

# **Response to the draft international situation document, “As crises converge, the challenge of how to move forward for those below”**

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The draft international situation document prepared by the FI Bureau for the February 2024 meeting of the International Committee is an advance over the draft it presented to the October 2023 meeting. But its analysis is still impressionistic, its program is undeveloped, and it doesn't affirm the need for revolutionary parties and a revolutionary International.

This text will respond to the draft in as much detail as we can in the 2,000 words we have been allotted. Our sections correspond to the sections of the Bureau draft. In our view, the International situation document should be rewritten along the lines of our critique.

## **An imperialist attack on the entire Middle East**

The spirit of the draft's Palestine section is correct, but it begins with an assertion exaggerated to the point of being untrue: “This is the first time since the offensive against Iraq in 2003 that the United States, the hegemonic agent of the imperial system, has acted as a direct aggressor, without intermediaries.”

The section acknowledges Israel's settler-colonial character, but then focuses too much on the supposedly “neo-fascist nature” of the Netanyahu government. Ethnic cleansing has been the policy of all Israeli governments.

It correctly says that the most urgent task is to win support for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and the unimpeded entry of humanitarian aid. It demands an end to the displacement of Palestinians, their right of return, and an arms embargo against Israel. Oddly, it doesn't mention boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS). It calls for “link[ing] the struggle for self-determination for Palestine with an Arab revolution with democratic, secular and socialist dynamics.”

But it doesn't rise to the level of permanent revolution: a workers' and peasants' revolution against the capitalist governments of the Arab states, both monarchical and authoritarian, a democratic, secular Palestine, and a socialist federation of the Middle East and North Africa.

## **Advance of the extreme right challenges the neoliberal so-called “democracies”**

The draft conflates the rightward drift of bourgeois politics, the emergence of new far-right parties, and the rise of fascism. It correctly sees the growth of the right as the result of “decades of crisis of (neoliberal) democracies and their institutions, due to the increase in inequalities and the inability of these regimes to provide satisfactory answers to the aspirations of the peoples and workers.”

It acknowledges that “the failures of the ‘alternatives’ represented by social liberalism and ‘progressivism’” have contributed to the growth of the far right, but not that FI affiliates in many countries have supported social liberal parties, including in Mexico, Brazil, Italy, Greece, Spain, and Denmark, or social liberal politicians, from Jeremy Corbyn to Bernie Sanders.

The draft poses as “a fundamental task of the Fourth International: the fight to the death against authoritarian regimes, neo-fascisms and all totalitarianisms.” But it doesn’t explain how to fight.

It should say: not through elections and parliamentary maneuvers — although they may play a supporting role — but through mass demonstrations, political strikes, occupations, and workers’ defense now. And through mass strikes, dual power, splitting the army, and workers’ revolution in the future.

### **In Ukraine, the defense of national self-determination**

The draft defends the right of Ukraine to self-determination, vaguely refers to respecting the rights of minorities, and calls for the dismantling of all military blocs. It says that Ukraine should determine its future “independently of the interests of the oligarchy or the current neoliberal capitalist regime.” But it dances around these issues too much.

The Ukraine war is partly an inter-imperialist conflict between Russia, backed by China, on one side, and the US and NATO, on the other. Partly a war of national self-defense by capitalist but not imperialist Ukraine against imperialist Russia. And partly a civil war over the place of Ukraine’s Russian minority in or out of the Ukrainian state.

Revolutionary socialists should be against both imperialist blocs, for Ukraine against Russia, for the right of self-determination of the Russian minority (either equality and federalism, or secession), and against all the ruling classes and governments. The only lasting solution is workers’ power in Ukraine, Russia, and beyond.

Within this framework, we should acknowledge that the war has become a stalemate. Ukraine has defeated Russia’s attempt to conquer it, but Ukraine can’t win back the territory Russia has seized. Unjust or not, a ceasefire must come.

### **Unprecedented internationalization**

The draft observes an internationalization and convergence of crises: the environment, the Covid-19 pandemic, the world economy, inter imperialist conflict, authoritarianism, neofascism, and war. Migration — covered only in passing elsewhere in the draft — and oppression based on race and gender should be added.

The draft argues that the closest historical precedent to today’s convergence of crises is 1914-1946, which included two world wars, and continues: “There are at least two major differences: first, today we have the ecological crisis. ... The second [is] the lack of an alternative or alternatives to capitalism that are credible to the masses, the absence of an anti-capitalist force or set of forces capable of leading economic and social revolutions.”

Yes, exactly.

### **Climate collapse with unforeseeable consequences**

The draft notes that “The backdrop of all the faces of this multidimensional crisis is the ecological crisis provoked by two centuries of predatory capitalist accumulation.”

Mercifully, it includes no reference to “degrowth,” implicitly recognizing that the transition to ecosocialism will require expansion of some kinds of production (clean water, food, healthcare, education, culture, renewable energy, energy-efficient, non polluting manufacturing, construction, and transportation, etc.) and contraction of others (military and police, excess consumption of the rich, hydrocarbons, private cars, other unnecessary, wasteful consumer goods, etc.).

