the houses with two cars and plenty of money were just less open to Yes."

Do These Issues "Put off" Other Sections of the Working Class ?

b. There is a danger that – as a result of the overwhelming turn that has been made to issues relating to women and gender oppression – we could become perceived by a layer of workers for whom that is not the only or primary concern as 'not for them'. This can obviously include layers of male workers and older women, but also young women and non-binary people who – while partly radicalised by their specific oppression – do not consider it to be the most central issue for them. (IS Document).

90. As shown above, the Irish section hasn't made any "overwhelming turn" away from the working class, but the quote from the IS also completely fails to recognise the significance of the change that has taken place in Irish society and in the working class. The victory on 25 May 2018 reflects this and is understood within the working class as being very significant. The fact that it was driven by a youthful movement from below, has been a powerful and inspiring boost for many.

91. From the Socialist Party article "The 8th Repealed-How Yes was won" (6 June 2018):

The yes vote was very strong in urban areas. Most cities had a yes vote of just below or just above 70%. Dublin had nine in the top ten Yes constituencies and Wicklow at 74.26% was the other. The overall Yes percentage in Dublin was 75.5%. In Stoneybatter, which is made up of working class communities, as well as a new younger demographic moving into the area, the vote was reportedly 92%.

The vote was very high among the middle class and working class. The figures point to it being higher in the former, though in the campaign it was clear that the depth of feeling on the issue was strongest in the working class, with working-class women being the beating heart of the revolt.

92. This is completely consistent with the political approach which underpinned all of this work. Below is a quote from the statement produced in the name of the three TDs in the aftermath of the referendum result: (May 26 2018)

It must also be said and said loudly, that once again, as was the case with the water charges movement and the Marriage Equality referendum, the working class was the "secure foundation" as James Connolly once put it, of this enormous social change. Because of lived experience, a sense of solidarity is innate to the working class. It is the force pushing forward progress in this country, as was witnessed during the campaign and will be demonstrated by the size of the votes in working-class communities.....

Real Solidarity

93. The change in the attitudes was also reflected in acts of solidarity. For this year's Pride, a leading organiser of the recent industrial action in Bus Éireann, who has joined Solidarity and is a contact for the Socialist Party, (who is extremely supportive of ROSA), came to Pride dressed in rainbow colours with his own children. Many older workers – affected by the radicalisation of their own children - have progressive attitudes on these questions.

94. Solidarity held a 500-strong Jobstown victory rally 1 July 2017. A young comrade who is a school student spoke at it. In her speech, she focused in on the role of young people in struggle, the impact of the Marriage Equality referendum as a radicalising factor, and the movement for Repeal. A few days later a comrade was intervening on a picket of crane workers and the first comment of a striker was to mention the full name of the young person, and how inspiring she was. Similarly, the young comrade's uncle overheard the two men beside him in a pub speaking about his niece and how brilliant her speech was! There is no evidence of working class people being put off by our ROSA work, rather, the opposite is true.

95. ROSA's mass campaign for a Yes vote received a strong echo. We produced 8,000 posters with a number of different designs and these were widely commented upon as being the most effective of the

whole campaign. They were the only posters to answer the scaremongering of the 'No' side. Our poster, with a photo of Savita was described as "striking in their simplicity and directness" by an Irish Times journalist and had a real impact in the final week.

96. The point about us potentially putting off women and non-binary people who are radicalised by their own oppression but do not see it as central does not add up. It's another example of a serious underestimation of the historic nature of the abortion victory. In any case, we have always in all our propaganda, our interventions, our speeches, raised a multitude of issues; from housing, to environmental destruction, to precarity at work; all the while, raising broader points about challenging capitalism and the type of working-class movement needed to do so.

Part Four: Conclusion & some Questions for the IS

97. We had hoped that this exchange on identity politics and the global women's movement could have been constructive and broader in its scope, going into the nature of the countless developments in many countries and what the perspectives are for this movement in a much fuller way. Hopefully that can still happen at the IEC meeting.

98. Of course a review is an essential part of any such discussion. The work in Ireland undoubtedly has many weaknesses; on abortion, on women's and LGBTQ rights, there are very many things that we could have done better. We will review and try to learn all the lessons in an open discourse in the organisation. That is essential in order for us to be sufficiently prepared for the political events and struggles to come.

99. In a pressurised situation, with a lot at stake, we strove to raise our programme, anti-capitalist and socialist ideas, highlighting the urgent need to challenge the private ownership of wealth and argued for a united working-class struggle as the only way to do so. We did feature the anti-water charges, working-class mass movement and included the trade unions in our argumentation in a balanced way, given the situation in the unions. We have produced an appendix as an answer to the numerous inaccuracies of the IS

document.

100. A defining feature of the IS document is the lack of understanding of how the struggle for abortion rights in Ireland actually unfolded over the last years, or unfortunately of the real nature of our campaigning and building work. Belatedly, after the struggle is over, and won (in large measures by our actions), the IS raise 'concerted' criticisms of our approach. We have no issue with criticism that is based on facts and a balanced assessment of them.

101. However, if this debate results in a more developed discussion on the nature and perspectives for the women's/feminist movement, that will be very purposeful. That is necessary as the situation is clearly moving on as some of the recent developments show - the need for workplace organising to take on sexual harassment and equal pay in particular have been pronounced in the past weeks. This is a very dynamic situation and we need to be politically open to what may happen.

102. The IS document says there could be more movements of women, but particularly where existing rights are attacked or in countries where there is a particular legacy of oppression. In conversation, IS comrades have indicated that the movements seem to have mainly been in Catholic countries. The comrades accept that there is a radicalisation among women, but that it isn't a movement in many states. In our view, all of this, errs on the negative side and isn't consistent with what has happened or what could happen in the next years.

103. These issues need more discussion. They haven't been adequately covered in perspectives material in recent years. In the documents for this IEC, in reality there are just three or four paragraphs but don't flesh out or sufficiently analyse these movements in enough depth. Instead, the material tends to pose them as secondary or the support acts to greater events. Women's rights or struggles can be seen as sectional issues, but we must remind ourselves that women are half the population and a huge portion of the overall working class. Below we quote from paragraph 22 from the IS document.

However, in our view it is not the case that movements relating to women's oppression will be central to struggle in every country in the next period. In addition, in many countries where such movements occur the working-class elements within them can quite quickly become part of broader struggles of the working class.

104. It is difficult to know what is being said here. Generally the paragraph seems to be cautioning, raising that the women's movement won't be central or primary. If that is the main point, we'd ask the IS to outline its rationale for such an assessment? Given the reality of recent events; would a more open attitude to the potential not be more appropriate? But it says, "in many countries where such movements occur", this seems to imply we should expect movements of women. That makes it even more essential for urgent and developed discussions, even special IEC discussions or meetings, so that the international is prepared. If we don't have such discussions, does that reflect we are not taking a serious approach to perspectives or that we have a view that the significance of the women's movements that may occur will be limited?

105. Our view is that the radicalisation among women seems to more universal, global and interconnected. It is not a temporary phase, but a more fundamental shift in consciousness and is deeper, in that it is not the preserve of middle class layers, but is also reflective of a change amongst working class women.

106. Work among the young is and must be a vital and central aspect of the work of every section; that is part of the tradition and DNA of the CWI. Front and centre in our youth work must be taking up the precarious position of the young and the huge increase in their economic exploitation. At the same time, if all sections engage in youth work, it would seem inconceivable that within that youth work we would not take up issues of oppression as this is clearly a part of the radicalisation process amongst the youth, including among working-class youth. Again, all this points to the need for more discussion, including about the possibility that these issues of equality could be quite central.

107. Point 44 of the IS document states, " We think it is a mistake to suggest that the young people who are rebelling against the gender norms of capitalism are automatically or generally the most radical section of society, thereby downgrading the role of other sections of the working class and miseducating those young people." Here two things are being alleged. The first that we elevate a section of youth and the second, that in doing that, we automatically, downgrade the working class.

108. This a strawman, as we never suggested those rebelling against gender norms are automatically the most radical. That is a baseless assertion. However, particularly in the context of the examples given above, we feel this quote raises more questions about the approach of the IS.

109. Why do the comrades counter-pose these young people to the working class? Do the comrades feel those who are impatient for equality for women and gender non conforming people are in general middle class or affected by middle class ideas, or is there a danger of mistaking the self appointed leaders of these movements for the base? We assume the comrades don't rule out that some of these young people while, not automatically assumed, could in fact be some of the most radical, or has that been excluded?

110. It seems to us likely that this movement has deeper roots than previous women's/feminist movements. Instead of coming just after the post war boom, is coming at a time of chronic neoliberal capitalist crisis, part of which is increased exploitation and the further proletarianisation, which can profoundly affect developments.

111. Questions are raised in the IS document about reviewing ROSA and asking if we see it as a model to be followed generally. What approach or tactics sections take to the work needs to be determined on the ground, taking into account the conditions and what our goals and objectives are. The IS talks of twenty people around ROSA now, again unfortunately, we see misrepresentation instead of a political approach. In the last months ROSA in Dublin has had 70, 100 and 150 at different meetings it has organised. Successful,

well attended meetings have also happened in Belfast and in other cities in the South.

112. ROSA is much more than the number who might be at a particular event. ROSA is extremely well known and supported by thousands. It is a reference point, and has a record and reputation. Of course it isn't clear if ROSA will develop with a growing and consistently active membership, but difficulties in getting and maintaining people in activity is a general problem in this period given the complications around political consciousness in general. What is beyond dispute is that ROSA has been essential in fighting on the issues and in building the Party in so many ways over the last years.

113. If, on the basis of further discussions on perspectives for the women's movement, it is felt by sections that there is definite potential, then there clearly would be a basis for a discussion as to whether a specific banner/campaign/organisation will be appropriate. No one would advocate a 'one-size-fits-all' approach, but clearly it would be beneficial for everyone if the lessons from all the sections who are taking initiatives are brought together.

114. We suspect that the IS has a significantly different view of ROSA and its successes to comrades in Ireland. If comrades see ROSA as having limited value, they will not accept as legitimate that the public profile of the party can be diminished when ROSA is being promoted. We are concerned about the profile of the Party too and are taking measures to enhance it. However, we need to be very clear, the Party has been strengthened enormously through the ROSA work.

115. The comrades are correct when they say there were ROSA and Solidarity posters in the referendum but none for the Party. It is possible that we could have produced a run of Party posters at one of two junctures in the campaign and that point will be taken on board.

116. However, it would be completely wrong if comrades concluded that if there were some Party posters that the Party would have grown, or that we did not have a definite plan for how to build during the

referendum. The way the Party was going to grow and in fact did grow, was by having a very high profile in the ROSA campaigns which mobilised hundreds throughout the campaign in different parts of the country. The Party has a very high profile in ROSA. The number of recruits so far is lower than we would like, but there is still a very large supportive periphery around us in ROSA, which we believe can yield significantly more in the months ahead.

