

Attendees speak on Socialist Equality Party public meetings marking 1926 British General Strike

Our reporters
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WSWS reporters spoke to some of those attending the lecture series held by the Socialist Equality Party (UK) last month marking the centenary of the 1926 general strike. The lecture by SEP National Secretary Chris Marsden, “Trotsky, Stalin and the 1926 British General Strike” was delivered to public meetings in Sheffield, Manchester, Inverness, London and Glasgow. It is available here including a video of the event.

Frank, a student from China, attended the London meeting. He said, “It’s the first time I’ve learned about this struggle in 1926. I think there are a lot of difficulties in that struggle which are reflected today. It’s also important to understand and to look back to see what we missed, what were the lessons. That’s how we deal with the future and this present moment.

“My own perspective is, even though, of course, the revolution, the next October Revolution is not coming tomorrow, we can’t say that capitalism is a historical necessity, or, on the other hand, that the revolution is coming and we just have to wait for it. I reject that narrative of necessity that capitalism, even in today’s stage of permanent crisis, is still trying to sell you.

“I would say a genuine revolution would come unexpected. But we can’t romanticise chance. Preparedness is important. It’s about how we organise something that is unexpected by capitalism.”

Frank had been studying “Japanese fascism and its influences, the lesson of that fascist movement for today because there are also lots of non-Western fascist tendencies and Japan can be seen as a quite good example.” He drew comparisons with the Stalinist influence in Britain, explaining, “The Soviet Union under Stalin’s regime was not giving good guidance to the Japanese Communist Party.”

“If we can put all these regional issues together, maybe we can really help each other to fight our battles.”

Asked about how he saw the significance of Trotsky and the Trotskyist movement, Frank responded, “I would say internationalism is still very, very fundamental, to connect this kind of revolutionary steam into a global perspective.

“What is really inspiring is that you’re not satisfied with a dead end. That’s very good; I like that. I think that’s very, very, very, very important for today’s situation, especially like I think we all live in capitalism and capitalism is global. We can’t really fight capitalism at one country, one system, one little fraction. Because the problem is global. You have to fight a global resistance offered by the capitalist class.”

Student **Jian**, who attended in Manchester, said, “I found the meeting interesting and liked the depth of the analysis, particularly the critiques of other histories of the events.

“I think a key lesson from the discussion was the importance of opposing the sway of reformist trade union leaderships.”

Chris Porter, a sociology lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University, said, “The meeting provided an important assessment of the lessons we can take from the 1926 British General Strike. I’ve read a few articles and books on the subject, but none of them had the critical perspective on the role of the political leadership, nationally and internationally, that was the focus of this meeting.

“Asking what a successful outcome and historical legacy of the strike might have been, given the revolutionary spirit animating workers’ struggles in

Europe at that time, rather than applying the restricted imagination of bourgeois reformism, the meeting opened my eyes not just to what happened a century ago, but also to lessons for assessing how today's revolutionary potential is subject to many of the same political forces.

“Above all, I came out of the meeting thinking how class struggle in different places and times are connected, that even defeat for the working class in one struggle can provide positive impetus and lessons. But for that we need a socialist, internationalist perspective willing to critically assess the role of union and party leadership in those defeats, to lay out the class positions they represented, and to make the case for an alternative that represents the interests of the international working class.”

Tim attended in Sheffield. He said, “I thought the meeting was very detailed with a lot of information to try to take in. It really made me further my studies of the General Strike and into the first Shop Stewards movements in Britain and the formulations of Workers' Councils at around about the time of World War. It was so great to see a lot of interest in the General Strike, particularly among younger workers and students.

“One of the things I learnt from the meeting was just how deep-seated and dreadful was the direction that the Stalinists gave to the British workers, and how this leadership disoriented and disillusioned a lot of them. Even though the defeat of the strike was a massive blow, it did help to radicalise workers and to drive more further to the left. The workers kept fighting, regardless of the misdirection from the Stalinist Comintern. The meeting and the General Strike were very educational and inspiring for today.”

Mark, a former miner, said, “I through the meeting excellent. I've always found being around fellow comrades inspiring. I was thankful to have the opportunity to buy some books for studying.

“That meeting was the only true analysis of the 1926 general strike, and its betrayal of the working class and the working class of today face the same betrayal.

“Only the Socialist Equality Party are true to the international fight the working class face. We're seeing a massive collapse of the “left”, the Labour Party and other splinter factions are bankrupt. The right know it. That's why facial cameras, biometric checks, and

surveillance are being used. They're preparing, they need to be ready, just like in 1926.”

Jill, a social care worker from Inverness who attended the meeting said, “I really didn't know what to expect when I went to the meeting as I didn't know much about the 1926 strikes beforehand. In school, I was taught about the First and Second World War and nothing in between. It seems the history of the struggle in between them has been obscured.

“I'm really glad Chris and the Socialist Equality Party brought this meeting to Inverness. This generation needs to be informed of important historical facts that still matter today and not be left in the dark like my generation was. If they are to take up a fight, they need to know this stuff. It was great to see so many young people at the meeting”.

Ryan attended the meeting in Glasgow. He said, “I was first interested in going to this meeting when informed of it by a friend. I had some knowledge of the general strike before attending, though only the broad strokes. I was not fully aware of the role the TUC [Trades Union Congress] had played in breaking the strike. I feel the lesson of the unions' betrayal of the strikers is a pertinent one, as it reflects further betrayals of workers and a continued desire to pour cold water on any revolutionary intent for the emancipation of the working class.”

The WSWs also received comments sent in by those who have watched the lecture online. Mohammed from West Yorkshire said, “I thought it was a brilliant speech, with a lot of information and how this strike lead to other things for the working class.”

Another read, “Really great lecture! I see many people think that all it takes to fix society is having a general strike, but as the British 1926 experience demonstrates, that is not the case. It requires a revolutionary party oriented to the international proletariat, independent of the trade union bureaucracy.”



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