

A critique of 'Analyzing an Age of Imperialism, Nationalism and Militarism'



Editor

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By PRMI reporters 20 January 2025

This rather unusual article is published as a contribution to the process of clarifying how we as a revolutionary Marxist, feminist, antiracist organisation in the process of reflection and reconstruction understand and orientate ourselves within the world today.

Introduction

In 2024, after five years of existence, the International Socialist Alternative (ISA) suffered an existential crisis. A small majority of its international leadership participated in a cynical cover-up, including with the use of gaslighting and falsified documents, of the mishandling of a serious safeguarding case.

This alone justifies the decision by a majority of sections and groups to leave ISA and launch the Project for a Revolutionary Marxist International (PRMI).

The participants in the PRMI are fully convinced of the need for a revolutionary international, and understand that to establish one in this current period needs a period of serious preparation, of discussion and analysis to develop a programme capable of meeting the challenges of this epoch.

Disagreements on perspectives, and consequently on programme were growing in ISA before the safeguarding crisis. If it had been a healthy, democratic organisation, debating them would have been a positive process leading to an improved analysis and a sharper programme. But the safeguarding failure, and the flawed response of the leadership demonstrated that ISA's core leadership was politically rotten, and incapable of making the changes needed.

The remnants of the ISA have now published an article "Analyzing an Age of Imperialism, Nationalism and Militarism". It demonstrates a one-sided, impressionist and superficial analysis of the global situation which is both based on and in turn enhances the increasingly dogmatic and sectarian approach by those who now claim the mantle of the ISA.

A serious approach to revolutionary politics requires the drawing of clear redlines with that approach – our justification for this article.

Lessons of the safeguarding scandal.

In 2023, the leadership of one of ISA's largest sections took the decision to take no effective action against a leading member who had been accused of serious acts of gender-based violence, on the basis that he was too important for the section's work. This was first

kept from the elected leadership of ISA, and when that became no longer possible, a rearguard campaign with the participation of the International Executive majority to hide the truth of what happened was conducted. Those involved refused to take responsibility for their actions, promising only to “learn lessons”.

Instead of learning lessons, the rump ISA has amended its Code of Conduct (CoC) in such a way as to legitimise their previous actions. These amendments include one which opens the door to members of a body participating in the investigation of other members of the same body, which clearly undermines the impartiality of an investigation.

Another limits the cases in which members are expected to recuse themselves from decision making on cases in which they are involved only to those in which there are close personal relationships outside of the political work of the organisation – excluding a range of other scenarios where bias and conflict of interests may arise, such as the one that occurred in ISA.

A third amendment opens the door to further abuse and damage to transparency by granting the body that made the original decision full discretion over how information is more widely disclosed, enabling it to withhold anything that might expose wrongdoing.

These amendments completely undermine the original intent of the Code of Conduct developed when the ISA was launched and are intended to retroactively legitimise the serious safeguarding failures made by the ISA majority.

Doubling down on a one-sided analysis

The PRMI is taking time to thoroughly discuss all the issues needed for the launch of a revolutionary international.

Not so the remnants of ISA who held a rushed “World Congress” in November 2024 to discuss a long document entitled “**Analyzing an Age of Imperialism, Nationalism and Militarism**” outlining their view of current “world perspectives”. It is a distilled version of the one-sided “geo-political analysis” that had created so much

disagreement when debate was still possible in ISA – that is, before the unveiling of the safeguarding mishandling sparked a campaign of political mud-slinging against the minority in the leadership who opposed it.

The document is marked by political laziness, accepting at face value statements from bourgeois analysts and commentators. For example, they uncritically quote a NATO communique criticising China's role in the Ukraine war with the absurd claim “both sides tell the truth about each other's role in the war” – as if each side does not use selective and distorted narratives that serve their own interests.

It is marked too by theoretical laziness – having long ago ditched a dialectical analysis of events, now, as later explained in this text, the authors introduce a strong undercurrent of idealism – as opposed to materialism – in their analysis. There is a superficial and misleading understanding of “Bonapartism”. A transitional approach is largely missing.

Most incredibly, given the centrality of socialist feminism and all struggles against oppression in the disputes in ISA over the past years, it is thirty pages into the text before women are even mentioned, and the analysis of womens' struggles is one sided and overwhelmingly negative. LGBTQIA+ and trans rights are mentioned only in passing, and not in the context of any real struggle.

There is not the space, nor probably much value in deconstructing the degeneration of the ISA over the past couple of years, which has left it with a collection of yes-people who simply vote uncritically without seriously assessing the content. So, we will restrict this review to a few general themes.

Dramatic twists and turns

Although written just a few months ago, the authors have had to write a new introduction, in which they comment: *“We feel that the dramatic twists and turns which have taken place since this text was drafted — most notably the re-election of Donald Trump and the*

collapse of the Assad regime in Syria — do not contradict, but rather fully confirm its key lines of argument.”

In the fierce debates on perspectives during 2022/23 the majority argued that no elections due in 2024 would change the direction of events, and that the world was already divided into two firmly consolidated blocks. Hiding behind the truism that imperialism is an “objective process,” it refused to accept the position of the minority that more ‘subjective’ factors and political shifts —such as electoral outcomes, coups, revolts, and revolutions—can significantly alter inter-imperialist dynamics in the current epoch.