117. The IS comrades say that "in our anxiety to recruit" from this work, we are taking shortcuts. For the comrades' information, we have not operated an open policy of recruitment - we didn't during the water charges nor during Repeal - because we are trying to recruit on a good basis. Given the confusion that generally exists, this is appropriate. Here is a breakdown of recruitment in the South this year, at the time of writing:

- 29/35 of recruits in 2018 are women
- 13/35 are workers, including precarious low paid workers, retail, teachers, factory, tech & community workers
- 12/35 are school students, and 9 out of these 12 are from a working class background
- 9/35 are college students (some of whom also part-time workers), the large majority of these students are from a working class background
- 26/35 were active in the referendum campaign before joining the party

There are still challenges to integration and consolidation which we are discussing and trying to wage a campaign on.

Raising a Fundamental Question Mark

118. Incredibly, the IS document says that a "tendency has... developed of some leading Irish comrades seeing all struggles through the prism of the women's movement". What is the basis or evidence for this assertion that intimates that some leading Irish comrades are abandoning a class viewpoint and Marxism? The central idea of the whole IS document is that the Irish section has moved away from a working-class orientation and stand point.

119. All of these points tee up the IS to make a reference at the end to the USFI and their infamous and disastrous writing-off of the working class as the key agent for change. Despite not directly linking the Irish leadership or 'sections' of it, to such a degeneration, inevitably the allusion is enough to raise a big question mark over the Irish comrades. Comrades are free to raise whatever they see fit, but it should be based on real information and facts about the work and the political approach being pursued. It is poor that the IS document isn't based on that method.

120. The Irish section has an important base in the working class, that we have fought tooth and nail for over decades. We are always looking to deepen and activate that base. In the North, the question of working-class unity, most especially in the workplaces and trade unions, but also through youth struggle, is the daily concern of the comrades because of the National Question. The role we have played for decades, both North and South, is to be the most implacable defenders of the working class as an agent for change, as the most powerful and only antidote to all the ills of society. We would hope that what we have documented here, and the experience of comrades of the Irish section, answers the question mark that is being raised over our position.

121. Finally, we have to register that we regret the approach that the IS has adopted in their document. It is based on superficial analysis and judgment from afar. It is full of inaccuracies or misquotes and half information removed from context to such an extent that they confuse rather than clarify, and speculative suggestions that paint a very negative picture. For our part, we will try to answer all points about our approach and hope that the actual discussion at the IEC is constructive and productive. A very important aspect of that discussion will be whether the CWI has engaged in and prepared for the exceptional women's movement that has erupted and whether the CWI is ready for what may come next.

Appendix 1 - IS Document - Answers in Brief to specific points:

122. Housing Demo and Meeting: The IS completely misrepresent our intervention at the recent housing rights demonstration. The IS says a ROSA public meeting was the cutting edge of our intervention. That is simply untrue. They refer to a ROSA meeting entitled 'Housing is a Feminist Issue', and criticised the title. We agree it's not a great title (the whole idea of discussing this issue was precisely to bring in class points to youth who've been radicalised by the Repeal movement) but there was no specific ROSA material distributed at that demonstration. The meeting in question was advertised on social media. So much for it being the cutting edge. At the demonstration, a Solidarity leaflet was distributed, but the main intervention was for the Party, and included a discussion among comrades beforehand regarding the approach; the distribution of a specially produced leaflet and the selling of the paper. We sold 110 papers and got 6 Party names.

123. Socialist Feminist Pamphlet: The IS note there is no reference to the water charges movement in the Socialist Party pamphlet produced for the referendum campaign. We've outlined that water charges are a constant reference point. In fact water charges speakers have spoken at ROSA IWD and Bread and Roses events. However, the IS comrades didn't say that this pamphlet was a selection of old articles from recent few years relating to abortion. In that context, we feel it is imbalanced to portray the absence of a mention of the water charges as being symptomatic of anything.

124. A Socialist Party pamphlet for IWD 2017, which sold up to 1,000 copies, says,

The revolt against water charges of recent years has shown that when working-class people get organised en masse, they are powerful. Initially, the working class got organised in communities to challenge the water charges, a pillar of austerity and the neo-liberal drive...the need for the women's and LGBTQ movement to connect with the working-class and trade union movement.

125. Use of Language: We haven't historically used the phrase 'socialist feminist' in the Irish section. However, a number of years ago we felt it could be a useful term, if filled with the content of our programme. Two words that are mentioned by the IS are generally not words that we feature, namely 'cisnormative' and 'patriarchy'. We consciously shun the use of the word 'patriarchy', though we do refer to capitalism as 'patriarchal' which is different. In the course of the campaign, in the different strands of our campaigning we used trans-inclusive language and this in no way dimmed the impact of our material, nor were there any indications that it put anyone off.

126. Comrades Speaking at the CWI School: It is a poor method for the IS to take out of context a line in LF's lengthy contribution at the European School and we completely dispute their interpretation of it. We feel the approach taken to the contributions of two young comrades, one of whom was a member for four months, is completely imbalanced and implies an overly strict approach in what is a school and forum for comrades. If leading Irish comrades had taken up the mistakes of these young comrades in the commissions, from what were generally positive, if imbalanced and raw contributions, that would have been a real knock to the two comrades. There were ongoing discussions with all the comrades during the school, teasing out issues etc., and those two comrades have also been discussed with since the school on these issues.

127. Not Raising Childcare and Real Choice: We've consistently raised the need for public childcare, housing etc. to ensure working-class families can make the choice to have children and not subsist in poverty, in relation to abortion. The comrades' assessment that this would have been helpful in convincing people unsure of abortion, misses the main point. Once we were in the actual referendum campaign, it was necessary to focus and openly deal with abortion, and not be seen to avoid it. The real situations people face and why this right is a necessity - these questions and the points of the Pro-lifers, needed to be answered directly and that was our focus.

128. The CWI Website: The IS implies that the abortion issue in Ireland has been well covered on the CWI

website and that any deficiencies are as a reflection of the comrades here. The fact is that between Savita Halappanavar's death in October 2012 and September 2017, apart from a short press release, there was one brief article of 250 words. In our experience, it is normal that the comrades get in touch with sections when they want to cover issues they consider important, or take articles from websites of sections and adapt them, but this didn't happen. In September and early December of 2017, we sent in a number of articles on abortion, but they were not featured. Yes, in late December 2017 the issue was covered with an article, and again for IWD 2018, and after the 'Yes' vote, but in our view, two written pieces over an intense five years indicates a political issue.

129. Monthly Public Meetings Solely Based Around Fighting the Oppression of Women or LGBTQ People: Point 16 in the IS document continues with the biased portrayal that everything we do is women or LGBTQ focused. In fact, the information that is presented in a confused way is not a description of the Party, centrally, but that one branch out of five in Dublin, which sometimes holds open branch meetings or public meetings that they publicly advertise. The seven meetings from October 2017 to October 2018 were: 1. Oct. Public meeting on Catalonia; 2. Nov. Open branch meeting on Che Guevara; 3. Feb. Open branch meeting Repeal to Revolution; 4. April. Open branch meeting on Belfast Rape Trial; 5. May. Public meeting on Abortion; 6. July. Public meeting on Why Ireland has been no place for women or LGBTQ (Documentary) and 7. Oct. Public meeting on Housing/Capitalism. So the information relates to one branch and not the Party overall and shows, unsurprisingly, that at the high point of the Repeal movement we featured issues connected to that struggle, but before and after, the topics were different.

Appendix 2 - What we Actually did in Relation to the Unions during the Yes Campaign:

130. We will quickly sum up some of the initiatives we took re the unions.

131. Susan Fitzgerald, organiser for Unite the Union, spoke in an official capacity at a 500-strong launch rally for ROSA's 'Yes' campaign in Liberty Hall - the most well-known trade union venue on the island - she spoke on the role that the unions should play in the struggle and how abortion rights is a worker and trade union issue.

132. Attempts were also made to try to turn Unite's Yes position into something more active and tangible, like getting assistance for the postering of the broad campaign, but this proved difficult to tie down.

133. Comrades active in a number of unions sought to get motions passed in their union branches, and at union conferences to support a Yes vote. This includes a comrade who is on the Youth Committee of Fórsa, the second largest, who really pushed the issue but met a wall of resistance from the bureaucracy who refused to take any position on the referendum.

134. On 18 May, we organised a major press conference that was covered widely in the media. The theme was how abortion was a class issue. It had speakers who were working-class campaigners from communities and a union speaker about how abortion is a workplace issue.

135. ROSA had an article about the abortion pills in a special newsletter produced by some unions to advocate for a 'Yes'. This was a good initiative, but

unfortunately it was not distributed very widely.

136. Not directly union related, but connected; Ruth C wrote officially to the broad 'Yes' campaign to raise a number of criticisms. These included that there was not enough / any working-class voices for the 'Yes' campaign in the media debates, and that it was a serious mistake for the campaign to be associated with Government figures who were implementing a myriad of attacks on workers.

137. Immediately after the 'Yes' victory, ROSA in the North organised a major action to use the victory to force pressure for change, there. This 'Abortion Pill Bus' garnered unprecedented national and international coverage. Illustrating that were there is potential, the Party focuses on the unions; the bus went to the NIPSA conference and was greeted enthusiastically by the delegates and a comrade then spoke for ROSA and received a standing ovation. A motion of support for ROSA and abortion rights campaigners' work was passed. (This action at NIPSA took place after the victory. Using NIPSA as an example in the South, where the actual situation in the unions is different, wouldn't really have been feasible.)

138. Some trans comrades took the initiative to organise Dublin's first Trans Pride march in July. On our request, Unite officially supported the march and there were numerous trade union banners on the demonstration. Approx. 1,000 attended.

139. Both, North and South, we have attempted to connect with workers on the question of challenging sexual harassment in the workplace and trade union activists have been invited to address ROSA meetings on this topic.

Response of Belgian IEC members on IS document on IP

November 20, 2018

1. Rosa Ireland was our main inspiration to start our own public women's work under the Rosa-banner. With its bold initiatives in the Repeal Campaign it assured that the mass mood around abortion rights turned into a mass struggle that won an important victory which inspired women all over the world and provided the International with a superb position to intervene in the mass mood around women's issues that has become an international trend. It showed how the building of mass struggle – putting trust in the working class masses rather than in the “progressiveness” of layers of the establishment - is the way forward to obtain victories, showing how women fighting for change shouldn't trust the bourgeois feminists and their methods of lobbying or their limited demands that always remain within the limits of the capitalist system - including the interests of its establishment – and wouldn't provide real change for the majority of women. The comrades made sure that victory was won, but also, with their bold intervention, that the influence of the bourgeois women's organisations and their divisive ideas was curbed, or at least challenged in a serious way.

