

Statement on the 2013 crisis in the SWP

Monday 20 May 2024, by [SWP \(UK\)](#) (Date first published: 16 May 2024).

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) is opposed to all forms of sexism and oppression, and we have zero tolerance for abuse or harassment. However, decisions made by the SWP in 2013 damaged our record—and the current leadership acknowledges the party's mistakes and is committed to learning from them.

We were wrong in how we responded to the two cases described below and we unreservedly apologise.

Accusations of “rape apologism” directed against the SWP arise from a case that was discussed at our party conference in January 2013.

The case involved a woman alleging rape by someone who was then a member of the elected leadership of the party. A second woman also came forward to allege sexual harassment by the same member of the leadership. The women making the allegations chose not to take them to the police, an entirely understandable decision, given the lack of seriousness with which the police treat such cases. Instead, they sought to pursue their allegations through the party’s “disputes committee”, an elected body of the SWP.

As we subsequently recognised, the process we had in place at that time was entirely inadequate and we handled the two cases badly.

Among other mistakes we made, the composition of the panel that heard the first case contained people who had worked closely with the person accused. Following the procedures in place at that time, the panel sought to pass judgement on matters of fact about which it could not meaningfully establish the truth. Our 2013 procedures were also insufficiently mindful of or sensitive to the challenges women face when they bring forward serious accusations of sexual misconduct. They also did not do enough to acknowledge potential imbalances of power due to gender, seniority in an organisation and age differences.

For clarity, the person against whom the allegations were directed has not been a member of the SWP since 2013.

We are sorry for failing the two women. We also apologise to all those in the wider movement who, like us, consider women’s oppression in general, and rape in particular, to be abhorrent, including former members of the SWP who supported the two women.

Because of the inadequacies in the handling of these allegations, in 2013 we immediately changed how we deal with such cases and have continued to review and update these procedures since. Our current procedures [\[1\]](#) and expected behaviour [\[2\]](#) are on our website. We make sure any new member of the SWP engages with these, and we make every effort to ensure they are taken seriously.

Under our current procedures, anyone accused of rape or harassment is suspended from SWP membership while an investigation is taking place. If a member of the SWP's elected leadership body is subject to an accusation that needs to be investigated, no member of that same leadership body – or former member of the leadership who worked with them – will be on the panel looking into the case. It will also be ensured that the person bringing the allegation is happy with the nature and membership of the panel overseeing the case before it begins.

Our new procedures also reaffirm that those bringing such accusations should be supported, whether they decide to go to the SWP's disputes committee, the elected body that handles such matters, or to seek to use legal avenues, such as the police and courts. We should always proactively take measures to protect women who come forward with accusations.

When holding hearings over cases of sexual misconduct, we now, in common with many other organisations on the left, seek to apply the guidelines drawn up by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission.

We were and remain absolutely opposed to rape-apologism. We are now confident our procedures are robust, helping us maintain our zero-tolerance approach to abuse and harassment. We hope that the measures we have taken will help to reassure those in the wider movement that we do not tolerate rape in our organisation or downplay its seriousness.

We do not assume that we have all the answers, and we welcome advice from those outside the SWP who have expertise in these matters. We feel we have learnt both from our own mistakes in 2013 and from our engagement in wider movements over questions of oppression since then. We will strive to continue to learn and develop our practice in future.

Statement from the Central Committee of the SWP, May 2024

P.S.

• Socialist Worker (UK). Thursday 16 May 2024:
<https://socialistworker.co.uk/press-releases/statement-2013/>

Footnotes

[1] <https://socialistworker.co.uk/procedural/terms-of-reference-and-procedures-for-the-swp-disputes-committee/>

[2] <https://socialistworker.co.uk/procedural/expected-behaviour-in-the-swp/>