Since then, an embarrassingly long list of events has underscored the validity of the minority’s argument. The fluid nature of power dynamics in South Asia is demonstrated by the mass revolt in Bangladesh, elections in Sri Lanka and the Maldives, all affecting the competition for influence between China and India. In another geopolitical twist, Modi’s regime has been deepening its ties with the Taliban regime, trying to exploit the souring of relations between the Afghan and Pakistani leaderships since Imran Khan’s removal from power.

Within days of the rump ISA describing President Yoon’s success in taking South Korea into a military alliance with Japan as yet another of “this era’s historic shifts”, Yoon faced an impeachment resolution which attacked his policy of “adhering to a bizarre Japan-centred foreign policy... and triggering a crisis of war”. If, as is likely, the PDP wins the imminent election this “historic shift” could well be rolled back. This follows Argentina’s withdrawal from BRICS as a result of Milei’s rise to power – the possibility of which the ISA majority had explicitly excluded.

Elections in Slovakia, Romania, Georgia and major political crises in the EU have deepened tensions and divisions amongst the European ruling classes, weakening Europe’s ability to present a united front towards the war in Ukraine, and dramatically complicating its commitment to long-term assistance.

Assad's overthrow is having profound destabilizing effects on the inter-state balance of the Middle East, French imperialism continues to concede ground in Africa in the face of a series of military coups and growing popular opposition and of course, Trump's re-election has sent shockwaves through the entire imperialist order.

It is more than likely that as a result of his victory, and the reaction to it not just by the different imperialist powers, but by the many millions of the oppressed who will fall victim to his reactionary policies, we can expect an increasingly unstable and contradictory period.

Looking forward, the rump ISA saw no likelihood of any form of de-escalation of the Middle East conflict. Their document predicted only one outcome of the genocidal war on Gaza. A major war between Israel and Lebanon, which would inflict devastation on an "even wider scale than what we have seen in Gaza" and which would trigger a full-scale regional war seemed, they say, "highly likely".

Following the Qatar sponsored ceasefire agreement—which even if it holds, will be a fragile retreat from the relentless slaughter—, will the ISA do a somersault by claiming that this new twist "*does not contradict, but rather fully confirm [s our] key lines of argument*"?

The rump ISA offers a one-sided analysis of Trump's victory, which they say "*marks a clear shift to the right in U.S. society including within significant sections of the working class*". While it is true that Trump's victory reflects deepening reactionary currents within U.S. society, posing an enhanced threat to immigrants, women, queer people and marginalized communities, reducing the outcome to a rightward shift in the working class tends to mirror liberal narratives that blame the working class for the growth of racist and misogynist ideas, and to paint with one brush the uneven, contradictory and dynamic nature of working class consciousness.

In fact, as US supporters of PRMI said: "*These arguments don't fully capture the reality of the situation. While Trump received around two million more votes compared to 2020, Kamala Harris lost nearly seven million compared to Joe Biden. While more working class and*

marginalized people did vote for Trump than four years ago, the number pales in comparison to the amount of people who saw no good options this time around and chose not to vote for any presidential candidate.” Actually, Trump received 4 million less votes than Biden won in 2020.

Rejecting “nuances” means rejecting dialectics

The authors of the document give lip service to Marxism’s need to pay attention to nuances, that is contradictions, but simultaneously diminishes their importance by framing them as distractions to the “dominant motor forces” —as “trees” obscuring the “woods”.

This is a mutilation of dialectics, which teaches that the “trees” and the “woods” exist in dynamic interrelation. The whole cannot be understood without examining its parts, and the parts only make sense in relation to the whole. By treating countervailing trends, nuances or so-called exceptions as obstructive to the general analysis, the rump ISA fails to recognize that it is precisely through examining nuances and contradictions that revolutionaries can identify the potential for future shifts. What may seem peripheral today can shape, affect, complicate or even cut across tomorrow’s dominant processes, and Marxist perspectives must account for this, or risk succumbing to an overly deterministic approach to political analysis.

The claim that an overemphasis on nuances leads to “a bit of this, but also a bit of that” caricatures the need for precision in perspectives. Identifying general processes is critical, but intervening effectively in a situation requires a concrete understanding of its particularities, without which revolutionary forces will succumb to missteps, leaving them ill-equipped for the complexities and rapidly changing dynamics of this period.

For instance, analyzing inter-imperialist struggles demands acknowledging both the ‘dominant’ conflicts (e.g., U.S.-China rivalry) and the complex, shifting alliances and contradictions that exist within and around them, and how these influence each other.

Instead, the ISA majority consistently painted the U.S.- China rivalry as a clash between two fully consolidated imperialist blocs, dismissing any attention paid to internal tensions, volatility and instability inside these blocs as “living in the past”.

While the two main superpowers’ strategic power-battle for global hegemony is undeniable and bound to further accelerate, every passing day makes it equally undeniable, as the minority stressed all along, that this process is far messier than the rectilinear narrative promoted by the majority, because it is also intertwining with significant national contradictions and competing currents.

