

# Britain: Post union president resigns from Socialist Workers Party

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Britain's *Socialist Worker* newspaper acknowledged on November 29 that Jane Loftus, president of the Communication Workers Union (CWU), has quit the Socialist Workers Party. Its manner of doing so only confirms how deeply embroiled the SWP is in the rampant opportunism that led to her departure.

Loftus is the SWP's leading member in the trade unions. As reported by the *World Socialist Web Site*, she was one of the 17-member executive of the CWU that voted unanimously to call off the national postal strikes scheduled for November 6 and 9 and to accept a no-strike deal until at least the New Year. This enabled the company to begin clearing the massive backlog of mail in the run-up to Christmas resulting from as many as 18 days of strike action by some post workers. It also facilitates ongoing plans to sack around 45,000 CWU members in preparation for the partial privatisation of Royal Mail. (See "Britain: Socialist Workers Party colludes in postal strike sellout")

The interim agreement signed by the CWU has left postal workers bitterly angry with their leadership, while management has renewed its campaign of speed-ups, victimisation and intimidation of militants. With the London area of the union already demanding a resumption of the national strike, all efforts to present the agreement as a victory have been treated with contempt by everyone apart from some union apparatchiks at local level and the Socialist Party of Peter Taaffe. (See: "Royal Mail strike: Britain's Socialist Party defends union capitulation")

The SWP was explicitly opposed to the agreement, but its articles said nothing about Loftus's support for it and maintained this silence for over three weeks. This remained the case even after reports emerged of her decision on November 18 to resign from the party rather than reconsider her position.

The *Socialist Worker* report is remarkable for its

brevity, at just 167 words, and for the friendly tone it adopts to Loftus. Stating that her vote was in "sharp contradiction with the SWP's position," the unattributed piece complains that this "has caused problems for our members in the union and much wider."

It continues, "Members of the SWP's central committee met Jane and asked her to reflect on her position and, particularly in the light of Royal Mail's continuing attacks, to reverse her support for the agreement. A meeting of SWP postal workers at the union's national briefing agreed that it was wrong to vote for the deal. The party's national committee also discussed the issues raised."

After all this, however, "Jane has made it clear that she is sticking to her line."

Not only does the SWP remain on first name terms with Loftus, but they close the article with an appeal on her behalf, stating that having resigned, "she remains keen to continue working with party members."

A politically appalling picture emerges from this brief account. The SWP leadership would have happily remained silent on Loftus's betrayal, asking only that she make some token display of contrition, but for the fact that its members in the CWU and nationally were facing embarrassing questions that they could not answer. In the end such a shabby compromise was only prevented by the hard-line taken by Loftus in defence of her right to collude in the CWU's betrayal. And even then the SWP makes clear that they want their members to continue political collaboration with her.

Similar events took place in 2005, when SWP members Martin John and Sue Bond, who sat on the executive of the Public and Commercial Services union, voted to end action against a pension's agreement that excluded new entrants. Bond continued as a member after signing a vague letter of apology, while John quit the party.

More directly, this is not the first time that Loftus has

behaved in this way while remaining in the SWP. Her entire career has been characterised by constant accommodation to the CWU bureaucracy, while utilising a connection with the SWP as a left cover for herself and her fellow bureaucrats. Whatever minor concerns this posed for the SWP, it was a willing accomplice in Loftus's actions, seeing her as a means of consolidating its own relations with the union tops in the CWU and more generally.

The SWP has feted, amongst many others, CWU General Secretary Billy Hayes, a member of the group of left union demagogues who emerged in 2003 dubbed the "awkward squad." Hayes appeared at Stop the War Coalition meetings and the party's annual education school, "Marxism," before he joined the Compass Group, which proclaims the virtues of the social market.

In 2002, Loftus was elected to the CWU national executive and in June 2007 became its president. She was elected in part due to the desire of postal workers to oppose the CWU's collaboration with privatisation and massive job cuts. However, whereas her voting record on the CWU executive is secret—like that of her cohorts—she has been accused of voting for the 2004 "Major Change" agreement between Royal Mail and the CWU and of absenting herself from the ratification of the 2006 "Shaping the Future" document.

The accusation appears well founded, given a polemical exchange between the SWP's Charlie Kimber and Hayes, who attacked the *Socialist Worker* for encouraging unofficial strikes while noting that "members of the Socialist Workers Party have not advanced such a policy at branch or national executive level." Loftus was the only SWP member at national executive level at the time.

In 2007, the CWU sold out a national strike of postal workers, with the executive accepting a rotten offer by Royal Mail at a meeting on October 15 and 16 and calling off strikes scheduled for October 18 and 19. The deal was so bad that it was not released for several days. Loftus too maintained her silence and so helped to demobilise rank-and-file opposition to the sellout.

The SWP itself described the deal as one that would "sweep away crucial rights, steal our pensions, clear the way for more bullying, and give managers even more power to order us about.... It is a threat to us all and to the public service." Two executive members registered their opposition to the deal, as required by the CWU's undemocratic constitution, in order to campaign against acceptance. Loftus did not and was never criticised by the SWP. The deal paved the way for a massive assault on

postal workers, carried out in collusion with the CWU that resulted in this year's dispute.

The road traveled by Loftus into the bosom of the trade union bureaucracy is hardly unique, nor is the SWP the only point of departure. The upper layers of the trade union bureaucracy are littered with figures who began their career in one or another of Britain's fake left groups—utilising them to build a reputation as an alternative to the right only to break with them once their career reaches its zenith.

The Public and Commercial Services union leadership to which the SWP executive members capitulated in 2005, for example, is headed by Mark Serwotka, who began as a supporter of the Alliance for Workers Liberty before transferring his allegiance briefly to George Galloway's Respect party. The general secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, Matt Wrack, was formerly a member of the Socialist Party of Peter Taaffe and maintains close relations.

Other top bureaucrats have no problem continuing membership in pseudo-left groups, thanks to the opportunist politics they espouse. PCS President Janice Godrich is a Socialist Party member and heads a large minority on the national executive.

The SWP et al. seek to justify their efforts to cuddle up to various left-talking trade union bureaucrats on the basis that this constitutes a struggle against the betrayals of the right wing and is part of a strategy of "reclaiming the unions." But far from their having transformed the unions, the nominal left has carried out betrayals that the right wing could not get away with. Those members of left groups elevated to the various executive bodies have acted in similar fashion. They are examples not of the ability of the unions to become "fighting organisations," but of the integration of a significant layer of ex-radicals into the very highest ranks of the trade union apparatus where they act as loyal guardians of its left flank.



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