2. This victory is that of the Irish section and the work they developed under the banner of Rosa. It was possible on the basis of correct perspectives that a movement around this issue would develop and on the basis of a correct intervention in the mood present among the youth and broad layers of society. In the development of their work they provided important lessons for the work of all sections: an emphasis on action, creating an important inroad to youth on which comrades can build in the years to come. In that way Rosa played, in Ireland, but also – on a much smaller scale – in Belgium, a role similar to that of Blokbuster and Youth Against Racism in the 1990's.

3. At that time the IS played an important role and gave significant attention to this important issue in the youth work of our sections. We were able to tap the mood and play a leading role in the anti-racist movement, through our national sections but also with outstanding international initiatives like the international YRE demonstration of 40.000 on October 24th 1992 and the YRE international camp in 1994. Unfortunately the IS is not playing this same leading

role in this new field of work, despite the big opportunities that occur.

4. We would like to make two concrete proposals on the basis of the opportunities that have arisen after the Cork rape trial and the massive international attention Ruth's intervention in parliament got internationally:

- First to widen or open up the call by Ruth for worldwide protests and strikes on IWD 2019 through an international appeal and campaign by the CWI, in the name of some of our most prominent female public figures as Ruth C (Ireland), Kshama S (US), Lucy R (Germany) and Ana G (Spanish state).

- And secondly to organise an international meeting of at least 3 days on the issue of the women's work of our sections (similar to a meeting that was organised at the end of the 1990s), there we can take time to share the experiences and discuss some of the very important topics and issues of program and approach. Agenda, timing, how wide to mobilise etc. to be further discussed.

5. It was the Irish section that provided comrades internationally with a Marxist analysis of what is identity politics, among others with a pamphlet which the Belgian section translated to use in our Rosa work (<http://rosa.ie/fighting-oppression-marxist-viewfighting-oppression-marxist-viewpoint-point>). Why is it that the IS doesn't mention any of the written material of the Irish section and Rosa, but bases its text on isolated remarks and impressions? And why is that a text of this character is sent to the IEC before elaborated discussions on this issue have taken place with the Irish section or before the section could respond?

6. In point 13 one phrase of Laura's reply at the summer school 2018 is quoted. Making up an argument around a one phrase quote is highly questionable. How are comrades to check if these were her exact words and if she didn't explain and cadre them? Where is the written material that shows

the comrades “overstate” the importance of the referendum victory?

7. The housing meeting called by Rosa is in our eyes a correct move towards the big layers of people who engaged with and around Rosa in the fight around abortion rights. When we intervene in “sectional” movements or with front organisations that are aimed at specific oppressed layers, it is a key task that we orientate them on the broader social issues and on the working class and pull them into the struggles of the working class.

8. Trade union traditions in Belgium are very different from those in Ireland, with a trade union leadership which is just as traitorous, but using different methods. The fact that they organise an overwhelming majority of workers, combined with the fact that there is competition between the two main trade union federations for membership pushes them regularly into action to show they are the most combative. When pressure from the rank and file mounts trade union leaders can also use the method of tiring workers down through a series of ineffective (isolated in one sector/region) action, a tradition which is particularly strong in Wallonia. In Belgium the last years have been years with regular mass trade union demonstrations and strikes, flowing from a continual pressure from the rank and file to act against the constant flow of attacks by the right wing government. Trade union membership remains at a very high level, even though there is widespread discontent about how the leadership misled the fight against the government. The massive trade union action plan of 2014 attracted large layers of young workers to the trade union, which was partly reflected in the social elections of 2016, with shop stewards being elected who got to know the trade union as a fighting organisation instead of a negotiating institution. On top of that both main trade unions have in the last years taken steps to attract more women to the trade union and to take up the question of women’s low wages for instance. Very quickly after the start of the Me Too movement some trade union sectors and shop steward delegations took a number of initiatives to bring the issue of workplace harassment on the agenda. It was therefore quite easy to orientate Rosa on interventions in trade union demonstrations, sometimes just with a leaflet, sometimes with a Rosa delegation carrying slogans as “Women’s

struggle/feminism is also about free public transport with more personnel” or “about decent pensions for all – minimum pension of 1500 euro now”, bringing forward trade union demands as important demands if we want to fight for women’s emancipation. It does in no way mean “we see those working class issues only through the prism of women’s struggle”, it serves to show that women’s main ally is the working class.

9. Rosa’s material is welcomed amongst the trade union basis, not in the least because we are usually the youngest delegation present, opening up opportunities for our trade unionists to start using Rosa and attract more female workers in our periphery. After long years of having had an Equal Pay Day campaign in cooperation with the bourgeois(ified) women’s organisation linked to the Flemish social-democracy, with a program in which rather technical trade union demands were swamped by an overall bourgeois feminist approach, that met with resistance from the rank and file, a discussion in which individual comrades have been intervening since a number of years, last year the socialist trade union put an end to this alliance. Rosa’s program and approach is very attractive to female trade unionists looking for a working class feminism, laying the blame for sexism with the bosses and their system and putting forward important and offensive central trade union demands like a 30-hour workweek, a higher minimum wage and minimum pensions and an end to the witch hunt on the unemployed (which has always touched women and also youth in far higher degrees). Last year we got the support of the Flemish socialist trade union of education for the March 8th demonstrations called against sexism and austerity. This year also the socialist public sector union in Brussels is showing an interest and we’re having a campaign towards the trade unions to get their support for working class feminist action on the March 8th. It shows that the mood around women’s rights can offer opportunities for our party not just for our youth work, but also in the trade union field when the trade unions start playing a role in struggles around women’s issues.

10. We are sure that if such circumstances would exist in Ireland the comrades would take the opportunities this offers to orientate the youth we reached with Rosa on the organised working class, developing similar initiatives as we do. But in the absence of trade union struggles in Ireland orientating Rosa members and

periphery on this important issue of housing is in our eyes a good way to try and do this. We can argue if it wouldn't have been better to make it a joint meeting of the party and Rosa, but we see the logic of using the front organisation that is more broadly known. Nor does the IS state important issues or movements the Irish comrades have not properly intervened in, or have neglected or abandoned, which could justify speaking about a "danger" of losing our important base in the working class. The majority vote in the referendum – with overwhelming majorities in working class areas - was not only made up of women's votes and the mood against sexism is not only present among women. The victory obtained in the Repeal campaign also gives young radicalised layers the confidence to move onto other areas of struggle, which is already shown by the presence on the housing demonstration, and in which the party's approach plays an important role.

11. In the part "global radicalisation of women" the IS states that it is not sure that the Me Too question will lead to movements or be central to it in every country. This is of course true. But in our opinion the mood against sexism is an international phenomenon – developing against the background of an open failure of the neoliberal ideology of individual responsibility, meritocracy and "post-feminism" - and offers opportunities for our sections to build the party by attracting the best working class elements that radicalise around these issues. Every section should at least discuss this developing radicalisation among mostly young working class women and see how it can intervene in it, gain an influence and combat bourgeois and petty bourgeois feminist ideas through offering a socialist feminist alternative and revive or (re)build their youth work on the basis of it. At this point rapidly developing movements around this issue are possible almost everywhere and building Rosa/LyS seems to us to be the best preparation for them. In every field of work we learn to refine and sharpen our program and approach through being active, through being confronted with different class forces on the field and different discussions that may emerge in movements, in that way preparing and positioning ourselves for future battles.

12. In Belgium there has been no mass movement in the streets, but that doesn't take away the fact that it has been in the last years our best option to attract the

widest groups of youth around the party. At different moments the refugee question or more generally racism and the new extreme right, or the environmental issues, have put themselves as important points of discussion and action in our youth work, but sexism and LGBTQI-phobia have remained an important topic and we don't see this changing in the near future. It didn't stop us, each time the opportunity was present, from orientating our youth work towards the working class struggles, including in demo's and visiting picket-lines during strikes. Nevertheless the mood against sexism and LGBTQI-phobia is an important mood against inequality, far more clearly anti-system among broad layers of youth than the anti-racism struggles in the nineties which followed closely after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Even though there's no mass movement it is clear to us that we would've missed important opportunities to build the revolutionary party and its influence if we wouldn't have started to work with the Rosa banner and prioritise these issues in our youth work. Even in Spain, where the comrades have the important instrument of the Student Union in hands, it seems to us that Libres y Combativas puts them in contact with a new layer of young women that are very open to anti-capitalist and socialist ideas, in a way that would not have been possible with the Students Union. It provides the comrades with an instrument that allows them to tap into that consciousness as it is. We'd like socialist consciousness to be more developed, but that is not the case. Instruments like Rosa or LyS allow us to win the ear of these young people and to work with them and win the best of them, at the same time as building our influence among those layers. We think the IS-text doesn't take this new and massive mood sufficiently into account.

13. We also think that where we have the forces to fight for the leadership of this new feminist wave, we have to consider it. Leaving this mass mood in the hands of bourgeois and petty bourgeois organisations and leaders has its own dangers, whereas where we present our socialist feminist approach we get an eager response. The old bourgeois feminism of figures like Hillary Clinton has lost its appeal a long time ago, but if the working class doesn't fight the questions of harassment in the work place and take its place in these movements, its effect can still be highly divisive.

14. In Belgium the last number of years all bourgeois parties have pronounced themselves “feminist”. The establishment putting Belgium forward as a “progressive” nation has been a constant feature since the breaking up of the dominance of the Christian-democratic “people’s” party in 1999. The laws on euthanasia and on same-sex marriage have more recently been followed by the administrative recognition of trans-people. In the same way all established parties have delegations on the Pride, including the conservative Flemish-nationalist NVA. They’ve also almost all got at least one LGBTQI-person in an elected position. In this situation it is even more necessary for a combative working class alternative to be present there to denounce their hypocrisy and to show how their “progressiveness” end when it costs money to the state and to the bosses. At the same time as pushing through “progressive” legislation the witch hunt on the unemployed have pushed large layers of women, but also LGBTQI-youth, into poverty or leaving them dependant on their partners and parents, restricting very harshly the way they can live their lives as they want to. The continual growth of short term contracts leaves them highly vulnerable to losing their jobs in case of pregnancy or in case of their sexual orientation becoming known.