Squeezing reality into the geopolitical template

While the document was written before the US election, the fact that in 23,000 words not one deals with how Trump’s victory would throw global relations into turmoil, including within the ‘US-led bloc’ speaks volumes about the rump ISA’s ‘grid-like’ appreciation based on what they call “the dominance of geopolitics” of world relations, as well as of their inability to adjust and refine analyses as reality unfolds.

It is a result of squeezing everything into this unidirectional two-block template that led the rump ISA to conclude that the overthrow of Assad was the work of “US-backed” forces. It is no surprise that US imperialism is now scrambling to influence events in Syria by, for example, lifting the \$10 million bounty on Al Julani’s head. But there is no credible evidence that it supported or orchestrated the HTS offensive. Just weeks before Assad’s downfall, the Biden administration was working with the United Arab Emirates to lift sanctions against Assad’s regime in return for the latter shutting down Iranian arms supply lines.

Beyond being factually inaccurate, the rump ISA’s geopolitical determinism leaves little room for homegrown factors and for the masses’ agency. A similar attempt to crudely reduce the region to an imperialist playground was the framing of Gaza’s genocide as a “proxy war” — as if the longstanding oppression of the Palestinians and their ongoing genocide at the hands of the Israeli regime is

nothing more than an after-effect of the conflict between global superpowers— a characterisation the document now appears to be, at least partially, back-peddalling from.

Tellingly, in a period where the national question is being acutely revived in many parts of the globe, the extensive document is almost entirely silent on that question. This omission mirrors recent internal debates within ISA, particularly over Ukraine. The majority operated under the misguided belief that the overwhelming nature of superpower competition somehow diminishes the relevance of national struggles and the fight for national rights.

Consistently the ISA majority downplayed any aspect of the Ukraine war being for national liberation from the Russian imperialist occupation, going so far at one stage to say the rights of Ukrainian workers would have to be sacrificed in favour of those of the international working class. The German section of the rump ISA takes this position to its logical conclusion in their latest article on the Ukraine war. A particularly crude, geopolitical analysis empirically regurgitating western media articles contains no criticism of Russia – it is not even described as imperialist merely presenting it as responding to Western imperialist escalation, as if it is the victim. Most incredibly the article demands that the Ukrainian working class take action to stop the war without any demands on Russia to withdraw. The programme they present will merely allow Russian imperialism to occupy the rest of Ukraine.

Superpower rivalries often intensify national struggles, making it all the more urgent for the left to engage with these aspirations and channel them into a socialist direction. When the left neglects these struggles, national movements are vulnerable to being hijacked by bourgeois, petty-bourgeois, or reactionary forces. Far from being secondary, the national question is central to the fight against imperialism and capitalism—especially in this era of acute geopolitical and social crises.

Trotsky warned of the “*injurious practical consequences*” that follow from the substitution of the dialectical analysis of reality, in its every concrete phase, in all its transitional stages, that is, in its gradual changes as well as in its revolutionary (or counter-revolutionary) leaps, by abstract categories formulated upon the basis of a partial and insufficient historical experience (or a narrow and insufficient view of the whole).” This precisely describes the wrong approach that the rump ISA has adopted with its geopolitical template.

Revealing their long-denied truth about the New Cold War

Since its formation out of the 2019 split of the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI), the then-ISA understood that global capitalism is in a qualitatively new period. A retreat from neo-liberal ideology and globalisation is taking place, and the world is becoming polarised between US imperialism and Chinese imperialism, in what we all characterised as a “New Cold War”.

Apart from those around TIDU, who left ISA in 2021, no-one questioned the validity of these assertions, but there were sharp debates over what stage of the process had been reached. The minority argued this is a developing, accelerating process, the course of which can be affected by events such as elections, social protests and of course workers’ struggle. The majority rejected this, arguing that the process has been completed, the blocks are fully formed and cannot be changed, with the clear implication that WW3 is imminent. Although the majority denied this last assertion, now the truth is out. According to their new perspectives, “*the formulation “New Cold War” is no longer sufficient to describe this process.... The direction of travel is not only towards the deepening of this conflict, but towards its transformation from Cold into Hot, including the prospect of more direct and generalized military conflicts between the main powers.*”

In this currently very dangerous world, it would be completely irresponsible not to recognise the threats posed by wars, the possibility of their escalation into regional conflicts particularly at the present time in the Middle East. It is an absolute lie when the rump

ISA in their document claims the former minority argued that the existence of nuclear weapons was an “absolute obstacle” to a bigger conflict.

However, while wars may be triggered “by accident”, even if accidents take place the conditions have to exist for the war to develop. And at this stage the conditions for World War 3 have not yet matured to the stage that the rump ISA now claims.

The possibility of what starts as a ‘local’ conflict escalating into a wider war, with the use of increasingly dangerous weapons, including nuclear weapons, cannot be ruled out. But even one nuclear bomb dropped on a US port city would, apart from the huge cost to human life, do initial damage worth \$1trillion and act as a major trigger for a global economic crisis. A regional conflict using 100 warheads would leave two billion dead, many more facing famine as a new ice age envelopes the world. It is for these reasons that the imperialist powers attempt to prevent their use. Xi Jinping warned Putin in November 2022 not to use nuclear weapons, while Biden and Xi agreed to restore the hotline to prevent accidental military escalation. However, this cold war differs from the first. It is not between two social systems but two imperialist blocks, each of which is defending the interests of its own monopolies. In the first cold war, nuclear MAD [Mutually Assured Destruction] acted as a relative deterrent to the two sides. Now there is also economic MAD.

