

Linda Rogers' letter

For the Attention of the SWP Central Committee

I am writing to express my condemnation of the process used by the leadership of the SWP to deal with an allegation of rape. As the shop steward at Scottish Women's Aid I am horrified that the leadership of the SWP - of which I have been a member for 18 years - thought that it was in a position to investigate a serious crime such as rape. Would the DC have investigated a murder? I would guess not, but then what does that say about the level of seriousness with which the CC and DC treat rape?

The series of decisions made by the CC and the DC around the processes for dealing with this allegation of rape and their inability to either pull back from them when they started to go wrong, or to respond reasonably to criticism after the fact (despite access to a very clear analysis of what was wrong with the decisions made) indicate a real lack of understanding of rape, its definition and its consequences.

In addition to my concerns about the sheer inappropriateness of some of the lines of questioning -as raised by many others - I have a more general concern about the lack of specialism in the DC which is required when dealing with rape victims, and the separate set of specialist skills required when investigating rape when there is only one word against another. This allegation is about rape and sustained abuse within a relationship with a huge power imbalance rather than for example an isolated incident. My point is not that certain types of rape are more or less serious others. My point is that the investigators were not trained in understanding and investigating the different manifestations of violence against women and the various responses required depending on the experience of the woman.

We do reject the bourgeois system of justice but in this case aspects of the bourgeois process were used, and having read the available documents relating to this case it is not convincing that there was a there a clear analysis and understanding of what aspects of an investigatory and quasi-judicial process were accepted and which were rejected. Clear decisions around process needed to be made and then fully explained to the complainant so that she was aware of what exactly she was getting into, its limitations and how effective it could possibly be in terms of her need for a resolution and could make her own choice on that basis.

This shambolic playing at investigator, judge and jury held a real risk of

ruining someone's life and it is no thanks to the leadership of the SWP and only testimony to the woman's strength if it hasn't.

The response of the CC following the leaking of documents onto the internet and the subsequent media publicity has been the shamefully offensive "Statement by the Central Committee in response to attacks on the party". This document is only further evidence of the failures of this process.

"Had the Disputes Committee believed that the accused person was guilty, it would have expelled him from the SWP immediately." This statement alone sums up my point. Really? Do you think this could be an adequate response to rape? No responsibility to any other woman who might be at risk?

This document also states:

"If this case had been raised within a trade union or any other organisation there would be no question that the matter should be treated with complete confidentiality. This basic principle should also apply in this case."

Of course confidentiality should apply; however, confidentiality really isn't the issue here. The decisions you made and the way in which you handled the investigation are the issues. Focusing on confidentiality is a poor attempt to obscure the failings of the process and close down the debate.

As anyone who works in an organisation or operates in a trades union knows full well this matter would NOT have been dealt with through internal mechanisms. The procedures for investigating disciplinary matters or disputes between colleagues are not used by organisations or trades unions to investigate serious crimes. How could you not know that? Or are you just assuming that a sheepish membership will accept this untruth?

Even by your own terms you failed to follow the "basic principles" of a standard trade union process. I would refer you to ACAS good practice guidelines in terms of appointing individuals to panels that don't have a personal connection with the individuals involved in the dispute being heard.

The introductory statement to the document is also untrue:

"A series of attacks on the party have appeared over the last few days - many in newspapers which are the sworn enemies of women's

liberation and workers' rights".

Most of the attacks on the actions of the CC and the DC are not in newspapers which are the 'sworn enemies of women's liberation'. Again, why lie to us? It does your position no good at all - most of us do have access to the internet. The issue at hand for the membership is never what the enemies of women's liberation and workers' rights say about us and to us, but rather how we can hold our head up and explain our actions and decisions with integrity to the world outside of the party with which we come into contact on a day to day basis. Your actions have seriously damaged the party's integrity and members' ability to operate.

Finally, it is false to claim that the party is somehow immune from sexism. There is no theoretical or evidence basis for making this claim.

I have seriously considered my position in the party over the last few days. I know many others who feel the same way that I do. I have decided I want to stay a member, however I can only remain as a member of the SWP on the basis that action is taken to remedy this:

- Conference must be recalled and the entire CC and DC need to resign.
- There needs to be an immediate and public apology to both of the women who made complaints including an acknowledgment of the mishandling of their complaints, and
- An immediate apology must be made to the membership of the SWP who have been shockingly let down by their leadership.

I would appreciate a sensible and thoughtful response to this letter.

Linda Rodgers

SWP Edinburgh Branch

Shop Steward, Scottish Women's Aid

Unite CYWNfP Edinburgh Branch Committee

Unite CYWNfP Regional Industrial Sector Committee, Scotland.