15. The establishment approaches questions like sexism, harassment and violence as “remaining issues” of women’s oppression, not linking it to women’s economic position. Their “solutions” point to individual behaviour and “mentality”. They very regularly use their “feminism” or their LGBTQI-“friendliness” to portray the “superiority” of the European culture over Islam in a racist campaign against immigrant communities and refugees from Muslim countries. They also aim for “equality” for women through blaming men as being selfish when they demand higher wages, their solutions for the low pensions of women all hang on men getting less, “sharing it out”. Their measures limit themselves to the anti-sexism law (which make sexist behaviour/remarks punishable with fines, but only for individuals, not for companies, so the law doesn’t touch sexist publicity), which doesn’t change anything. Even in those countries where the establishment is posing as feminist, the big issues of sexism, low wages in big female sectors (partially) run or financed publicly (health sector, education, new services sectors,...), measures in unemployment benefits that mainly hurt women and young people,

workplace harassment,... together with the general austerity politics that touch women hardest, like the heavy cuts in services and health care, mean that we have a role to play in exposing the class character of these “feminists of the establishment” and showing radicalised youth the link there is between the capitalist system and issues like sexism or LGBTQI-phobia or racism. It was no surprise that through our election campaign in Saint-Gilles the issues in which the Parti Socialiste (the social democratic party that has had an absolute majority in the commune since the second world war) made concessions to our program in just those issues linked to women’s position: in the last two weeks of the campaign they promised the creation of a considerable number of new places in public child care and the introduction of free school meals (two of the “Rosa”-demands in our program), starting with two public primary schools. The present mood, together with our campaign which exposed the empty nature of their “feminism”, made that these were the issues in which they were most under pressure.

16. In the points on “What is a transitional approach to the struggle against women’s oppression?” the IS puts forward some general points of the transitional program: the fact that the program is based on objective reality and not on present consciousness. This doesn’t mean however that we don’t take into account the consciousness of the masses or of specific layers we want to reach, we strive to build a bridge from existing consciousness to the need for socialism, in this case that eradicating sexist ideas can only be obtained by a change in the material conditions of the masses of women and that changing these material conditions can only be done in a complete and definitive way through fighting capitalism and building the working class struggle for socialism. Just quoting one leaflet isn’t sufficient to state that the Irish section doesn’t do this. What about the paper and other material of the Irish section? The fact that only one leaflet is quoted to bring forward such far going conclusions seems to us to show a lack of seriousness.

17. In the same way the remarks of Ruth quoted in the text don’t have to mean what the IS says it does. It can also mean an honest question if there was a mobilisation among young women, if an attempt has

been made to attract these new radicalising women to the event on issues that are on the forefront of the public discussion. We feel it is wilfully interpreting her words in the worst possible way to turn this in a “misunderstanding” about the importance of economic questions for working class women. It is also a very improbable interpretation in view of Ruth’s record of political work, public speeches and statements and the enormous role she played and plays both in the parliament and in the struggles of women and the working class in Ireland. Again these are verbal comments and can’t be checked.

18. We agree that in our women’s work we need to emphasize the need for an end to austerity and put forward demands that effectively would change the lives of the majority of women, like demands on wages, working conditions, services to alleviate women’s double task,... But the mass movement which was built around the abortion issue or the massive reactions we saw in different countries against victim blaming in rape cases couldn’t have been built on these demands, not at this stage in time. The comrades saw the potential of this movement and grabbed it and because of that they were able to effectively take the lead and strengthen the progressive working class elements in the movement. This put us in a position to have a discussion with wide layers about what is necessary to come to more far-reaching victories, to victories in the economic independence of women. The work we do around issues like sexism, that are very present in the heads of young women, is also to attract them, to be able to start working and discussing with them and through all this to convince the best of them and recruit for the party and built our periphery. The massive Repeal campaign, but also the massive demonstrations against violence against women in several countries show - like in fact the anti-racist actions in the nineties - that mass movements, definitely of the youth, are not necessarily directly linked to economic demands. Limiting ourselves to that would mean leaving important layers of radicalised working class youth without answers to the moralist and individualist divisive propaganda of the establishment and the middle class women’s organisations/campaigns.

19. *“In every struggle in which we intervene, we aim to have a transitional approach, linking current demands to the need for socialist revolution, led by the working class.”* We think the longer articles and the pamphlets of Rosa Ireland - or for instance the speeches of comrades on Rosa-activities - do bring forward the need for socialism and the fact that this is a working class struggle. Every Rosa-speaker who spoke in meetings in Belgium - as recent as early November (2018), when Rita spoke for a series of meetings here or Monica who came to our summer camp (June 2018) - spoke along those lines, with not a shred of the petty-bourgeois feminism that is so typical of the USFI approach. The same has to be said about Ruth’s commission on our Socialism Weekend (October 2017) or about Laura’s commission on identity politics on our international women’s day event in March 2016. But in any mass campaign it is impossible and unworkable to describe this in every leaflet we spread. In Blokbuster it was present in the programme (in a general formulation, “socialism” was out of the question in that specific period), in our main slogan “Jobs not racism”, in a number of initiatives we took, but the bulk of BB-material only cited a place, a time and a day together with an appeal to mobilise against the Vlaams Blok. There is a difference in what you put in what instrument. Why is there no mention of the paper and the website, our public interventions, ... If this lack of a transitional program is real, why not show it through the main public faces of the party?

20. We agree with the points on the use of the term “socialist feminism”. We don’t refer to the “soc-fem groups” of the 1970’s which were in many cases distinctively sectarian, putting “socialism” forward but as an abstract idea without an orientation on the working class and with a rhetoric that blamed men in general. But we don’t see anything comparable to that in the work or material of Rosa or of the Irish section. One uncritical quotation of a feminist academic is not sufficient to justify this insinuation, nor do remarks of individual comrades on the summer school. Comrades can make mistakes, young comrades who’ve recently joined can be confused and hold incorrect ideas. How does the IS know however if comrades did or did not

take up an individual discussion with these comrades afterwards?

21. We agree on many of the general points on language made in the IS letter. But again the very few examples mentioned do not justify a letter sent to all sections, full with insinuations that are not backed by material that can actually be checked. The remarks on the We Believe Her movement are tendentious, because of course we don't deny accused men a fair trial and of course we don't believe every allegation made against every man. Does the IS suggest that the Irish comrades do? Where is the material that shows that, the speech that brings this idea forward? The reality is however that the number of non-punished actual rapes far outnumbers the number of false claims. Victim blaming is a reality in a high number of rape cases and the anger against it shows there is among growing layers no confidence in the capitalist justice system. While not putting forward demands to finish with the presumption of innocence in cases of sexual violence, which some petty bourgeois women's organisations do, we need to be sensitive to the genuine anger over the impunity of sexual violence against women that is a reality in many women's lives. Using the progressive elements in this mood/movement, we should show that the way forward for this lies in a program of social demands that diminish women's vulnerability and dependence rather than a witch hunt on men. In the same way there are elements of a "rape culture", put forward by pornography (with a majority of youth watching

pornography) and the "porno-fication" of publicity. Jokes on rape are present in stand-up comedy and just this week a student organisation in Louvain-La-Neuve, organising student baptisms, was faced with claims of sexual humiliation and rape during their baptism. Although these incidents in baptisms have been known for a very long time, it is only now that students feel confident to put forward charges. The university reacted immediately, whereas in the past it always used to brush over such incidents, and minimize them by the idea that "boys will be boys".

22. Rosa was extremely important for our capacity to intervene in the movement/mood and gain an important influence there for socialist ideas, to develop and refine our program and our approach and re-dynamise our youth work. But it also permitted us to win more female members and to activate, consolidate and educate our female members, to give them a role in which their confidence could grow to play a bigger role in building and recruiting for the party. The development of our influence among this important layer of radicalised young women furthermore opened opportunities to develop our work among female workers in the workplaces. It provided us with the possibility of building our authority and the influence of socialist ideas among an important layer of the working class in the preparation for future battles of the whole working class, as the movements of youth and of working class women has been in the past - and is today - an important precursor of major class struggle.

For a Marxist approach to struggles against women's oppression

Document of the Faction 'In Defence of a Working Class Trotskyist CWI/CIT'

January 31st, 2019

1. This document aims to vindicate the analysis and the approach of the CWI in relation to the mass movements in defence of the rights of women that have emerged in numerous countries, and that have become an important axis of the class struggle internationally.

2. As was reflected in the meeting of the IEC last November, strong differences have emerged on this question that, in the opinion of our faction, could indicate a break with a Marxist approach on a theoretical plane and in our practical intervention. The aim of this material is to highlight these divergences, and to call on the whole of the International to fight with determination against the opportunistic trend that the leaders of the Irish section and the leaders of other sections that support them are demonstrating in relation to this key issue.

3. We are convinced that the only way to put an end to gender oppression is to build a revolutionary Marxist party with a programme that defends the central role of the working class in the process of the socialist transformation of society. What does this mean? That we cannot separate the struggle for the liberation of women from a socialist strategy that recognises that gender oppression is an inevitable consequence of class society, with working class and poor women suffering most from that oppression, and that calls for the organisation of women under the programme of socialist revolution.

4. Unfortunately, the leadership of the Irish section has focused on the struggle for women's rights with a very different approach. Their interventions in specific movements, such as the referendum on abortion rights, have lacked a socialist perspective, abandoning the method of transitional demands. In their mass propaganda, produced and distributed as ROSA, they have not raised a Marxist programme, not even highlighting the central role of the working class in the

struggle for women's rights. It is very alarming that, despite the efforts made by the IS to correct this policy, leaders of the Greek, Sweden, American and Belgium sections have uncritically defended this mistaken position.

5. If the IS was to allow this opportunistic retreat without highlighting the need to maintain a class and a Marxist approach, the political foundations of the CWI would be under threat. It's a fact, that the position of the majority of the leadership of the Irish section, and of those who defend them in the IEC, disarms the International programmatically, undermining its ability to intervene in movements as important as this one, does not succeed in understanding the objective causes that have driven the movements, and mis-educates a whole generation of cadres and militants. Uncritically applauding the Irish majority's mistakes would only prepare a bigger disaster for our organisation for the mighty class struggle that are still to come. This alone, aside from the other vital issues that arose at the IEC, justified the formation of a faction.

The IS's approach to the mass movements against women's oppression

6. At the recent IEC meeting, and since, the theme of those who oppose the approach of our faction has been to argue that we have underestimated the scale and importance of the women's movements that have taken place internationally. The Irish NEC majority's reply to the IS on the issue sums it up saying: "A tendency to understate the significance of this development inevitably had an impact on concrete initiatives and interventions or lack thereof." This is also suggested in the document by IEC members Andros Payiatsos (Greece), Vincent Kolo (China) and Bryan Koulouris (USA), on why they disagree with our faction where they say: "The position of the IS, in putting its main emphasis on 'future class battles' in

contrast to this historic battle taking place today, runs a certain risk of overlooking important opportunities round newly radicalized layers present or developing into today's situation."

7. We will deal with this crucial issue of our approach to the 'future class battles' later in this reply, but we entirely refute the allegation that we underestimate the importance of the many struggles against women's oppression that have developed internationally. At the last World Congress we produced a special document and we had a specific discussion on the struggle against women's oppression, rather than on youth work, trade union work or any of the other vital issues we might have discussed, exactly because we recognised the importance of the struggles that have and will develop. For IWD 2018 we had a special drive for the socialist world website, with twelve special articles on the site, again because we saw the importance of orientating towards the growing radicalisation on women's oppression, but without abandoning the defence of a class, socialist and internationalist programme.