Despite the fragmentation of the global economy, the two imperialist powers are still economically highly reliant on each other. Even the rump ISA accepts that there is still “an interdependence between the major capitalist countries” and that there is still growth, although at a slower rate, of trade between the blocs. This means that trade sanctions and other economic weapons used by one side against another will in turn damage the economy of that side using the weapons.

In opposition to Trump’s China hawks such as Rubio and Waltz, Elon Musk has a cozy relationship with Xi Jinping, so much so he was

allowed to open his first Shanghai factory in 2019, with a second currently being built. The first produces half of Musk's global supplies. At a certain stage, it is likely that Trump's sabre rattling against China will affect the profits of a section of US big business, potentially putting pressure on Trump to temporarily and partially retreat, while not changing the underlying dynamic of increasing inter-imperialist tensions.

But most importantly, the rump ISA's geopolitical analysis ignores the role of the masses. The Second World War only became possible after the massive and brutal defeat of the working class with fascism coming to power in Germany, Italy, Spain, the defeat of the Popular Front in France, and elsewhere, as well as the victory of the political counter-revolution in the Soviet Union. Even the threat of the use of nuclear weapons during the first cold war led to massive anti-war protests, which coincided with the growth of workers' struggle.

The economic consequences for the working class of an escalating trade war combined with massive anti-war protests, the potential for which has already been demonstrated by the Gaza solidarity actions mean that the imperialists still have to overcome the opposition of the masses, particularly the working class in all its diversity before they can move to all-out war.

While the extent and forms of this opposition, as well as the challenges of building it in the current period, are open to debate, leaving it out of the equation — or treating the development of the workers' movement as disjuncted from capitalism's drive towards war—can only result in flawed conclusions. Yet this omission is a recurrent pattern in the rump ISA's analysis of imperialist wars, both contemporary and historical.

As if realising that their analysis of the cold war turning hot with the merging of three theatres of war may have gone too far, the authors have included a convenient escape route by stating "*While we make no stark headline prediction of imminent World War in this document, the dynamic in this direction must be recognized and the real*

dangers fully spelled out.” What exactly are the readers supposed to make of this? Denying they are making a prediction they argue for the dangers of that very prediction to be “fully spelled out”. The result is a muddled, incoherent message that leaves readers unclear on their actual position.

This incoherence is a result of the divergence between their analysis and actual reality. For example the document characterises imperialist rivalry by saying “*The U.S. and China must show that they will come to the defense and aid of other members of its bloc... The U.S. and China simply cannot “cut the strings” and leave an ally alone without appearing weak.*”

Such statements jar dramatically with the claim made in the introduction appended to their main text, which proclaims, in a chest-thumping manner, that events since the text was drafted, “fully confirm” their key arguments. Assad will definitely now be wondering why, then, Russia, Iran, and presumably China so resolutely abandoned him to his fate.

The US has been more ‘consistent’ in aiding its allies with unremitting support for Israel, but clearly reluctance to continue support for Ukraine is growing. This is a reality that the ISA majority, with their entrenched belief in the “decisive” role of Western weapons and continual military escalation, while oblivious to any other factors that affect the dynamics of the war, stubbornly refused to foresee. On top of this a Trump-driven trade war, his threats to take over the Panama Canal, turn Canada into the 51st state which helped precipitate Trudeau’s resignation and annex Greenland as well as attempts to bully Britain’s Starmer government to break from the “socialist EU” in favour of a UK-US Free Trade deal may drive schisms within the western block.

China, for its part, has been more cautious in stepping in to help its allies. This is not in any way an assertion that somehow China is a lesser evil, but simply a recognition that currently Xi fears more instability will damage his regime. China avoids actions that might be

seen as direct support for Russia's war efforts. Its largely muted response to the use of North Korean soldiers in Ukraine strongly suggests this decision was not to Beijing's liking, if it was even consulted. The Chinese regime fears it could be dragged into conflict on terms that are not of its own choosing. The truth is that, while China has no intention nor interest to sever ties with either Russia or North Korea, the Chinese bloc is, at this stage, less consolidated than the western bloc, and certainly less so than claimed all along by the ISA majority.

This reality has even crept into a new article on the rump ISA's website, which quietly acknowledges some of these points, noting that Xi Jinping does not control Putin, highlighting the "limits" within the China-led bloc, and describing the deployment of North Korean troops to Ukraine as an "unwelcome development" for Beijing. The article, however, fails to recognise that these very points were the basis upon which the minority was systematically accused of repudiating the 'New Cold War' analysis, whilst the majority repeatedly claimed the China-led bloc was "more than intact" and grounded in a "no limits" agreement.

Class struggle replaced by geopolitics, materialism by idealism

Historically our revolutionary current paid particular attention to perspectives, and in particular, opposed the ultra-left groups, who saw revolution around the corner, when that clearly wasn't likely.

