

An opponent of the class struggle attacks Trotsky, writes a cautionary tale of the 1926 British General Strike

Jonathon Schneer's *Nine Days in May: The General Strike of 1926*

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Jonathon Schneer's *Nine Days in May* is miserable history. It is a book written to explain to workers that the 1926 British General Strike was doomed to defeat, as proof of the impossibility of all such militant struggle. The best that can be hoped for, at a time of ever more viciously right-wing governments, is a repeat of post-war Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee's supposed parliamentary benevolence.

Lenin once wrote that a Marxist's "task is to arouse the working masses to revolutionary activity, to independent action and to organisation". The definition of a bureaucrat is the opposite. Schneer has written a book for bureaucrats. Citing at the beginning his concluding lines will give an idea of the sort of work we are dealing with:

The Strike had to happen; it should never have happened. It was a magnificent failure for labour; it was a complete triumph for labour's enemies. It provided no blueprints. It was unique in British history. It illuminated the human condition.^[1]

What a staggering waste of 353 pages plus notes (by the eBook edition) of historical research. At the UK book launch in London, sitting alongside the Trades Union Congress's General Secretary Paul Nowak, Schneer further clarified of the General Strike, "British workers and their leaders, most of them... learned vital lessons from it: first, never strike when it suits your employer... second, be very wary about declaring general strikes in the future... third, and a corollary to the other two, stick to the parliamentary road where possible."

He has appointed himself the labour movement's Dante: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter upon the class struggle!"

What makes this more galling is that the factual material Schneer presents in his book speaks strongly *against* these conclusions. In places, the contradictions scream out from the page. At the heart of this seeming paradox is a deeply conservative political perspective which recoils at the thought of a revolutionary way forward for the British working class in the 1920s, or any time before or since.

When 1926 posed the choice sharply between either that road or the path to defeat, Schneer's conclusion is that failure was inevitable.

One function of this "history as tragedy" account is to excuse the choices and actions of the main political players—certainly on the side of the trade union bureaucracy. They were doing what they had to do, playing their appointed roles through to their fateful conclusion. Significantly, the sole figure in the text who strikes a discordant note, whose ideas are "wilder" and cannot be reconciled with this defeatist

framework, is Leon Trotsky.

The following review will answer *Nine Days in May's* attacks on Trotsky, largely in his own words, and in doing so make clear that these writings are the working class's indispensable guide to this critical historical experience.

An inevitable confrontation, predicted and betrayed

Nine Days in May makes clear the enormous force of historical necessity driving the strike, as over a million miners fought to resist sweeping attacks on wages, supported by the solidarity action of millions of workers in other industries. It also extensively demonstrates that this was the last thing any of the trade union leaders who formally authorised the action wanted. The fact that Schneer agrees with them renders his book unusually honest on this score, when most published on the topic are written with the aim of inventing a more militant pedigree for the trade union bureaucracy.

The General Council of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) had in fact "done their utmost to avoid calling the Strike in the first place, and now did not want to win it, whatever they might say in public, but merely to induce the government to reconvene talks."^[2] It "sought desperately to avert it", "continued looking for an exit so long as it lasted" and countermanded every expression of rebellion, trying to get local councils of action or strike committees, of which there were "hundreds" throughout the country, "to discontinue their own, often much more militant, local strike bulletins" or else "censor their product".^[3]

Why then did the strike take place? Schneer answers that "mounting pressure to call a General Strike eventually overbore" the TUC's resistance. To have denied support to the miners, after the "Black Friday" betrayal in 1921, "would have constituted a second, greater, betrayal, not merely in the minds of the miners but in the minds of the rank and file of most other unions."^[4] The text is largely pre-occupied with the manoeuvres of the government and the trade union officials, but the mood of the British working class makes itself felt throughout.

On the other side, the employers and the government organised extensively for the General Strike's total defeat. "The prime minister, Stanley Baldwin, stated he would not convene negotiations to end the mining dispute until the TUC called it off unconditionally" and enacted a "long contemplated and carefully considered" plan to defeat it, including the mobilisation of "hundreds of thousands of willing strikebreakers..."

police, army, navy, even the air force.”^[5]

Baldwin and his cabinet had concluded, and Schmeer agrees, that “a national General Strike must inevitably challenge the existence of the national government”. Therefore they “never would compromise”:

They held fast because they understood that there can only be winners and losers as a result of a national General Strike, and they would not be losers. Meanwhile, the General Council welcomed every pacific approach. It understood the implications of a national general strike too but rejected the binary conclusion. Therefore, it was doomed.^[6]

For Schmeer, this is the stuff of tragedy; the trade union leaders were forced into a confrontation they could not win, against their better judgement. In fact, it was the stuff of political struggle: not only between the working class and the capitalist class and its government, but between the working class and its conservative bureaucratic leaders who organised for their defeat.