8. Linked to this we also refute the argument in the document of the Irish EC majority that: "The IS seem to imply a rigid distinction between those who are radicalised on economic questions and those who are radicalised on social questions." This has been repeated ad-infinitum by the leaders of the 'non-faction faction', that the majority of the IS and the members of the faction believe there is a 'Chinese wall' between economic and social issues, that we are only interested in battles on economic issues and other arguments of this kind. Our International has a long history of campaigning on social questions, including against violence against women. Of course, in doing so, we have linked them with the economic issues with which they are intertwined, with vital importance for the working class and poor. Not to do that would mean to adopt an idealist non-dialectical approach to the class struggle.

9. In their document the Irish NEC majority comrades belittle our reference to the Campaign Against Domestic Violence (CADV), on the grounds that it is "from a quarter of a century ago". This is an attempt to

undermine our tradition and our political conquests. The point, however, is that the CADV is an illustration of the long and proud history of the CWI of mobilising and consciously organising against all kinds of oppression with a correct method of orientation to take the movement forward. In Britain, the CADV successfully fought for the trade union movement to take up the issue of domestic violence, at a time when many – including supposed Marxists – were arguing that it was divisive to take the issue up in the workplaces. At the same time the CADV always linked the campaign against domestic violence to 'economic demands' such as the provision of refuges, grants for women fleeing violence, and mass council housebuilding, which for working class women were and are vital to successfully leaving violent relationships. We also successfully fought for changes in the law particularly relating to women who had killed their violent partners, in response to the daily hell they suffered. Nonetheless, in very difficult objective circumstances, after the collapse of Stalinism, there were limits to how far we were able to use the CADV to raise the level of the workers' movement about how the oppression of women as an intrinsic part of class society. However, this did not lead us to stop explaining that, although violence can affect all women, including women of the ruling class, it is women of the working class who suffer most because of their material conditions of existence. It is the violence of structural unemployment, of the wage gap, of the social cuts, of the domestic tasks that bind us to the home, of poverty, of the sexist prejudices spread by religious institutions and capitalist public opinion in its broader meaning... that oppress working-class women. Therefore, from a Marxist point of view, linking this concrete battle to the workers' global struggle is essential and the reason why is obvious: the working class is the only social force capable of ending capitalism that, in the final analysis, is the cause of the oppression of women. This approach has always led us to maintain a clear and open confrontation with petty-bourgeois feminism, which is nothing more than a reflection of the bourgeois positions in this field.

10. We would like to ask the IEC leaders of the non-faction faction who accused us of "conservatism" and of being incapable of confronting the "new challenges"

of today's women movement: Do you think the CADV showed an international that puts a 'rigid distinction' between those who are radicalised on 'economic' and 'social' questions? Or is it that you think we have since abandoned that stance? Why then does the document on women put by the IS to the 2016 World Congress, which the comrades voted for and raise no criticism of, put a central emphasis on issues relating to violence against women, saying for example: "Even then sexism remains ingrained into the fabric of capitalism. It is now less socially acceptable in many countries to openly state that women are the possessions of men, but this idea – and that it is acceptable to enforce it with violence or the threat of violence – remains deeply embedded and was enshrined in law until relatively recently. Marital rape only became illegal in Britain in 1991, Spanish State in 1992, and Germany in 1997. While no longer legal or openly acceptable, marital rape is still widespread and rarely punished. Nor is rape in general. It is estimated that in Britain only 15% of all rapes are reported to the police, and only 7% of those result in conviction. According to the UN, of all the women killed globally in 2012 almost half were killed by their partners or family members. In contrast, only 6% of killings with male victims were committed by intimate partners or family members."

11. In many sections the CWI has intervened in, and some cases led, campaigns relating to 'social' questions on the specific oppression of women. Prominent among these is, of course, the tremendous role that the comrades in Ireland played in fighting for abortion rights, a historic blow against the Catholic establishment and victory for the working class. Incidentally, the document by AP, VK and BK claims that we challenged the use of the term 'historic' in reference to the referendum victory. This is nonsense.¹ The comrades of the Spanish section, supporters of the faction, have been able to use the lever of the student union (SE) to organise magnificent student action, with more than two million students joining a strike without precedent on the 8 of March, IWD, and against the

¹ The Irish majority tried to suggest that there was some meaning behind our document using the adjective 'tremendous' rather than 'historic'. There was no such meaning. What we are pointing out is that we have to have

Spanish courts shameful light sentencing of the 'wolf pack' rapists. We are wholly in favour of playing this role in the movements that arise around these fundamental issues, linking them to the defence of a socialist and class policy, confronting the petty-bourgeois tendencies of the feminist movement, and using this intervention not only to raise the level of consciousness of the women's movement and expose the class character of many of its self-proclaimed leaders, but also to educate our members and help form the future cadres of the party.

CWI's proud traditions on analysing women's oppression

12. The CWI has developed a worked-out Marxist approach to women's oppression over many decades, as outlined in Christine Thomas' book, 'It doesn't have to be like this' and numerous other materials. Violence against women, gender stereotyping and all the discrimination suffered by women are all rooted in the existence of class society. As part of the formation of the first class societies – based on private property relations – women became the property of individual men within the family unit. Today, thousands of years later, capitalism has created a contradictory situation. It has inherited the institution of the family from previous societies and fashioned it to suit its own interests. At the same time, capitalism itself, particularly in the recent period in the economically developed countries, has tended to undermine the traditional family unit as a result of women being drawn into the workforce. In many countries, women have won large elements of legal equality, and violence against women is no longer openly tolerated. There is greater acceptance of LGBTQ+ rights. Nonetheless, capitalism is incapable of ending the oppression of women or rigid gender norms. Violence against women remains endemic, reflecting deeply ingrained attitudes that women are the possessions of men. In general women remain concentrated in the lowest paying sectors of the economy and take the majority of the burden of caring for the home, the children, the elderly

a sense of proportion, and it is not correct to disregard the fact that sectors of the Irish ruling class stood in favour of recognising this right, trying to assimilate the women's movement for their own benefit.

and the sick – a burden that is increasing considerably as a result of social cuts and austerity.

13. Of course, it is vital that – at each stage – we analyse new developments relating to women’s oppression, and the struggle against it. Nonetheless, we do not accept that there is something fundamentally new in the current wave of radicalisation which invalidates our previous analysis. The reply to the IS by the Irish majority makes repeated and general assertions about the scale and depth of what they describe as ‘the global women’s movement’ which they describe as a ‘fundamental shift in consciousness’. However, they give no coherent explanation of what has caused this fundamental shift in consciousness. Points are raised about ‘an unwillingness to accept inequality or any further vestiges of sexism’ and ‘a new generation of young women are being radicalised by continued women’s and LGBTQ oppression’. Women’s oppression has, of course, existed in different forms since the dawn of class society, but that does not explain why movements are taking place now.

14. In the approach of the Irish majority there is a strong element of idealism, with no serious attempt to draw out the material basis for the current radicalisation. On the contrary, when the IS pointed to, among other factors, the undermining of all the institutions of capitalism as a result of the capitalist crisis, we were ridiculed. Incredibly Kevin McLoughlin, Irish IEC member, said to the Irish NC regarding the referendum that, “when comrades say surely there is an anti-austerity anti-establishment element to the vote in Ireland it really wasn’t the case.” This spurious argument is partially backed up by AP, VK and BK when they say: “IS speakers stressed austerity as a main factor behind the victory in the Irish referendum. While this was an important factor, movements for political change and revolution do not only stem from economic issues. Most that voted for the change did so for the issue itself, the right to abortion.”

15. This completely misunderstands the point we were making. As we explained at the IEC, of course, people voted for abortion rights in the referendum because they supported the right to abortion. We were

attempting to discuss why social attitudes have changed so dramatically on the issue. In 1983 when the vicious anti-abortion eighth amendment was introduced in Southern Ireland almost 67% of voters voted in favour of it. Today a sea change has taken place. Clearly, there are many reasons behind this. This is the case with all movements against women’s oppression. In reality there is not a single global women’s movement, but a worldwide radicalisation, which is expressed in different countries in mass movements, all with their own features, and with the relevant characteristic that, in spite of having a cross-class character, the demands of working women and the anti-capitalist and class slogans have acquired a very important weight. The explanation for this cannot be separated from the devastating effects that the global recession of 2008 has had on millions of workers, not only economically, but also in relation to the instability and social and political polarisation that has been introduced as a consequence of the economic crisis. A reality that hits directly the movement for women’s rights.

16. In our view it is indisputable – both in Ireland and globally – that a decisive aspect of this process of radicalisation of many women and young women of the working class, and of many women coming from the impoverished middle layers, is the crisis of capitalism, which has undermined the hopes that existed in the previous generation that capitalism offered young working and middle class women better prospects than their mothers and grandmothers - with improved education, jobs and opportunities. Today they are more likely to have higher education, but face harder lives in other respects. This has profoundly undermined the authority of all institutions of capitalism -including the media, the church, the courts and the capitalist parties that sustain it- leaving them less able to influence social attitudes and events. The call in the Spanish State for a general labour strike on March 8, 2018 and again this year, reflects this in a very specific way, and confirms our analysis: it is impossible to understand the current women’s movement if we separate it from the current economic, social and political crisis of capitalism.

17. The reality of life for working class women in this era contrasts sharply with their expectations. Improved

educational opportunities and the large increase in the number of women in the workforce in many countries – a particularly steep increase in Ireland – have given working women and working young women more confidence. At the same time, the gains won by the workers’ and women’s movement in the previous era have raised women’s expectations of equality. The fact that, under the pressure of those movements, large sections of the capitalist classes worldwide proclaim that they stand for equality also gives more confidence to challenge the very different reality.

18. The Irish reply to the IS asserts that we argue: “there could be more movements of women, but particularly where existing rights are attacked or in countries with a particular legacy of oppression. In conversation IS comrades have indicated that the movements seem to have mainly been in Catholic countries.” It is clear in Ireland that the openly reactionary backward character of the Irish capitalist state, intertwined with the Catholic Church is an important factor. The deep felt accumulated anger at the Catholic Church for its crimes against working class women in particular is undoubtedly a major radicalising factor in Irish society. The IS does not, however suggest, that movements on women’s oppression are likely only in Catholic countries. On the contrary, in the many countries where regimes implement openly reactionary politics towards women, often on religious grounds, mass movements of women are on the cards. So too will we see movements in countries where new attacks on women are being launched as capitalist politicians try to increase their social base, as with Trump’s attacks on abortion in the US. And, of course, significant movements can also develop in other countries around labour exploitation and harassment of women, as indicated, for example, by the Google walkouts.