Those groups experienced a high turnover of members and collapsed. The rump ISA is now walking blindfolded into the same error with its perspective that WW3 has, in the words of one of its leading members, already started. Characterising a dangerous and developing trend as a finished process will be disorientating and demoralising, and lead to a wrong programme and tactics.

They have fallen into this trap because they have rejected the basic tenet of Marxism, with which Marx and Engels started the "Communist Manifesto" – "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." They have replaced class struggle

with geopolitical struggle, in which the masses and particularly the working class has, at best, a minimal role to play. This is why the rump ISA's theoretical base today has verged towards idealism. The ISA's conclusion that the global bourgeois had retreated from neoliberalism and used state intervention to save the global economy from a deep depression after 2007-8 was based on the understanding that the neoliberal epoch had run out of steam with a decline in profit rates, the build-up of huge bubbles and other contradictions. In the decade following 2008 China grew to become the second imperialist power, challenging US hegemony. The essence of imperialism today remains the same as that described by Lenin. It is the struggle using various, and ultimately military means to expand and protect the interests of capitalist monopolies. As the capitalist monopolies no longer benefitted from pure neoliberalism, governments moved to state intervention to protect them, a process accelerated during the COVID pandemic. Increasingly the globalisation period in which global rules attempted to develop an "even playing field" for all countries was wound back as competition grew between national economies. They were pushed further down this road for fear of the masses, who had already moved to defend their rights before the pandemic. Quickly, by far the main axis of the confrontation between imperialist interests developed between the US and its allies on the one side, and China and its friends on the other. But there are also strong cross currents within this picture. This inevitably led to an increase in nationalism, protectionism and with the outbreak of the war in Ukraine a dramatic militarisation of society. We are not economic determinists who believe everything is dictated by the mercantile interests of the monopolies. The new ideology that develops in this situation can gain a life of its own – the economic and ideological elements interact with each other in what is today a reflection of the deep crisis of the capitalist system. Most importantly

the struggle between different class interests can play a decisive role.

The rump ISA though, having effectively ditched materialist dialectics, confuses cause and effect. Rather than seeing the material interests of the monopolies as, ultimately, the main driving force behind the inter-imperialist conflict, they mechanistically view everything through the prism of geo-politics, without adequately tying these dynamics back to the forces of production, including the economic interests of the ruling classes – and the contradictions this can generate.

It is true, of course, that the turn away from neoliberalism and globalisation, with first the use of state intervention to prevent global depression after 2008, and then decoupling, friendshoring and increasingly protectionist measures, has driven an increase in reactionary nationalist and militarist ideologies and measures. This is driving, and is driven by the conflict over markets and spheres of influence with China, the new imperialist power, which has in turn pushed governments further in a militarist direction. As a consequence governments have developed new strategies, such as the various government driven plans to ensure national self-sufficiency in semiconductor production.

The rump ISA with their one-sided geopolitical analysis only sees one side of this dialectical equation – it is not the interests of the capitalist monopolies driving the inter-imperialist conflict, but the inter-imperialist conflict which leads to economic changes. They say, for example: *“in discussing the development of the inter-imperialist conflict we must look at its numerous domestic effects including within the key imperialist countries. These include growing state intervention into the economy to develop and protect “strategic” sectors...”*

In their new document the rump ISA has also now shifted towards more tempered phrases like *“diminished trade with China”* and *“a considerable degree”* of decoupling, a significant retreat from their

earlier erroneous proclamations that economic decoupling was in “full swing” at a time when it clearly was just beginning to gain momentum. This is a consequence of treating global relations as a linear process where the alignments and outcomes of imperialist confrontations are seen as largely immutable and inevitable, and where the class struggle or any contradiction in said process are reduced to incidental factors – or as they put it, “the countervailing tendencies have been decidedly secondary”.

Their fatalistic approach to historical development veers into what Lenin described as ‘objectivism’, by which he meant the approach of treating social phenomena in a one-sided, abstract way without taking into account the interactions of social classes and political struggle, which are critical elements of the objective process itself. But for all their claims to root themselves in material and “objective” conditions, their appreciation of imperialism allows idealism to creep in: since “geopolitics” is, in their view, the new driving force in world developments, imperialist blocs and tensions tend to be approached as self-contained entities, disconnected from their underlying material base: the dynamic process of capital accumulation and its contradictions. In this way, the rump ISA’s methodology oscillates between rigid determinism and idealist abstractions.

Theoretical laziness

Having demoted the role of class struggle in promoting change, they rewrite the analyses of world developments previously accepted as fundamental by our revolutionary current.

They write that “*World trade was the engine of the post war [WW2] recovery*”. In doing so they reject the Marxist [ie dialectical] explanation that the decisive factor driving post-war growth was the increased scope for capital investment, due to the political climate caused by the failure of the Stalinists and social-democrats, the need to rebuild after the destruction of war combined with economic aid and state intervention. Instead, by focusing solely on world trade, they fall back on crude Keynesian economics.

They use the same lazy approach when addressing the trend to authoritarianism. Bonapartism is, they say, “authoritarian “rule by the sword” in the interests of the ruling class” and “All of this stands in sharp contrast to the era of neoliberal globalization when “market fundamentalism” dominated”.

