

## *We need an entirely new leadership*

*Emma Rock*

There is currently a huge crisis playing itself out within the SWP, the party I have been a member of the past five years. Like many of us warned, this has now spread beyond our ranks into the national press, and has even been picked up by our international affiliate groups in the International Socialist Tendency. Regardless of individual's opinion on the details of this case, it can no longer be denied that this issue will create severe repercussions for the party. The CC have failed to lead and much of the membership is demanding an explanation. It is also a dead end to argue that this should stay within the party and we should simply draw a line under it. This is in the national press and silence and failure to recognise the problem would be political suicide with the very people we hope to work with, the movement.

I want to make clear straight away that I believe in the party and broadly support its political analysis, and that I am in no way suggesting the formation of yet another left wing group. By writing this I hope to rally comrades to stay within the party and change it for the better. Therefore I firmly believe that the best way of preserving all that we have achieved in the last few years is to be critical. Demonstrating that we are an organisation that can take on board its failures and change to remedy them, is the only way I believe we will restore our reputation in the eyes of the class. I am not going to reopen old cases, or go over the events of the last couple of months in this argument, but explain some of the political problems the party is suffering from, and how we go about remedying them.

The party is effectively run by the CC, who dictate the direction of the party and respond to events day by day. Whether you agree with their decisions or not, this system is hardly democratic, and while we may debate issues at conference the initiative clearly lies with the CC. For example decisions about whether to form or join united fronts are made unilaterally by the CC. While we can debate the method of our involvement in them, our participation has already been decided by a tiny group of comrades. Likewise the employment of full time party workers is decided by the CC, who themselves are mostly either present or former full timers. This has created a bad culture where the leadership recreates itself each year, a line of continuity running back to the 1970s. While some will argue that this preserves our political tradition, it is becoming more and more clear that this is also hampering

our ability to adapt and respond to new ideas. The long running debate on the role of the internet and the party's use of social media is one such example; another is our lagging behind the rest of the left on issues such as Trans rights.

The CC now unfortunately represents a conservative layer now firmly ingrained in the party and focused on preserving its position. Many of it's members have worked for the party for a decade or more, they rely on the party as an income and have become career bureaucrats entrenched in their jobs. Somewhere along the way the leadership stopped being a group of leading revolutionaries and started to be a self-serving political class in their own right. Now more than ever the party needs effective and democratic leadership made up of the best people in the class, not people who haven't set foot in a workplace for decades and who are in my opinion totally divorced from the class.

This is not to say that the members of the CC aren't sincere revolutionaries who desire to change the world. They themselves have fallen victim to the secrecy and elitism that is customary with the leadership, this a system that just as little justice to the members of the CC as it does for the party. However they're solution has been to circle the wagons and maintain control by expelling or censoring dissenting voices. This has left us with a CC that is only able to lead by fear, and as a consequence is increasingly politically bankrupt. Being on the CC is not a right or a privilege it is a duty to the party, and when you are no longer performing that duty it is time to go. The party does not owe the CC a wage no matter how long they've been there. This is not a private members club, it's a revolutionary party that needs to adapt and change with the class.

Another problem is that the development of our political tradition is for the most part left in the hands of 'safe' and 'experienced' members. These people will frequently have their pieces published in the ISJ and elsewhere and will be encouraged to speak to meetings. Similarly to my comments on the CC this does not mean that these people are not sincere, or even in many cases correct, but it does lead to a serious block on our development of new ideas. For example the slowness and conservativeness with which the party, and much of the movement, engaged with LGB issues in the 1980-90s. Likewise it wasn't until 2007 that the T was added to LGBT on party documents, and since then it has remained effectively a meaningless gesture, with the party providing little or no political contributions on the issue. This leaves us playing catch up with the other elements of the left when we should be taking the lead. We are supposed to be the vanguard of the class, and

being behind them on important issues is simply not good enough.

Therefore the solutions as I see them are radical and unforgiving. We need an entirely new leadership, and we need to comprehensively overhaul all the democratic structures of the party. All party forums should be more than just talking shops and should have real teeth to implement new ideas. Likewise ideology and the development of our political position should not be left to a handful of theorists but should be engaged in by every comrade in every branch. We should become a true hub for the development of new ideas, and not be left lagging behind groups such as UKuncut or Occupy. The leadership should be the best members of the class, those with a real understanding of what it is to be in the workplace right now, and we should feel no sentiment in removing or replacing them as the situation demands. These ideas and others if implemented could begin a process of making us genuinely a party of leaders, and not just jumping from one task to another at the behest of the CC. This could make us much more effective in the class and allow us to work more closely with others on the left while avoiding the secrecy that lead to this present crisis. We need draw a curtain permanently on a culture where comrades who feel the CC have made poor decisions don't raise it for fear of being tarred as disloyal.