

# **Rape and the ISO Survivors' Caucus: Nothing can be changed until it is faced**

Reflections on our crisis

Sunday 24 March 2019, by [ISO Survivors' Caucus](#) (Date first published: 22 March 2019).

**In the weeks after the 2019 convention of the International Socialist Organization (ISO), and in the days after the revelation that members of the 2013 Steering Committee had interfered with, overturned and silenced an independent committee's finding that an ISO member had committed rape, survivors in and around the ISO organized in solidarity with one another and to point a way forward for the left.**

**As survivors committed to the project of socialism from below, they have stepped in to fill vacancies in the ISO's leadership and begin to theorize what it will take for their justice. Moreover, they say to their abusers, to rape apologists and to those who refuse to acknowledge their existence: We exist in defiance of you, and in love with ourselves.**

**The following statement was written by Maryam A and Nikki W of the Interim Coordinating Committee of the ISO Survivors' Caucus.**

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TO BE a revolutionary does not exempt one from the broader context of capitalism. Despite our best efforts to unlearn the logics of the ruling class, the left cannot assume itself immune to racism, sexism, transphobia and other oppressions, simply because it identifies itself in opposition to oppression and exploitation.

The ISO is in the midst of understanding the depths of this simple statement.

The Survivors' Caucus was proposed at the 2019 February Convention, partially in response to the #MeToo movement. We had no idea how necessary the self-organization of survivors would become in the coming weeks. We had no idea how closely we would cling to one another, how much we would hold one another, and learn from one another in the fire.

The convention affirmed the explicit need for survivors to organize and collectivize their experiences personally and politically. The crisis that unfolded in the past week has made this more imperative than ever.

The #MeToo moment reemphasized for us what many feminists have articulated through decades: interpersonal sexual violence reflects heteropatriarchy in society at large and that to confront sexual violence in all its forms often means confronting entire societal structures set up in opposition to survivors. As Marxist survivors, the intersection of the personal, the intimate, the structural and the political is raw, and yet necessary to confront, in order to understand ourselves and the world we're trying to change.

There is much to say about alienation, about justice, about trauma and about violence. We hope members of our caucus can use the coming weeks and months to write from the vantage point of their experiences around these issues. Yet, at this early stage of crisis, we have a few simple things to say.

We are revolutionary socialists. We are survivors. We are committed to the safety, security and ardent defense of survivors. We are committed to a project of restorative justice, not to rehabilitate remorseless and unaccountable abusers, but to provide ourselves the opportunity to ask what healing means and what justice looks like for us.

**WE ARE not** the first revolutionaries who are also survivors. Sexual violence is pervasive in our society, and across the left. We say this not to deflect from, but to underscore the gravity of the crisis facing the ISO today. To step back and take time to assess the crisis and the underlying culture is of utmost importance.

For us, the question is not do we leave or do we stay (and caucus members have made both decisions), but more simply that there is work to be done. Exiting one organization or another won't solve the problem of sexual violence on the left. We are too aware that the left is lacking in structures and cultures that protect and believe survivors. The left must be able to recognize and combat gender-based violence in our own spaces if we are going to fight it in the world with any success.

The international working class is made of women, queer people, disabled people, indigenous women, sex workers and many others disproportionately prone to sexual violence. As revolutionaries, we must be able to provide an alternative vision of a world without violence, but we also must be able to confront the harms we are particularly vulnerable to before worldwide transformation. Building a project that does not stand for sexual violence is necessary to be at all worthwhile to the working class and to ourselves. We are committed to building that project.

We need structures that protect and believe us. We deserve justice. We deserve safety in spaces where we fight for human liberation. While our organization's future is unclear, we are committed to justice for those who have been hurt in our name. Whatever the future of revolutionary internationalist socialism from below, we will bring with us our commitment to survivors.

We do this work as people traumatized by the current revelations within the ISO. We do this work because we believe in the politics of socialism from below and liberation for all oppressed people. We do this work because we believe it is our duty to live up to those politics now more than ever.

If you are or were a member of the ISO and are a survivor and would like to join us in this work, please email [isosurvivors@gmail.com](mailto:isosurvivors@gmail.com).

We hope you can join us in solidarity as we seek justice for one another.

*Towards a world without violence,*

**Maryam A and Nikki W**

on behalf of the Interim Coordinating Committee for the Survivors' Caucus

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**P.S.**

- Socialist Worker, March 22, 2019:

<http://socialistworker.org/2019/03/22/nothing-can-be-changed-until-it-is-faced>