There is no doubt at all that authoritarian and Bonapartist tendencies are being strengthened in many parts of the world. But to say this is in sharp contrast with the neoliberalism period is a parody – after all that period kicked off with the Pinochet coup in Chile, and the brutal use of the state with Reagan’s ban on the PATCO’s right to strike and Thatcher’s attacks on the miners. Even in the 1990s, the height of neoliberalism, Thailand, Algeria, Peru, Turkey and Pakistan were among the countries where the numerous coup attempts succeeded. Suharto’s military dictatorship in Indonesia was propped up by Western powers throughout much of the neoliberal era and that is not to forget Yeltsin’s 1993 attack on the Russian parliament or events in Azerbaijan and elsewhere in the former Soviet block, which opened the way to Bonapartist rule in the name of the free market.

The rump ISA misses the point that all states in class society are essentially, as Lenin said, instruments for “the oppression of one class by another”. Bonapartism is not just “rule by the sword” but is a specific form of state, in which the repressive apparatus in a period of sharp social conflict no longer represents the whole ruling class. It acts on behalf of the most exploitative section of the bourgeois, even acting against other sections of the ruling class. This distinction may appear unimportant, but understanding it plays a critical role in developing our democratic demands in authoritarian regimes without, as the rump ISA does, dismissing them as liberal ideas.

These points on Bonapartism, focused on Europe and the United States, also fail to understand that vast parts of the world, especially in the neo-colonial countries, have never experienced extended periods of bourgeois democratic rule, even at the height of the neoliberal era. This reflects another characteristic of the rump ISA: its

tendency, at best, to broad-brush and, at worst, to overlook the specific realities beyond the advanced capitalist world.

Underlying the Anglo-American-centric nature of ISA, in fifty pages just six paragraphs are devoted to Africa and Latin America, with more emphasis given to Ukraine's involvement in opposing Wagner forces in Mali than to the uprisings in Kenya and protests in Nigeria. Protests in Mauritania, Mozambique, the changing situation in South Africa pass it by, presumably because they don't fit into their geopolitical template. Sudan, long a key battleground between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces, now engulfed in one of the bloodiest military conflicts in the world involving a wide array of regional and international powers, barely deserves a mention. Sri Lanka, scene of a mass uprising in 2022, and of historic elections this year that nearly obliterated the traditional bourgeois parties who ruled the island since 1946, none at all.

2024 has seen the landmark election in Mexico, contested elections in Venezuela, natural disasters in Brazil, continued protests against Milei in Argentina, a failed coup in Bolivia, the resignation of Peru's prime minister, presidential election in Uruguay and many other events. Yet the rump ISA chooses to over-emphasise China's support for Maduro and its conflict with "yanky imperialism". The reactionary nature of Milei's government is raised eight times, but only once is the massive resistance to his government mentioned.

Part of workers' struggle, not something apart from it.

It is though the section on the workers' movement and struggles against oppression that exposes the real nature of the rump ISA. Its approach is schematic, based on what Lenin called "economism". The debates in ISA over struggles against oppression have clearly had no impact, as it has reverted to the same stale, conservative approach that marked the CWI, the split of which led to the birth of ISA in 2020. It is not surprising that at least the leading members of one section who attended the supposed "World Congress" have

opened up discussions to return to the CWI. They might as well join the real thing, rather than a pale imitation.

Reading the last section of their document, ISA treats the workers' movement as a completely separate entity from movements against oppression.

More than that, they schematically anticipate continuing growth and the forward development of the workers' movement through economic struggles despite the current leaders which, the authors do not appear to have noticed, in most countries move heaven and earth to ensure that trade unions are not involved in politics, unless to support bourgeois parties.

Having already dismissed exceptions as 'trees' that obscure the woods—and therefore as largely irrelevant—they write that *“the powerful expressions of counter-revolution which mark the current conjuncture will, without exception, also drive workers' struggle forward at given moments.”* While it is true that the 'whip of counter-revolution,' as Marx put it, can sometimes act as a catalyst for working-class resistance—as demonstrated recently in South Korea—the assertion that this will happen “without exception” is a romantic, overly simplistic, and potentially dangerous view.

Once again, the method of 'blunt generalisations' in place of a concrete analysis of specific situations reveals its obvious limits. While the historical context is obviously different, this one-sided and ultra-left approach of viewing all counter-revolutionary developments as inevitably advancing workers' struggles bears parallels to the leadership of the German Communist Party's (KPD) catastrophic blunders during the Comintern's 'Third Period' in the face of Hitler's ascension to power—which, they argued, would lead to revolution and bring the Communists at the door of power.

Of course, fascism represented a unique and existential threat at a time, one that does not manifest in the same way today. However, then as now, the sweeping assumption that counter-revolution will always and in all cases, push workers' struggle forward, is a

mechanical oversimplification, failing to account for the ability of counter-revolutionary forces to impose heavy defeats on movements. Egypt, which has endured over a decade of darkness and reaction under Sisi's military coup, stands as a stark example of this.

The authors of the document clearly don't deliver on the promise of the "balanced assessment" of the workers' movement announced in the subhead. But on the other side, they bend the stick completely the other way when speaking of movements against oppression, held back by wrong leadership, which is summed up starkly by their comment: "In Iran, for example, the crushing of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests has unleashed a wave of state repression."