19. The Irish majority argues that the current women’s movement has ‘deeper roots than the previous ‘feminist movements’. There is undoubtedly a rage that exists against the system, and in some of the countries where these mass mobilisations have taken place the demands have an important class content, as is the case in the Spanish State. But we also have to have a balanced analysis. The movements of the

women that are developing today also reflect the general difficulties of the period, and the low level of working-class organisation and of socialist consciousness. The Russian revolution came within the time frame of the first wave of feminism and France 1968 in the second. We do not accept the argument of petit-bourgeois feminists like Hester Eisenstein who is uncritically quoted in the Irish comrades ‘Socialist Feminism’ pamphlet as saying that: “it took the nineteenth and twentieth century’s women’s movements to claim the rights of women as full citizens”. Eisenstein’s statement entirely discounts the role played by the workers’ movement and revolutions. This is typical in the discourse of petty-bourgeois feminism, consciously hiding the fact that it was the socialist and Marxist movement that wrote on its flag, before any other, the struggle for full rights of working-class women and for their emancipation. From the beginning, the feminist movement was divided on ideological and class lines, and Marxism, despite the falsifications of petty-bourgeois feminists and not least those belonging to the Mandeliste current, waged a constant struggle to organise women with the only consistent programme: that of the socialist revolution. We need the International as a whole to study profoundly the contributions of the great Marxists and the contributions of the theoreticians of revolutionary socialist feminism, and to stop quoting these petty bourgeois theoreticians with such superficiality. As we have insisted, our policy also aims to educate the members and the cadres, especially our female comrades who intervene in this movement and suffer the ideological pressures of these sectors, and not to confuse them with the prejudices of our adversaries.

20. Moreover while the huge, accumulated anger against the existing order is reflecting in movements against women’s oppression, our task is to actively put the case to working women and young working women and the impoverished middle classes, and to young workers and workers who participate with them in these movements, that ending gender oppression is inextricably linked to the overthrow of capitalism. It is a mistake to intervene in these movements without putting the focus on the ideological battle against petit-bourgeois feminism, which in many countries continues to have a leading position within the

movements, and prevents the development of a class and revolutionary consciousness among women who participate in them. Petit-bourgeois feminism acts in the same way as the reformist bureaucracy in the unions and the workers' parties. To bow our heads before it is a serious mistake, and more serious still to make political concessions, even if they are justified as a way 'to connect' with the general mood. We must adopt the same fighting attitude that we have in the workers' movement in the women's movement. We have to denounce openly and without shame the sectors of the capitalist class, and of the establishment parties, which claim to be 'fighters' for the equality of women. And in relation to other 'radical' sectors of these movements, who see themselves as anti-capitalist but refuse to recognise the need to end capitalism and the central role of the working class to achieve this task, we need to be patient and friendly but very clear in our criticism. Our task is not to mimic them, but to differentiate on the basis of solid arguments and a non-opportunist revolutionary practice.

21. We must boldly link the struggle against gender oppression to the need for the socialist transformation of society and highlight the central role of the working class in achieving this objective. Unfortunately, instead of doing this, the Irish majority has made important and mistaken concessions, adapting to the prejudices and the level of consciousness existing in the movement to justify not putting forward a socialist programme in their mass work.

Differences not on whether to intervene – but how

22. Our differences with the Irish majority leadership lie not in whether it is correct to instigate, to intervene in, and to fight for the leadership of movements against gender oppression, but in how we intervene in them, particularly how we use a method of transitional demands to raise the consciousness of those layers we can reach. In addition we believe, on the basis of the Irish NEC majority's reply to us, and the discussion that took place at the IEC, that we have a different estimation of the role of women's movements in the transformation of society. As we explain later this, is a

crucial issue from which other issues flow.

23. At every stage the IS majority has attempted to pursue discussion on these issues with the Irish leadership. This proved difficult prior to the IEC, as they have repeatedly prioritised the discussion on the confidential issue, to the exclusion of starting the debate on women and identity politics. The IS first wrote to the comrades asking for a meeting that included discussion on women and identity politics on 31 August, 2018. The IS majority finally had an initial discussion at the Irish NC on 17 November, 2018, just one week before the IEC.

24. In our view it is not only the Irish majority who have tried to avoid a serious discussion on these issues, but also the comrades of the IEC who have organised in support of the non-faction faction. Within the IS the dispute with DB on these issues began with his reluctance that the IS write to the Irish NEC to ask for discussion on their approach. In AP, VK, and BK's document disagreeing with the faction they say of the IEC meeting that regarding movements against women's oppression, "The need for a bold working class, socialist approach in our work in these movements, distinguishing our class struggle feminism from the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois leadership of these movements, and emphasising the united struggle of the working class for socialist change, was not questioned by any comrade in the discussion." We totally reject this claim.

25. The Irish NEC majority reply shows that this is not the approach the comrades took to the referendum campaign or are defending in its aftermath. In part one of their reply 'The Irish Section and Identity Politics' the comrades described how they clashed with supporters of identity politics in the abortion referendum campaign, but they can only give one single example of this: the clashes that took place over our tactics on the abortion pill. We accept that those tactics played a role in the campaign. However, tactics of this kind do not in themselves do anything to politically challenge the ideas of the petit-bourgeois feminists.

26. Nor does this type of militant tactic, which inevitably is only carried out by a small minority, act to

encourage mass participation of the working class and the youth in the struggle for abortion rights. A referendum, which is an electoral campaign, implies inevitably a lower level of struggle compared, for example, to mass strikes, or even demonstrations. This does not make it less important for us to participate in referendum campaigns, but it does make it vital that we raise demands that go beyond voting and point towards the need for mass working-class action. The abortion pill tactic does nothing to encourage this. Such a tactic can be a useful adjunct to our central tasks, but not more than that. It certainly did not – and how could it? - ‘emphasise the united struggle of the working class for socialist change’.

27. Nor did the comrades do this in the material they produced during the referendum campaign, particularly in the mass propaganda produced to be used to campaign for a ‘yes’ vote. In their reply to the IS the comrades explain that: “Substantial resources and the party itself was only directed into ROSA in the first six months of 2018, in the run up to the referendum itself” but it is particularly what the comrades did and didn’t do during this period, in the run up to and during the referendum campaign, which alarmed the IS and led to it asking for discussion with the comrades on the issues.

28. In their reply to the IS the comrades give quotes from material they have produced from as far back as 2013, but only one from a 2018 leaflet, which is not related to the abortion referendum. They do not quote from any of the ROSA material produced for the referendum campaign because it would not have backed up their assertion that they raised socialist ideas during the campaign. There may have been individual Socialist Party leaflets produced at local level during the campaign. However, it is indisputable that all of the mass produced material during the campaign was in the name of ROSA. Prior to the referendum there were also mass produced Solidarity newsletters, delivered to households in our constituencies, which dealt with the referendum but this went no further, programmatically, than the ROSA material.

29. The point we are making is that huge layers of workers and young people were politicised around the

issue of abortion during the referendum campaign and we – particularly as a result of the TD’s profile but also to some extent ROSA’s – had an opportunity to intervene defending the socialist programme and the method of transitional demands to raise the class consciousness of those we could reach. In our view the comrades failed to do that. It does not answer our charge that a major opportunity was missed in the mass work done around the referendum campaign to point out that some longer, more rounded, material was produced in pamphlets or websites, because this was only aimed at a much smaller layer. We would argue that at least a significant part of the mass material should have been produced in the name of the Socialist Party; it was a campaign that focused the political attention of the masses. Of course, this was not done, but also the material produced as ROSA suffered from a very important programmatic weakness. We attach the main ROSA leaflet that was used during the referendum to the end of this document for information. As you will see it talks about how ‘young people, in particular, have the power to determine the outcome of this referendum and really make history’ and it talks about how winning abortion rights ‘will empower all those who are fighting economic and social inequality’. It does not, however, make any reference to the working class and the role it could play in this battle, or to the oppression that women suffer under capitalism, and neither links abortion rights to the fight against cuts and austerity, and of course, does not mention the need to organise youth and women of the working class to fight for socialism. This was the case in all of the mass material. ROSA is a banner which we initiated and lead, with a limited layer consistently active beyond our ranks. There was nothing to prevent us openly putting the socialist programme of our party in ROSA material.

30. The Greek EC resolution on the crisis says that, “ROSA’s 15 point programme is a clear class-oriented programme”. In fact, it falls far short of this. It is quite limited, talking of how “people power movements are key to social change”. The furthest it goes is in the final demand which concludes, “For a mass movement of women, workers and all the oppressed to challenge capitalism’s rule of the 1% super-rich”. However, even this limited programme was not included in the mass-

produced ROSA material during the referendum.

31. In paragraph 127 of their reply document, the comrades justify their approach in not raising economic demands, not even guaranteed free healthcare for all, linked to giving women a real choice when and whether to have children, saying:

“We’ve consistently raised the need for public childcare, housing etc, to ensure working-class families can make the choice to have children and not subsist in poverty, in relation to abortion. The comrades’ assessment that this would have been helpful in convincing people unsure of abortion, misses the main point. Once we were in the actual referendum campaign, it was necessary to focus and openly deal with abortion, and not to be seen to avoid it. The real situation people face and why this right is a necessity – these questions and the points of the pro-lifers, needed to be answered directly and this was our focus.”

32. It is clear that it was essential to argue for the right to abortion as the central point in our referendum propaganda. However, we think it is completely wrong to refuse to link this to demands on pay, housing, childcare, family leave, the fight against cuts, and the defence of the socialist transformation of society. Not only could this have helped to win some who were unsure on abortion, demonstrating that it is us – and not the reactionary anti-abortion campaigners – who actually fight to give children a decent life, it would also have played a vital role in exposing the pro-capitalist politicians who had cynically come behind the call for abortion rights, but were and are presiding over a devastating housing crisis, low pay and astronomical childcare costs (an average of over €1000 a month in Dublin for example). By limiting themselves to issues directly related to abortion alone, the comrades were tending to reflect the existing mood of a radicalised layer, rather than connecting with it but then – via our programme – going further raising their political perspective. Of course, we understand that during a referendum campaign for a measure that could make a real difference to millions of women’s lives there was bound to be considerable pressure to limit ourselves just to the immediate question on the ballot paper.

Our role, however, is not to concede to that but to explain how, by raising broader demands, we could not only improve the prospects of winning the referendum, but prepare the ground for future struggles.

Anti-capitalist propaganda and a transitional approach

33. In the Belgian IEC members document, written to defend the Irish majority, they suggest that the IS has no evidence that the Irish comrades are not sufficiently using a transitional approach in their work, arguing that one leaflet is not evidence of this. That of course is true but, unfortunately, it is clear from the Irish comrades reply, from their argumentation in the debates, and from numerous material, that our concerns were fully justified. We agree that every section will have produced poor leaflets and articles at different points which they would not wish to stand over. The problem is when it is not a question of this or that individual mistake, but when individual mistakes cohere into a trend, which the comrades are not prepared to honestly assess and correct but instead defend. This is the approach taken in the Irish comrades’ reply. In paragraph 81 of their document, for example, the Irish majority say: “We engage in a lot of anti-capitalist argumentation consciously as a key way to raise the need for socialist change and the centrality of class. The more convincing an argument is made as to why it will be impossible to deal with the issues people face, the more the material necessity of each person getting involved in a collective struggle is clarified. This not only exposes reformist ideas, but raises the urgent need for an organised working-class movement.”

