

***this is a deep translation, the original article in German can be found [here](#)***

## **A Crisis in the International Socialist Alternative (ISA)**

*This year, ISA Austria made the decision to leave our previous international organisation - the International Socialist Alternative. The reason for this is unacceptable misconduct in dealing with sexism and discrimination in the organisation. Our letter of resignation [can be found here](#). However, below we publish a detailed statement on the specific case and have added a short statement on the role of the Austrian section.*

### **Declaration by ISA Austria**

From the very beginning, the committees of the Austrian section have been fighting within the organisation to demand accountability from those responsible and to correct the course of the majority in the leadership in a profound and decisive political manner. For us, an international socialist organisation that does not deal decisively with sexualised and gender-based violence, various forms of sexism and discrimination within the organisation is unacceptable. Unfortunately, this attempt to demand accountability and correction was not successful. The majority bloc in the international structures has further exacerbated its catastrophic approach, which is why we are leaving the ISA together with other organisations and organising around the project for a revolutionary Marxist international.

### **Upheavals and reflection in the Austrian organisation**

This crisis of the International is interrelated with reflection, upheavals and changes in the reflection on the role of our own organisation, which has developed over the past four years. We are aware that we have developed too slowly in many areas and have only fully understood the extent of the many years of misguided development of our organisation in the course of this development. We owe this development process above all to newer members, who have been the main driving force behind the process.

This process of change also primarily concerns our approach to specific oppression (racism, sexism, queer hostility). In our socialist-feminist work as a whole, but above all in how we deal with sexism and discrimination within the organisation. This also applies to coming to terms with our own mistakes in the past, which we are currently addressing. We are aware that past mistakes are based on a political weakness in our understanding of gender-specific violence and are determined to develop further on these issues. As is our procedure for dealing with sexism and discrimination within the organisation and the movement. We have a lot to work through here and, where possible, we will also get in touch with those affected. We have caused harm to those affected by these mistakes and our political weaknesses - for which we would like to apologise profoundly. Of course, we are aware that such an apology is of little value without the promise of a complete political reappraisal and an in-depth review of past cases and mistakes, to reflect on them critically and to learn lessons accordingly.

The ISA in Austria has placed a strong focus on socialist-feminist work in recent years. In this process, we ourselves have learnt an enormous amount and are still learning. Unfortunately, socialist and Marxist forces often had and still have a very problematic relationship to the fight against gender-specific oppression. This often includes a lack of determined struggle against abuse and discrimination within their own ranks.

In the Austrian section of the ISA, too, ongoing processes to correct weaknesses and mistakes have been taking place for several years, especially, but not only, in connection with socialist feminism. This included, for example, the creation of a guideline in 2020 and the establishment of a committee to deal with sexism and discrimination within the organisation, the development of a socialist-feminist programme, intensive debates on these issues over the past two years and an improvement/revision of the guideline, which is currently in progress, as well as a planned strengthening of the committee's competences, but also a critical review of previous cases.

These changes and upheavals are absolute necessities for socialists. Also in view of the global revolt against all forms of sexism, queerophobia and racism that has taken place internationally in recent years: from the 'Ni una menos' protests against gender-based violence, #metoo, the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement in Iran and #BlackLivesMatter to the feminist strikes in Spain, the Basque Country, Switzerland and Iceland. This process of change in the direction and orientation of the organisation has also led to the departure of central comrades (e.g. the former federal spokesperson Sonja Grusch), who saw the further development of our socialist feminism as a danger to the organisation and a departure from Marxism and the working class and underestimated the importance of struggles against specific oppression in the development of class struggles and consciousness.

We have already published a [focus on](#) the more general political perspectives in this process of upheaval in our newspaper and will publish further statements on this process.

If people have questions or want to share experiences related to the ISA, they can contact us or the Committee on Sexism and Discrimination (KUSD) (at [kusd.oesterreich@gmail.com](mailto:kusd.oesterreich@gmail.com)) at any time.

**- the National Committee of ISA Austria, supported by the ISA-Austria Conference of May 2024**

## **A crisis of the International Socialist Alternative (ISA)**

**Content warning: Abuse, betrayal of survivors of abuse**

Original text: <https://www.socialistparty.ie/2024/04/a-crisis-in-international-socialis...>

This statement is issued by the Group for Safeguarding Against Sexism and Other Discrimination within the Organisation (hereafter: Safeguarding), Socialist Feminism and Internal Democracy (SSFID), an organised opposition within International Socialist Alternative (ISA). It was initiated by members in the leading bodies of the ISA who have

since learnt of catastrophic failures in Safeguarding, which we outline below. Furthermore, we are fighting to restore the strong commitment to socialist feminism in words and deeds, without which an international revolutionary socialist organisation cannot be built.