That the Iranian regime has been limited in its response to the Genocide in Gaza and to the Israeli state provocations in part for fear of a reaction from its own masses does not fit the rump ISA's geopolitical template. Although many Iranians sympathize with the Palestinian cause, there is widespread skepticism about the regime's sincerity in its foreign policy, coupled with mass discontent over the economic hardships partly attributed to it. Now even key figures in the regime have warned that there is the danger of a repeat of the Syrian collapse as, since October, widespread protests have been taking place involving pensioners, students, steel and oil workers. These raise not just their own demands, but generalise them with calls to end repression and for an end to the regime.

The rump ISA's compartmentalisation of protests into workers and others is not only precisely what Lenin warned against when he criticised the economism of trade union reformism, but it completely fails to understand the dialectical interplay between these movements. Movements such as these do not simply develop in a straight line, but go through ebbs and flows, victories gained in one area can inspire others, just as retreats can lessen the mood to struggle. Workers who find themselves unable to progress further using one form of struggle, can turn to another form to break out of the deadlock.

History has been rich with examples of when trade union struggle has been blocked either by a narrow craft mentality, or reformist leadership, and it has taken the more spontaneous protests by fresher, radicalised layers to break the logjam – Marx spoke of this happening in America and East London, it happened in the Russian revolution, in the US in the 1930s, in France in 1968, with the shop-stewards movement in Britain, the 1973 Durban strikes in South Africa, or more recently, the predominantly female garment workers in Myanmar and Bangladesh. Yet the rump ISA ignores this. Its mechanistic views are also on full display in their specific remarks on socialist feminism. In ISA, the majority waged a crusade against “intersectionality”, portraying it one-sidedly as “bad”, “alien” and “anti-Marxist”. In doing so they failed to engage with consciousness as it is, overlooking how intersectionality positively reflects a growing awareness among radicalised youth that multiple forms of oppression objectively do interplay and struggle against them should be interconnected. It is deeply ironic that now they accuse those who rejected their sectarian approach of analysing all struggles against oppression through a “feminist lens”, as in doing so, they echo almost verbatim the arguments once wielded by the former International Secretariat of the CWI.

This accusation betrays the shallowness of their claims to support socialist feminism. The PRMI is unafraid to state clearly that yes indeed, a consistent feminist approach requires systematically integrating a gender perspective into all struggles. Anything less is a disservice to the fight against oppression as it ignores the pervasive role of gender oppression in shaping every facet of capitalist society. Far from “undermining our understanding of other struggles against special oppression,” a socialist feminist analysis deepens and enriches that understanding—because oppression under capitalism does not come in neat silos: all struggles against oppression are inherently gendered. Just as socialist feminism must be trans-inclusive, anti-racist and anti-imperialist.

The logical extension of the rump ISA's position is that socialist feminism should be left at the door when addressing other forms of oppression. This approach is not only theoretically bankrupt but also practically harmful, as it allows patriarchal and sexist ideas to persist unchecked within movements against oppression. The consequences of such an approach were laid bare in their mishandling of the safeguarding case, where they justified protecting a sexual abuser under the pretext of his belonging to an oppressed community.

The same approach that led the ISA majority to downplay the necessity of socialist feminism in fighting oppression also led them to a series of misjudgments when it came to assessing the trajectory of global movements. Free from a consistent opposition inside their own ranks, they now dishonestly attempt to rewrite history, spinning their own past mistakes as those of the former minority.

A striking example of this is their claim that the “departed Minority comrades’ perspective” for the current era revolved around an “ever-growing and ever more central new feminist wave.” This is a gross, deliberate and documented misrepresentation. In reality, leading figures of what became the majority bloc, predominantly from the US and English sections and viewing politics through the Anglo-American prism, universalised the setback of the women’s movement in the US to prematurely pronounce the decline of the global feminist wave mere months before the explosion of the largest feminist uprising in history in Iran. They never acknowledged this monumental blunder.

As they well know, no one in ISA ever articulated a perspective of an “ever-growing feminist wave.” What the minority consistently argued was the deep-rooted and ongoing nature of this wave, which the majority repeatedly downplayed — to the extent of even questioning whether there was a wave at all— only for events to prove them wrong. Despite defeats and significant right-wing backlash, this wave has shown remarkable resilience, continuing to surface—albeit at a

more subdued level for now—as seen in recent protests against femicides and gender-based violence in India, Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Kenya.

Sectarian consequences

These points are not just nit-picking by one group of another group's analysis but are important because they determine the programme and tactics to be adopted.

Despite the rump ISA's protestations that it uses the transitional approach, it doesn't. Every issue, according to their programme requires the socialist revolution to resolve. This is of course 100% correct. To achieve the socialist revolution though requires a politically conscious and organised working class, with a revolutionary organisation with deep, organic roots in the working class in all its diversity.