34. In fact, the mass produced material for the referendum campaign certainly did not include ‘a lot of anti-capitalist argumentation’. The most that was included was in the ROSA leaflet produced prior to the referendum campaign saying that there needed to be “a socialist feminist challenge to the capitalist establishment and this inherently unjust system”. This reflects a tendency to limit even anti-capitalist agitation to leaflets aimed more at the activist layer, rather than the mass. In addition, even in the

comrades anti-capitalist agitation there is a worrying tendency to pose issues in a diffuse way which does not sufficiently point in the direction of the socialist transformation of society. In the quotes the comrades give in their reply as positive examples of their material, for example, they four times refer to 'challenging' the capitalist system, a phrase that is open to the interpretation of 'standing up to' or 'reforming' capitalism rather than replacing it. There is also a tendency to talk about neo-liberal capitalism, or even just neo-liberalism (although this is not evident in the quotes given in the comrades' reply) which again can be interpreted to mean that it is only neo-liberal capitalism we are opposed to.

35. However, even if the anti-capitalist argumentation of the comrades had been more extensive and better, it is simply not true that it would constitute, "a key way to raise the need for socialist change and the centrality of class". Many of those involved in the anti-abortion struggle, including some petit-bourgeois feminists, would consider themselves 'anti-capitalist' in a broad sense but would either have no conception of, or would disagree with, "the need for socialist change and the centrality of class".

What is a transitional approach?

36. The CWI has an excellent record of adopting a transitional approach unlike many other supposedly Trotskyist forces. Such forces have either continued to repeat, as if by rote, demands from the programme put forward by Trotsky in 1938, without taking into account the concrete situation we face today, or – in the case of the SWP/IST, in particular – arguing that it is not relevant today and instead putting forward a 'minimum and maximum' approach – with minimum day to day demands reflecting today's consciousness and then, separately - when appealing to a narrow audience – calls for revolution: with no link between the two. Unfortunately, in the Irish comrades' material there seems to be a sharpened drift towards the latter approach. They put forward a very limited programme, as our platform explains, in the 2016 election campaign, and in much of the Solidarity material produced since. It is significant that the Southern Irish paper has no 'what we stand for' section, or similar list

of demands.

37. In this reply, however, we want to deal in particular with the comrades' failure to apply a transitional method in the abortion referendum and in other work relating to gender oppression. We recognise that on issues related to violence against women, but also regarding to the lack of reproductive rights and the right to abortion, there are some on the reformist left that insist on putting the emphasis on a vague "backward culture" and circumscribe their criticism to specific reactionary institutions, such as the Catholic Church, but without questioning their economic and political power, and in key areas such as education. This is also the approach of the sections of the capitalist class who claim to be fighting for the rights of women. For this reason we consider that it is absolutely vital to take sides and participate in these important issues, but do so defending a programme and demands that help those who are listening to us to draw conclusions about capitalism's responsibility for these ills, and the need for socialism. Vague statements about anti-capitalism or socialism, with no programmatic link to the immediate issues, do not in themselves achieve this.

38. For example, in November 2018 the Irish comrades received widespread publicity following Ruth Coppinger's underwear protest in the Dail (Irish parliament) against victim blaming in the courts in cases of rape or sexual assault. This was an important opportunity to raise aspects of our programme on the capitalist state. However, in the article published on the issue on the Irish party website (15 November, 2018) only one demand relating to the justice system was raised: "This movement must absolutely demand and fight for changes such as compulsory training for judges and juries in cases of sexual violence and education about consent in schools." Of course, we are the most consistent fighters for sex education in schools and for putting an end to religious obscurantism in schools. But talking about the education of judges in a "gender perspective", as the social democratic and petty bourgeois feminist leaders do in all countries, is not our programme. Do we think that this proposed training would change the class character of the legal system, or the role of judges in

representing the interests of the ruling elite? And training by whom? More representatives of the ruling class? There is nothing in this demand to clearly differentiate our approach from that of the Blairite Labour MPs in Britain, for example, who are also campaigning against victim blaming in the courts but whose solution is to abolish juries because they are 'prejudiced'. We are not dealing with a minor issue, but with a fundamental political difference in our programme for combatting violence against women and the institutions that protect it. This opportunistic drift must be corrected. If we want to propose measures on the judiciary, we must be concrete, and demand the immediate expulsion from the judicial system of those judges who adopt sentences that criminalise women, the election of judges and their submission to democratic control by the working class. We say exactly the same thing about the educational system: no religion in the education system, free public, democratic and secular quality education from children's education to university. The article does have a general sentence concluding it: "We need to build a movement of women, young and LGBTQ people and all sections of the working class around an anti-capitalist and socialist-feminist programme which challenges this system and all the injustices it perpetuates." This in no way, however, compensates for the lack of transitional demands on the concrete issues posed.

39. Some comrades have suggested there is no difference between the approach taken on this issue by comrades in the Spanish state and in Ireland. This is not the case. For example Libras y Combativas' (LyC) website article on the Wolfpack judgement: "This case is not an isolated case of the guilt of a judge or judge who does not have enough gender training as they pretend to make us believe. It is one more example of how justice is contingent on the interests of the capitalists." And LyC demands call for the expulsion of all judges and removal of police officers responsible for such victim blaming judgements.

40. This links to the questions the IS raised in our initial statement on language and terminology. Of course we fully support trying to reach young people who are radicalised by their anger against sexism and sexist

violence, but in doing so our role is to point them towards the responsibility of class society and the central role of the working class in ending it. To support the essence of a movement does not mean we have to take up and repeat all of its slogans. That is why we argued that, "We should use terms like misogyny and patriarchy with care because they do not aid us in a theoretical understanding of the roots of women's oppression" and went on to say that, in general, we recognise that what language we use is not fixed but that, "at every stage we have to use language which is scientifically correct and takes the consciousness of our audience forward, which reaches out to a layer who are radicalised on a particular issue, but does not exclude sections for whom that issue is not central." Clearly this is task, as we explained, is bound to vary from country to country. What is central for us is not what specific phrases we use but that we do not simply reflect the demands of those currently radicalised but developing them further.

41. Regarding Ireland we explained that we were concerned that, "it seems to have become commonplace to use terms which, while they might be understood among young feminist activists, can be off-putting or easily misinterpreted by broader sections of the working class such as 'cis-normative', 'toxic masculinity' and even 'rape culture'. On the latter we did not say it should not be used in any circumstances, but made the point that we should be careful how we use it "so as not to be seen to be implying that all, or a majority of men are potential rapists" or putting the blame for sexual violence on a vague 'culture' rather than capitalism and the social and economic relations of oppression that it generates. There is a danger of this, for example, in the ROSA leaflet the comrades produced for intervening in the March 2018 rape trial protests which says: "new generation of women and young people will not stand for victim blaming or a toxic macho culture that perpetuates sexism and gender based violence." Our job is to draw out how 'macho culture' is a reflection of class society. At the IEC the comrades played down the degree they use the kind of language we criticised. However, the experience of the IS comrades who attended the Irish NC, which discussed identity politics, was of leading NC members defending the need to use language like

'toxic masculinity' and 'hetero-normative'. When one NC member argued that anyone who was put off by the language should not be considered a potential party member no one disagreed. This is a mistaken concession to the jargon of petty-bourgeois feminism, and it has nothing to do with a class position. If we regularly use language of this kind, alien to Marxism, and that of course is neither used nor accepted by large sections of the working class we will certainly alienate potential members, not necessarily because they disagree, but because our organisation feels like it is 'not for them'.

Transitional demands, the abortion movement and the trade unions

42. In the comrades reply they show a total lack of understanding of the points the IS made relating to the need to raise demands turning ourselves towards the organised working class. It is incredible that AP, VK and BK can state in their document that the, "Irish comrades replied to these specific points, showing the work that had been done in these respects in the campaign". The Irish comrades give some, limited examples of trade union work done, including moving some resolutions, during the referendum campaign, but their reply to the IS tries to put a political case against orientation to the trade unions.

43. The faction has already made the central points on the trade unions in our platform, and will write further material on it elsewhere. In this document we think it is necessary to highlight the response the comrades gave to our raising the potential role of the organised working class. The majority of the Irish leadership wrote:

"Such a campaign would have gotten bogged down in bureaucracy, and opposition by some to a Yes stance and in demands to tone down discussion on

the use of abortion pills and the demand for full abortion rights. Both of these were crucial if we were to force acceptance of 12 weeks on request and in winning the Yes vote in the referendum. Put simply, the unions were not a mechanism to have a broad impact around a strong pro-choice position as they were behind the general population on the issue. Such an approach would have used up a lot of energy and resources needed for the main lines of battle."

44. What does this mean? The IS was not suggesting that we retreat one iota from our programme on abortion rights, but that we put demands on the union leaders to also fight for full abortion rights. As the IS explained, this was our approach in Britain in the anti-poll tax movement, where we combined building an 18 million strong non-payment campaign completely outside of the official structures, with putting demands on the trade unions to take a fighting stance. The comrades say that "the unions" were "way behind the general population on the issue" of abortion rights. We assume they mean the union leaders rather than their members. We understand that the trade union federation ICTU, and many trade unions, did have a position in favour of repealing the eighth amendment, but were not clear on standing for, and certainly not on campaigning for, full abortion rights. Surely then this was an important opportunity to expose the rottenness of the union leaders and to exert pressure on them. This would have allowed us to raise a programme which pointed the way towards the working class playing a greater and more collective role than voting, as individuals, in the referendum. It would have educated the radical youth we have around us on the potential role of the working class. This was the approach of the comrades in the Spanish state, who were able to use the Student Union and LyC to call strike action on the 8 of March (IWD) 2018 and again this year, and then use it as a lever to demand union leaders to do the same.² This could have been done by

² LyC publicly appears as a platform created by Revolutionary Left and the Student Union. This is part of its last public statement on the websites, which will be published in the party's newspaper of February: MARCH 8 24-HOUR FEMINIST GENERAL STRIKE
<http://www.libresycombativas.net/index.php/historia->

[nuestra-lucha/264-8-de-marzo-huelga-general-feminista-de-24-horas](http://www.libresycombativas.net/index.php/historia-nuestra-lucha/264-8-de-marzo-huelga-general-feminista-de-24-horas): "...That's why, LyC together with the Students Union (SE) and Revolutionary Left (IR), call all the youth to the general student strike this 8 March, and we demand from CCOO and UGT a 24-hour general labour strike. What we need is the unity of all workers, of all youth, paralyzing all

raising demands on the unions, and then taking them to the workers. The lack of union structures would not have prevented workplace petitions and meetings, for example.

