

In Defence of Our Party

The undersigned comrades are declaring a faction within the SWP constitution to argue for a rejection of some CC and NC decisions taken since our conference closed on 6 January 2013. We believe these decisions have exacerbated the crisis facing the party following the Disputes Committee report at conference. We fear that the CC's approach to this crisis, and in particular its hostile attitude to the legitimate concerns of student comrades, could easily precipitate a split. We believe a split would be a devastating outcome for our organisation, one that could seriously threaten its long-term viability.

The CC is stating that "the case is closed" and should not be further discussed. We do not want to reopen or discuss the case. The issues arising from it do need addressing, however, as our members face questions and attacks from those outside the party. The party has been damaged internally, in our relationships with those we want and need to work with, and in our international tendency. We have faced hostile attacks from the right-wing press and need to find meaningful practical ways of achieving a united defence of the party.

It is clear that comrades on all sides of the present debate are discussing it in various combinations and using a variety of media, both online and through the internal circulation of documents. It would be better to bring these discussions inside the party's democratic structures, within a framework that is open and facilitates participation. A faction can help clarify the political arguments in this way – far better than the current situation, which is in danger of spiralling out of control and further damaging the party.

We are for the unity of the party – and for instituting a change of course that will facilitate that unity.

We stand for the following:

1. Recognition that discipline in a revolutionary party is political - not administrative - and fundamentally a matter of conviction. This means that if contentious decisions are taken that do not have overwhelming support, the leadership cannot simply demand loyalty but needs to try to win the membership politically to its position over a period of time. However unhappy many members are about the actions of some comrades on all sides of the debate, prioritising disciplinary action over political resolution will only increase the damage to the party.
2. Recognition that comrades need time and space to honestly debate the issues we currently face if we are to reach a political resolution that has the overwhelming support of members. False polarisation and caricature will only obscure this process, and should have no place in our tradition.
3. Recognition that feminists are not our enemies, but potential allies. Feminists challenge the oppression of women. While some have few concerns beyond this, fighting oppression leads many more to reject society as a whole. It is crucial that we debate with these people about what politics can bring real social change, and that we defend strategies based on the central role of the working class. Sometimes we will be able to agree with those who identify themselves as feminists; at others, sharp but comradely disagreement will be necessary. Whatever our disagreements, they will not prevent us taking united action against women's oppression.
4. Implementation of a number of immediate measures to alleviate the current crisis:

- a) An acknowledgement by the Central Committee of the widely held concerns within our organization and internationally in our tendency, and in the wider labour movement, about the handling of the dispute, and an assurance that we are taking steps to learn from this criticism and address problems.
- b) A review of Disputes Committee (DC) procedures in relation to cases involving allegations of rape and sexual harassment. Sufficient time should be allocated at the next conference to discuss ways in which the DC and its procedures can be strengthened, with space also allowed for votes on proposals brought forward by branches and the leadership.
- c) X to stand down from any paid or representative roles in our party or united front work for the foreseeable future.
- d) No disciplinary action against those comrades who have publicly expressed concerns over the DC's conduct and findings.
- e) Full support for the comrades who made the complaints. Zero tolerance of any attempt to undermine them and others who have raised criticisms of the DC report. Action to ensure they do not suffer any detriment in the party because of the position they have taken. An end to the punishment of party workers who have expressed concerns over the dispute.

Why A Faction?

It is not part of our tradition to give rule-mongering priority over the principles and spirit of democratic centralism. In this instance, the creation of a faction is not only politically helpful, but is also within our rules.

Factions are an important part of the democracy of the SWP. Section 10 of the SWP Constitution reads:

If a group of party members disagrees with a specific party policy, or a decision taken by a leading committee of the party, they may form a faction by producing a joint statement signed by at least 30 members of the party.

A faction will be given reasonable facilities to argue its point of view and distribute its documents. These must be circulated through the National Office, to ensure that all members have the chance to consider them.