### **The economic and social crisis**

The section begins with this confused assertion: “We are still living under the impact of the great financial crisis of 2008, which would have opened a new great depression, followed by a long recession, just like that of the years 1873-90 and particularly like that of 1929-1933.”

It fails to acknowledge the capitalists’ success in navigating the past fifteen years. The world economy had recovered from the 2007-2009 recession and was booming, in capitalist terms, before Covid hit. To prevent a collapse during the pandemic, the capitalist governments launched an immense Keynesian intervention, \$7 trillion in the US alone.

The world economy is again at the peak of a business cycle, comparable to the latter 1990s. But this is a boom for the capitalists, and only a marginal improvement for workers. The prospect is another recession, the timing being uncertain.

Overall, the world economy has immense excess capacity and is growing more slowly than it did in the postwar period. The capitalists maintain their profits only by raising the rate of exploitation and appropriating the gains of rising labor productivity for themselves, increasing inequality between and within countries. This should be our focus.

### **The absence of mass revolutionary alternatives**

The draft speaks of popular resistance and observes: “The extremely critical moment for the system is, therefore, also that of a great political and ideological fragmentation of the social movements and the left. This is linked to a regression in the consciences of the oppressed and exploited.”

A promising start. For Marxists, the obvious follow-on would be that the central task of revolutionaries is to help counteract the fragmentation and regression in consciousness. But that isn’t where the draft goes.

### **How the many crises reinforce each other**

Instead, the draft describes how the many crises reinforce each other. The problems of working-class consciousness, organization, and leadership fade from view.

## **The United States, a hegemon in crisis**

The draft says that capitalism has been restored in Russia and China, and both countries have become imperialist. It sees signs of a transition to a new bipolar order. But it doesn't put this in a Marxist framework.

The alternatives were always that either the Soviet and Chinese working classes would overthrow the government bureaucracies, or the bureaucracies would restore capitalism. Given their size and levels of development, capitalist Russia and China would quickly become imperialist. When they were strong enough, they would challenge the established imperialist powers.

The bipolar order is here, but there are many open questions. The EU has disentangled itself from Russia. Can the US, Japan, and Europe disentangle themselves from China? How will the rest of the world fit into the imperial order? How will India, Brazil, South Africa, Iran, Turkey, and the other powers of the Global South exploit the conflict between the imperial powers to benefit their own ruling classes? What will happen to the poorer countries? What wars will there be? What will happen to the environment?

## **The exploited, the oppressed, and the peoples of the world respond with mobilizations**

The draft says that workers continue to resist capital and fight for democratic and economic demands. It lists struggles back to 2011: the Arab Spring, 15-M in Spain, and Occupy Wall Street. It doesn't list previous struggles back to the mid-1990s, when workers began to regain their confidence after the capitalist offensive and working-class retreat of the 1980s and early 1990s.

The draft returns briefly to the theme of working-class consciousness, organization, and leadership with the observation, "In Latin America, the social explosions and struggles – which combine democratic and economic demands – are channelled into the election of so-called 'progressive' governments."

But it fails to draw the conclusion that revolutionaries should expose these governments and the parties behind them as tools by which the capitalists control the workers.

## **The recent coups in Africa**

The draft, understandably, seeks to say something about Africa, since it is an important part of the world and one where the FI is weak. But the coups in Mali Burkina Faso, Niger, and Gabon are an odd point of entry

The draft should discuss the broad patterns: a population that is projected to exceed Asia's by the end of the century, rich natural resources, but not enough water and arable land to support the growing population by current methods, encroachment by Chinese and Russian imperialism, efforts to exclude them by US and European imperialism, competition among local elites and militaries for the riches, arms supplied by the imperialists, drought, famine, wars, ethnic conflicts, forced migrations, the exhaustion of the anticolonial movement, the rise in Islamism, dictatorships, coups.

It should go into more detail around the Arab Spring and around major countries whose crises illuminate the patterns: Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, and South Africa. The role of the African National Congress is particularly illuminating: on one hand, leading a corrupt, comprador government, on the other, filing a genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice.

### **The central demands for a new time**

The document should propose a set of demands to solve the problems it identifies, and a strategy to win them. That is, it should propose a transitional program, starting from the perceived needs of workers and the oppressed and leading to the conclusion that the working class must seize power and establish its own government.

Instead, the final section offers only a laundry list of demands and no strategy for realizing them. Its final paragraph says: "All these struggles must unite to defeat the new fascisms, to overthrow the regimes of exploitation and oppression, to lead to the confrontation with imperialism, colonialism, capitalism in a word." But how?

The working class will struggle. The problems are "the absence of an anti-capitalist force or set of forces capable of leading economic and social revolutions," "the political and ideological fragmentation of the social movements and the left," and "a regression in the consciences of the oppressed and exploited."

Revolutionary Marxists can't overcome these problems by an act of will. But we can organize ourselves to intervene in struggles in ways that help overcome these weaknesses. To do so, we must build revolutionary parties and a revolutionary International. The FI should return to that tradition.