45. The Irish majority criticise the IS, saying our implication is that putting demands on the trade unions, "should have been an important part of the campaign". How much time is spent doing such work is primarily a tactical question, which we had formed no definite judgement on. We did, however, think it should have been a politically important part of the campaign. For Marxists the central role of the working class in changing society is fundamental. This central role it is related to the working class' relationship to the means of production. It is in the workplace – first and foremost – that the working class comes into conflict with the capitalists. This does not mean that other forms of protest – including elections and community struggles are not also very important – but it is vital that a revolutionary party has an orientation towards the workplaces. It is essential that even small CWI sections, that are assembling the initial cadre by concentrating almost entirely on youth work, still put demands on the trade unions to educate the youth we are winning, as well as beginning to give those youth a vital practical education in intervening in workers' struggles and building in the workplaces.

46. Even where the unions appear completely empty we have to attempt work to bring around us the most fighting elements in a struggle to transform the unions. This can, in this period, involve all kinds of flexible

economic and social activity in defence of women's rights. We don't want symbolic stoppages of 10 minutes, nor feminist symbolic actions by those who accept austerity policies but then on 8M appear with a purple ribbon on their lapel. It is necessary to put the maximum pressure on the government of the Socialist Party so that our demands become reality and make it very clear to the Right that we are not going to take a single step back. The general strike is the most effective method of struggle to prove our true power. Also, as happened last March 8, general strikes in workplaces and schools will unmask those false feminists who benefit from sexist oppression. We refer to the businesswomen who increase their profits exploiting and discriminating against working women; to bankers like Ms. Botín (Santander Bank), who evict families that include

tactics. Our general approach is to fight to transform the existing unions because, despite the huge obstacle at the top, they remain in most countries the biggest mass workers' organisations and are based in workplaces. As part of that general approach, however, there can be circumstances where we – along with others – fight to found new unions. What is excluded is that we have no serious or consistent orientation towards the workplaces. This, however, has been the approach of the leadership in Southern Ireland over a whole period. What they have described as an element of an 'open turn' away from the unions at this stage is a serious mistake.

47. However rotten the leaders of the unions, in Ireland as in many countries, the unions can be forced to organise action – as is being shown by the nurses' and midwives' strike due to take place in Ireland. Previous to that there have also been important strikes in transport, retail and other sectors. We cannot stand aside and wait for a change to take place in the unions: we have to work to organise the most militant and determined elements in the workplaces in order to prepare for future battles. We believe the failure to do this systematically, particularly in Southern Ireland where we have no organised union caucuses, with, at most, occasional limited meetings of comrades in the unions, is miseducating our younger cadre, not least about their role in their own workplaces. That is why we do not believe that the propaganda of ROSA calling for a "global feminist revolt" for this 8 March, is the best way to address this issue on the trade union front. Where there is potential for mass action on 8 March

thousands of single and separated mothers, but advocate a "transversal" and elite feminism; to the deputies, mayors and ministers of the regime of '78, who shed crocodile tears while applying cuts that impoverish the majority and, especially, women. The battle for our emancipation is a revolutionary, class and internationalist battle. To free ourselves from our chains needs ending the root of the problem, capitalism, and fight for the socialist transformation of society. Only then, we will be able to live free, conquering equality and ending with any form of class, gender or race oppression. (At the end of the article, there is a complete program of transitional demands)." Comrades can visit the LyC website, which maintains permanent links to the websites of Revolutionary Left and the SE, and read their most significant articles.

we need clear and powerful propaganda from the Party towards the trade unions and workplaces, in which we advocate organising strikes and demonstrations on 8 March and the formation of action committees, of female and male workers, to fight for fundamental demands: against wage inequality and decent salaries for all, against labour and sexual harassment in the workplaces, for the reconciliation of family and working life, for nursery schools, kindergartens, decent housing. This is the right approach, rather than concentrating on 'bringing Metoo to the workplaces' via organising anonymous complaints. The Irish party with its TDs and its militant forces, has the obligation and the possibility to begin to build an alternative to the union bureaucracy in the struggle for the rights of working women.

48. The rotten role of the trade union leaders, and the relative absence of democratic structures and activists, are not peculiar to Ireland but exist to one degree or another in many countries. The unions in the Spanish state, for example, are among the worst in Europe but the comrades still put demands on their militant layers demanding the leadership of the unions fight and stop their policy of social peace, without the advantage of three TDs whose authority could be used to aid this task. Even if in Ireland there are very limited numbers of workers active in the union structures, there are clearly larger numbers who get active during strikes. Not only is union density in Southern Ireland slightly higher than Britain, but over the last five years around twice as many workers (per head of population) have been involved in strike action.

What was the character of the movement for abortion rights?

49. AP, VK and BK's statement in defence of the Irish majority says that the IS, "described the struggle for abortion rights as a "cross-class" movement in contrast to a working class movement which formally speaking is correct. However, other comrades replied showing similarities with other movements and phenomena: climate, anti-war, opposition to the European Union, LGBT+, democracy, anti-racism, refugees and more." There is an implication here that, by making the very obvious point that the movement for abortion rights

was a cross-class movement, we were diminishing its importance. This was not at all the case. Speaking for the IS Hannah Sell made the point that no movement under capitalism is a chemically-pure working class movement, there are always, to a greater or lesser extent, different class pressures exerted on a movement. Nonetheless, she argued, whereas the anti-poll tax movement in Britain, or the anti-water charges movement in Ireland, were predominantly working class movements, other movements like the abortion rights movement in Ireland, or the global anti-war movement in 2003, are more clearly cross class movements, with the petit bourgeois, and even sections of the bourgeois attempting to put themselves in the leadership of them. A number of the self-appointed leaders of the abortion movement, for example, are now standing as candidates for Fine Gael, and Varadkar is attempting to pose as a champion of women's rights. By the time of the referendum, even Fianna Fail was forced to formally support Repeal, although a majority of its TDs did not. The Irish comrades own initial balance sheet of the referendum campaign, "The 8th repealed-how yes was won", pointed out that: "The vote was very high among the middle class and working class. The figures point to it being higher among the former, though in the campaign it was clear that the depth of feeling on the issue was strongest in the working class."

50. We raised the cross-class character of the movement not to lessen its importance but to emphasise the need to put a clear class programme and to attempt to expose the role of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois elements of the leadership. It was necessary for us to make these self-evident points because the Irish majority reply to the IS stated: "The abortion rights struggle in Ireland also took place outside the union structures, but that doesn't mean it was not a working class struggle." Clearly it was a struggle which was of vital importance to working class people who voted for abortion rights, but it was a struggle which involved sections of all classes. An objective and realistic assessment of the character of a movement is a vital prerequisite for intervening in it effectively. The Irish majority comrades repeatedly talk about the working class being the 'beating heart of the referendum campaign' but have not put forward

demands which raise the level of that 'beating heart' about their role or the character of others involved in the movement.

Will women's movements be 'central'?

51. In the concluding section of the Irish comrades reply, under the heading, 'conclusions and some questions for the IS' they say that our view on women's movements that it, "tends to pose them as secondary or support acts to greater events. Women's rights or struggles can be seen as sectional issues, but we must remind ourselves that women are half the population and a huge proportion of the overall working class". They then quote part of paragraph 22 from the IS majority document. The whole of the paragraph stated:

"However, in our view it is not the case that movements relating to women's oppression will be central to struggle in every country in the next period. In addition in many countries where such movements occur the working-class elements within them can quite quickly become part of broader struggles of the working class (although of course the demands specifically relating to women's oppression would remain an important aspect of those movements)."

The Irish majority responded by saying:

"It is difficult to know what is being said here. Generally the paragraph seems to be cautioning, raising that women's movements won't be central or primary. If that is the main point we'd like to ask the IS to outline its rationale for such an assessment? Given the reality of recent events; wouldn't a more open attitude to the potential be more appropriate?"

52. In the following paragraph they then conclude that, "the radicalisation among women seems to be more universal, global and interconnected. It is not a temporary phase, but a more fundamental shift in consciousness and is deeper, in that it is not the preserve of middle class layers, but is also reflective of a change amongst working class women". They then go on to say that "more discussion is needed on these

issues including about the possibility that these issues of equality could be quite central".

53. This is alarming. It confirms the concern originally raised by the IS that there could be a tendency in Ireland, "to put the issue of a movement against women's oppression above all other trends".

54. In our view it was clear what we meant when we said that working class elements within women's movements can quite quickly become part of broader movements of the working class. An important radicalisation of women has taken place on a worldwide scale, which has and will result in mass movements in numerous countries. At this stage, there is a low level of general class struggle in many of the countries where movements against women's oppression are taking place. However, this will not remain the case. That is what we meant by saying the movements against women's oppression will become part of broader movements of the working class, not that movements against women's oppression will cease but they will be joined by other struggles and that, particularly as mass workers' struggles develop, there will be a tendency for women's movements to polarise on class lines. Implicit in the argument of the Irish majority that, "issues of equality could be quite central" is that there will not be mass struggles on other issues in the next period. Of course, we have to intervene in movements taking place today, not sit and wait for 'future class battles' as AP, VK and BK suggest we are proposing. However, in our intervention in today's battles we are always attempting to prepare for the future, by raising the consciousness of those we can reach and winning the best layers to our party.

55. Our international is preparing for the mass workers' struggles and revolutionary movements of the future, in which the working class will have opportunities to take power. Could such movements be 'sectional' rather than more general? We don't believe that a Marxist analysis can lead to the conclusion that is how events will develop. In the revolutionary movements of the future, struggles against women's oppression will be part of it, but we cannot consider women, in general, or LGBTQ+ as the social force that can overthrow capitalism. Doubtless

comrades will express outrage at the suggestion they could think such a thing – but it is the logical conclusion of some of their arguments. Of course, women and LGBTQ+ people will play an important part in overthrowing capitalism but as part of the working class as a whole. To achieve this requires a party with a socialist and internationalist programme that can unite the different layers of the working class in a common struggle. It is vital to fight to ensure that demands against women’s and gender oppression, and any other kind, such as national or race oppression, are emblazoned on its banner but alongside all the other demands that affect the working class as a whole, and that can end class oppression.

56. In the IS’s original document on these issues we raised the danger of repeating the mistakes made by the Mandelites who, prior to May 1968, “wrote off for decades the prospect of mass working-class struggle in the advanced capitalist countries and instead focused on ‘liberation movements’. At the time we argued that, “we are not suggesting the Irish comrades have taken this profoundly mistaken path but we are worried that some errors could have been made in that direction which need to be corrected.” Unfortunately, in the period since, far from openly discussing and attempting to correct those errors, the comrades are standing over them and attempting to justify them. The fact that a number of IEC members – as typified by AP, VK and BK’s document - are acting to defend the stance the Irish majority have taken is a fundamental political error, which, if had not been challenged by the IS majority and the faction, would have endangered the political foundations of the CWI.