Last year, a crisis erupted in the ISA due to the failure of a national organisation (hereafter: section) to respond to very serious allegations of abuse against a member at the time, exacerbated by the fact that parts of our international leadership supported this misconduct. While the signatories to this statement have vigorously opposed these decisions, we must publicly address the fact that this failure and enormous damage was caused by our international organisation. We sincerely and heartily apologise to those affected and all those who have been harmed in this process and for the unacceptable time it has taken to reach these conclusions.

The need to apologise for the additional damage caused, as well as the conviction that a healthy socialist workers' organisation cannot grow by concealing its wrongdoings, brings us to this public admission. Yet just over half of the members of ISA's elected leadership have chosen not to make such an honest statement acknowledging failure and expressing remorse, and with it the ideas behind it: socialist feminism as an integral part of our Marxism and its consistent application in the form of a safeguarding approach for victims and survivors of gender-based violence.

## **Disregard for socialist feminist principles**

The investigation and its outcome, which related to very serious and distressing allegations of abuse against a leading member, was handled in a way that violates the International Guidance on Addressing Sexism and Other Discrimination in ISA and fails to put into practice our analysis of the dynamics of abuse and gender oppression and prioritise the wellbeing of the complainant and the safety of the organisation as a whole for women, marginalised and oppressed people.

Therefore, this failure is far more than a procedural error, but violates the core of our policy principles.

ISA's guidance in dealing with these issues emphasises the need for members with leadership responsibilities to meet the highest standards of conduct and professionalism. Instead, the original investigation focussed on establishing guilt 'beyond reasonable doubt', balancing the evidence against the perceived risk of losing a long-standing member. Such an approach directly contravenes our guidance, which states:

'The basis for a governing body taking action at the conclusion of an investigation is not whether or not 'proof of guilt' has been established, which is how courts systematically discredit survivors of harassment and abuse on a daily basis, but our commitment to protecting individuals and the organisation from just such behaviour.'

In this case, the survivor's testimony was effectively ignored and the accused person continued as a member. This is not only unacceptable, but is also in direct contradiction to a socialist-feminist approach to which all sections of the ISA have already committed themselves.

Those responsible for the section in question also failed to inform the international structures in good time, so that a more comprehensive insight and the support of members who have more distance to the accused persons was not possible. When the decision on this case was further disseminated in the section and the process was finally scrutinised by international structures, crucial information was withheld and could only be obtained after arduous struggles.

This, and the lack of timely communication with the international organisation about the case, unnecessarily prolonged and complicated the process of uncovering and addressing the failure and rejection of the original conclusions.

The accused individual eventually resigned from the organisation three months after the initial scant information was shared with the 'International Executive' (IE, part of ISA's day-to-day leadership). A decision stating that membership should have been withdrawn after the initial investigation was completed was formally taken by the ISA's 'International Committee' (IC, the highest governing body of the ISA between world congresses) more than 18 months after the allegations first reached the organisation and more than ten months after the case was communicated to international structures.

This further and unacceptable delay was due to the fact that the leadership of the section in question and part of the international leadership persistently defended the original decision, even though the majority of IE members who were not involved in the original misconduct were against it. However, this opposition could not form a formal majority because the leading members who were directly involved in the section's original decision refused to recuse themselves from relevant votes on the handling of the case.

It is clear that the series of unacceptable decisions described above were entirely avoidable and that they caused harm to women and survivors in and around the organisation and, presumably, to the complainant. This misbehaviour and the refusal to account for it has led to a massive split in the ISA leadership.

It takes tremendous courage for people to speak out about their experiences of abuse and it is our duty to ensure that their voices are not only heard, but heeded. A key motivating factor for survivors who courageously speak out about their trauma is to protect others from similar harm. It is a brutal dereliction of duty for any left-wing movement or organisation not to understand this. Any serious failing in safeguarding, especially if left unaddressed, can create an environment that makes it difficult for victims and those affected to come forward and for individuals to feel safe. This also poses a serious obstacle to building an organisation that claims to be truly diverse and welcoming to all sections of the working class.

Since exposing the serious failure, we have taken this matter very seriously, because as an old motto of the labour movement says: 'An attack on one - is an attack on us all.' Our determination to stand shoulder to shoulder with all who suffer oppression and exploitation is undermined if this solidarity does not include those who have been victimised by 'one of us'. As our guide states: 'The building of a revolutionary party for socialist change and the broader workers' movement will be damaged if the divisions and prejudices created by class society find expression within our own organisation.'