The rump ISA's approach to building such an organisation is mainly as an observer and critic of the processes currently taking place, and success in building their organisation will depend on, as is stressed three times in their document: the “determination and sacrifice of their members”, again very reminiscent of the late-stage CWI, and which at the time when there is a major mental health pandemic will simply speed up burn-out and demoralisation when their abstracted perspectives clash with the reality of the situation on the ground. Building a genuine international though requires an analysis based on the concrete and often contradictory reality, not on truisms and templates, and for all members as far as possible to be intervening in events as they happen, presenting strategies and demands, testing and improving them to build the trust and respect needed to lead workers' struggle.

In the rump ISA's world perspectives and elsewhere they only see barriers to a newly developing consciousness – including “intersectionality, (left) nationalism, ‘horizontalism’, mutual aid networks, and in countries which lack any meaningful bourgeois democracy, support for liberal ideas”. They forget that the Bolsheviks

viewed the nationalism of oppressed nations as “only the outer shell of an immature Bolshevism” or the importance of even basic bourgeois democratic demands in the struggle against dictatorship. In their sectarian fear of “mutual aid networks” they forget that in the first dark years of WW1 the first steps taken by the Russian Bolsheviks to rebuild their base in the workers’ movement was precisely using workers’ insurance schemes.

Having set up these barriers, the rump ISA is creating obstacles to intervening in the coming movements. A transitional approach must begin by understanding the fears and concerns of those in struggle. Trump has won his second term, with the support of a significant layers of people who either supported or passively accepted his extreme racism, queerphobia and reactionary policies, while it is clear that important parts of the ruling class have shifted and are now more openly in favour of his reactionary authoritarian course. Our approach has to acknowledge the reality that migrant and other oppressed people are afraid and have all the reason to be.

The barriers that they see are addressed using one-sided ultimatums, an approach which as Trotsky said: “irritates and insults the workers”. Typical is the way they pose “key questions” in their text: in the fight against the far right the need for class independence, the need for working-class politicians and parties to break coalitions with bourgeois parties, the need to not allow movements to be led by a section of the bourgeois. All of these points are of course absolutely essential, but they will not be achieved by presenting them as ultimatums in the movements.

Typical of their ultimatumist approach is a recent article by the rump ISA on the protests in Georgia. Recognising that “Most of the young people demonstrating in Tbilisi are children of the working class, they do not belong to the bourgeoisie nor do they have jobs with the NGOs” they nevertheless view the protests through a geopolitical prism in which “Trade unionists and young people should not allow

themselves to be drawn into this dispute, in which they can only lose.”

Trying to find a “pure movement” with no illusions in hostile class forces they do not understand that the youth in Georgia are fighting what they see as growing authoritarianism with a turn towards Russia, they have opposed attacks on LGBTQ+ rights, and laws which severely restrict the rights of any opposition forces. As long as the working class and left are not intervening in a politically organised way, of course, illusions in other class forces will grow, which is precisely why the left should participate with a positive programme to build the movement and turn it in a revolutionary direction, an example of which can be found here.

The necessary conditions for a working class victory will only be possible when the consciousness and organisation of the working class have themselves reached the level necessary for that. A transitional approach means presenting a positive strategy and demands that can take the movement forward and demonstrate in practice the need for a revolutionary approach. As Trotsky said: “the party should submit a definite programme for joint action: that is the surest way of achieving leadership in reality.” That means in the current situation emphasizing that any resistance against Trump must be strongly anti-racist, particularly against anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism, feminist and fighting against all forms of oppression.

Perhaps one of the most demonstrative examples of the rump ISA’s failure to engage with reality in a non-sectarian way is their bitter opposition to describing what is happening in Gaza as ‘genocide’. They even dismissed members of ISA who used this term as guilty of exaggeration and opportunism. Since then, even the ultra-reactionary, US-friendly Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman—who was close to concluding a normalisation deal with Netanyahu before October 7, 2023— has publicly called it out as a genocide. But the rump ISA still hasn’t. Likely driven in part by

factional pride, they remain entrenched in their original stance, while both objective reality and mass consciousness have progressed far beyond them on this question.

Conclusion.

None of these mistakes, of course, rise to the level of political crimes, and even taken together, they pale in comparison to the sexual abuse and its cover up. But they show that even if one takes the rump ISA's arguments at face value —i.e., that last year's split in ISA was unrelated to that coverup, but pertains to other political issues— what is found in these other issues is a litany of problems which they have failed to recognise, let alone to rectify. They reflect a methodological drift towards dogmatism and rigidity, a mechanical understanding of complex processes, and an unwillingness to honestly reassess positions in light of new events —in short, many of the traits we saw develop within the CWI's International Secretariat a few years ago.

The rump ISA has no future. Not only will it be lost in the myriad of left organisations that have so demonstratively betrayed women, by accepting and prolonging its brutally rotten approach to safeguarding.

Its apparently revolutionary rhetoric in calling for international working class struggle against imperialism and militarism, which they say is only possible with the victory of socialist revolution is no more than empty rhetoric – a form of revolutionary pacifism – when associated with a series of ultimatums, but completely lacking any strategy and programme for building the revolutionary organisations that Lenin argued were key aspects of “revolutionary defeatism”, and which Trotsky and his supporters developed into a transitional programme, including for use in wartime.

All of this underlines the need for serious work by the PRMI and its supporters to take time to prepare and discuss our analysis to develop a programme capable of meeting the challenges of this new epoch.