Debate continues until the party at a Special or Annual Conference reaches a decision on the disputed question. Permanent or secret factions are not allowed.

However, factions are unusual in the history of the SWP, and it is particularly unusual for one to be formed so soon after a party conference. It would not be appropriate for a group of comrades to form a faction simply because they disagreed with one or more decisions taken at conference. It is not part of our political tradition to try to keep revisiting decisions until we get ones we like.

We accept the decisions taken at conference. None of the concerns listed above involve overturning these decisions. They relate to a failure on the part of the CC and the NC to provide an adequate response to the questions being asked of the party by its own members and supporters since conference. The CC motion passed by NC condemns comrades who have made their concerns public yet limits the scope for internal debate. It accepts the need to review DC procedures, but imposes

unnecessary limits on the remit of this review. It provides disciplinary rather than political solutions. It offers no clarity on the role of X, which is in danger of exacerbating unnecessary divisions. It offers no view on attempts to undermine the women who made the complaints or those who opposed the DC report.

We aim to conduct an argument within the party so that these concerns are addressed by the next SWP conference, whether a special conference or the next annual conference. In line with the SWP constitution we will dissolve the faction at the end of the next conference.

Jamie Woodcock (SWP NC / Goldsmiths /NUS NEC)

Dan Swain (SWP NC /Norwich/ UCU)

Sara Bennett (SWP NC / Unite EC)

Ian Allinson (SWP NC / Bury & Prestwich / Unite EC)

Amy Gilligan (SWP NC / Cambridge)

Laura J (SWP NC / Walthamstow / NUJ)

Jim Wolfreys (SWP NC / Euston / UCU)

Colin Wilson (SWP NC / Hackney)

Chaz Singh (SWP NC / Walthamstow)

Jelena Timotijevic (SWP NC / Brighton)

Mark Bergfeld

Hannah Dee

Ray Marrell

Pat Stack (Camden)

Ian Birchall (Islington)

Colin Barker (Manchester)

Mike Gonzalez (Glasgow)

Megan Trudell (Walthamstow)

Geoff Brown (Bury & Prestwich)

Charlie Hore (Hackney / Unison)

Pete Shaw (Leeds / Unite)

Ru Maclean (Tooting)

Andrew Cunningham (Manchester/ Unison)

Alice Livingston-Boomla (Euston)

Debs Gwynn (Merseyside / NUT)

Viv Smith (Hackney South)

Rita Mcloughlin (Hackney South)

Cathy Porter (Oxford)

Jon Flaig (Kent)

Nick O'Brien (Norwich/NUT)

Pura Ariza (Liverpool/UCU)

Simon Behrman (Euston)

Gill George (Hackney / Unite)

Dave Renton (Islington)

Alison Lord (Walthamstow)
Shanice McBean (Euston/KCL SWSS)
Samir Hinks (Euston/KCL SWSS)
Shereen Prasad (Islington/FE)
Rachel Eborall (Walthamstow)
Roderick Cobley (Walthamstow)
Stacey Whittle (Brighton)
Sarah Young (Brighton)
Ian Crosson (Lewisham / UCU)
Rick Lighten (Manchester / Unison)
Nathan Bolton (Essex Uni President)
Pete Gillard (Hackney / Unite)
Rob Owen (Croydon / NUT)
Willie Black (Edinburgh / Unite)
Mike Thompson (Leicester / Unite)
Norman Maclean (South London)
Brian Parkin (Leeds / UCU)
Paul Burnham (Wood Green)
Andy North (Birmigham / NUT)
Sundara Jermone (Birmingham / NUT)
Simon Furze (Birmingham)
Sadia Jabeen (Birmingham)
Kim Gibbins (Birmingham)
Bunny La-Roche (Kent)
Soren Goard (Goldsmiths)
Ross Speer (Euston)
Matt Myers (Oxford SWSS)
Robin Burrett (Euston)
Matthew Cookson (Hackney)
Dave Radford (Oxford/PCS)
Steve Ellis (Brixton)
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