## **Fight for accountability**

We are fighting for a thorough and collective understanding of what has led to this egregious failure to uphold and implement our Safeguarding policies and methods. This is critical to moving forward. To this end, a genuine, fully informed discussion is required, involving all ISA members, who must learn comprehensive lessons and develop measures to ensure accountability at national and international level. The fight for such a fundamental review must also include robust action to strengthen our safeguarding practices, improve policy training and support for our safeguarding teams, and promote new, inclusive discussions on issues of abuse and gender-based violence at all levels of the organisation. Unfortunately, given the approach of the majority of ISA leadership to date, it is far from certain that such an informed and democratic process will take place.

Crucially, those responsible for this serious neglect of duty of care, both to our members and to society at large, must be held accountable for their misconduct and poor decisions. The concealment of the misconduct from the international leadership and by extension the membership, the continued downplaying of the harm done to victims and all survivors of gender-based violence within and outside our organisation, and the refusal to admit that this misconduct has its roots in the absence of consistent socialist feminism, have forced us to form this caucus. Not only do we reject the course of the majority in the leadership, but we have come to the conclusion that we must organise to challenge them decisively through this caucus; we strongly encourage other ISA members who reject the majority's approach to join us in this endeavour.

We want to ensure that the right political conclusions are drawn. This includes informing ISA members, many of whom were previously unaware of the misconduct, about the situation - while, of course, scrupulously maintaining the necessary confidentiality. It also includes a thorough reflection on our own weaknesses and past mistakes in order to learn from them. And it includes the imperative need to remove from leadership all those who are directly responsible for the misbehaviour and cover-up. If the ISA emerges from this process without a deep understanding of gender-based violence, without strengthened measures to protect against assault and abuse, and without a strong focus on socialist feminism, it will have failed a fundamental political test.

Once again, we deeply apologise to all those affected by the misconduct in this abuse case. We thank the individual concerned for coming forward and recognise the pain and suffering she has undoubtedly endured. We are aware that words alone cannot undo the damage done, but we are determined to take concrete steps to prevent such incidents in the future and to fight to ensure that the internal culture of our international organisation is fully in line with our strong socialist-feminist principles.

In our view, it is impossible for left, socialist and revolutionary forces to grow without an organic connection to the most important elements of the labour movement today - the workers and youth who are in struggle, with women and queer people so often playing a leading role. It was our active engagement in and influence on the global feminist movement and movements of the oppressed that led us to broaden our Marxist analysis and programme to fully integrate the particular impulses of struggles and demands for liberation from oppression into our overall revolutionary politics and programme. We cannot and will not accept any approach that in any way diminishes socialist feminism and safeguarding or undermines the importance of the struggle against oppression. Any organisation that claims

to represent a genuine Marxism and fight for a socialist world must have a thoroughly socialist-feminist approach at its core.

Several left, socialist and revolutionary organisations have failed to act on a proper socialist-feminist basis and in line with a good safeguarding approach when confronted with cases of gender-based violence by one of their members. Often this happened when the perceived need to retain male leaders was prioritised over a principled safeguarding approach. This is unacceptable to us. The priority must be to build a diverse organisation and leadership that is rooted in the most oppressed layers of the working class. The struggle against oppression in all its forms is not secondary, but fully intertwined with the struggle against class oppression and exploitation and for socialist change.

With the founding of the ISA we had taken important steps to reckon with the blind spots in our past, to rebuild this International on a sound Marxist basis, to further strengthen our understanding and engagement in struggles against oppression and to be a strong counterweight against the rise of the far right. Part of our leadership has returned to this past, or perhaps never left it, even though we thought it had been left behind by all of us. We will continue the struggle not only to prevent regression, but to move forward on the basis of a solid revolutionary socialist feminism. This requires a decisive course correction from the approach of the sections of the ISA leadership that have allowed this aberration to occur. We will settle for nothing less, because the need to correct this is a fundamental question for a revolutionary international. Without it, there is no prospect of building a truly revolutionary socialist international dedicated to the struggle against all forms of oppression.

If the culture of abuse and gender-based violence is perpetuated by those on the left and radicals who speak out against oppression, it will cause even greater harm. While we learn painful lessons from this shocking debacle, we must not lose sight of those directly harmed. We urge everyone not to share information about this case publicly and not to speculate on specific details that could reveal the identity of those affected by this misconduct.

***- issued on 18 April 2024 by: Group for the Protection against Sexism and other Discrimination within the Organisation, Socialist Feminism and Internal Democracy (SSFID), which so far includes the leadership of ISA sections in Ireland, Belgium, Austria, as well as groups and individuals among ISA members in Brazil, South Africa, England/Wales/Scotland, India, Mexico, the USA, Ivory Coast, Poland, Russia, Colombia, the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, the Czech Republic and Tunisia.***