No one understood this situation better than Trotsky. His essays from 1925 collected in *Where is Britain Going?* insist, “We must examine Britain’s internal life from the standpoint” of its “abrupt and continuously declining world role”. To resolve Britain’s political-economic crisis, Trotsky explained, it would be

necessary either radically to re-organize industry, to reduce taxes, to cut workers’ wages or to combine all three methods. Cutting wages, which can give only an insignificant result in terms of reducing production costs, will produce firm opposition since the workers are today fighting for wage rises...^[7]

He continued, “This irreversible process also creates a revolutionary situation. The British bourgeoisie, compelled as it is to make its peace with America, to retreat, to tuck and to wait, is filling itself with the greatest bitterness which will reveal itself in terrible forms in a civil war.”^[8] Of that conflict, he wrote a month before the strike:

The necessity of a technical and economic reconstruction of the coal industry represents a profoundly revolutionary problem and requires a political “reconstruction” of the working class. The destruction of the conservatism of the British coal industry, this foundation of British capitalism, can only be through the destruction of the conservative organizations, traditions and customs of the British labour movement.

This meant “Both the rights and the lefts” who “fear to the utmost the beginning of the denouement” and “are hoping in their hearts for some miracle which will release them from these perspectives.” The situation, Trotsky predicted, “portends over a prolonged period the heavy pressure of a spontaneous and semi-spontaneous movement against the framework of the old organizations and the formation of new revolutionary organizations on the basis of this pressure.”^[9]

What “the fulminating Leon Trotsky” actually said

One might think that these prophetic writings would draw the eye of a historian of the General Strike. Yet Trotsky’s treatment by Schmeer is woeful to the point of fraudulent. It amounts to three pages out of the 353, which essentially begin and end with the desultory statement that while Trotsky “had reached different conclusions about the temper and possibilities in Britain... British Communists paid little attention.”^[10]

Schmeer even takes the liberty of responding on their behalf to a passage from Trotsky’s “The Anglo-Russian Committee and Comintern policy” explaining how the Labour lefts “restrain” workers “from revolutionary action”: answering, “To which British Communists might have responded: ‘but, no revolutionary action is possible right now.’”^[11] He continues that for the Communist Party, revolution “was indeed the ultimate goal, but in Britain in 1926 it was neither Russia’s [that is, the Communist International’s] nor the CPGB’s immediate goal, whatever the fulminating Leon Trotsky might say.”^[12]

These are lines recycled from the Stalinist bureaucracy which throttled the world socialist revolution begun in Russia, accusing Trotsky’s Left Opposition of engaging in revolutionary fantasies. Schmeer is frank about this provenance. He writes that “A majority of the Bolshevik leadership in Russia, of whom Stalin was chief, already had faced facts about Britain and drawn the logical conclusion” not to “expect quick results.”^[13]

Trotsky, in fact, did not set down any strict, let alone immediate, timeline for revolution in Britain; he argued that the crisis of British imperialism was creating a revolutionary situation and conditions for the growth of communist sentiment in the UK, which only a revolutionary perspective of intransigent opposition to the Labour Party and trade union leaders could consolidate. He answered Schmeer thoroughly a century before he published *Nine Days in May*, in the essay “On the Tempo and Timescale of the Revolution”, published in February 1926:

The coming period will therefore create even more severe conditions for British capital and thereby the question of power will stand out before the proletariat with still greater sharpness. I did not set any dates...

Today in Britain the question is not one of assigning a ‘day’ for the revolution – we are a long way from this! – but in clearly understanding that the whole objective situation is bringing this ‘day’ closer and into the ambit of the educational and preparatory work of the party of the proletariat and at the same time creating conditions for its rapid revolutionary formation.^[14]

It was precisely for this reason that the trade union leaders were so anxious to bring the strike to an end. This was the “fear” and “danger” one of the TUC leaders, Jimmy Thomas, spoke of to parliament the day after he helped end the strike—a day which saw *more* industrial action than any other. It is the “Pandora’s Box”, the “spectre”, the “whirlpool” and the “vortex” referenced throughout *Nine Days in May*, evident in workers’ declarations that they were “striving to make all workers’ lives ‘honourable, magnificent and noble,’” and “waging ‘an industrial crusade for emancipation.’”^[15]

The line advocated by Stalin and his allies was not patience, as Schmeer suggests; it was to subordinate the Communist Party to the General Council through the trade unions’ left-talkers, portrayed as the more likely “door” through which the British revolution would pass. As Trotsky wrote in sharp review in 1927, they were

straining to *supplant* the growth of the influence of the Communist party by skilled diplomacy in relation to the leaders of the trade unions. If any one tried to leap over actual and necessary

and inevitable stages, it was Stalin and Bukharin. It seemed to them that they would be able through cunning manoeuvres and combinations to promote the British working class to the highest class without the Communist party, or rather with some cooperation from it... That is how opportunism always begins. The development of the class appears to it to be much too slow and it seeks to reap what it has not sown, or what has not ripened as yet.^[16]

By contrast, Trotsky directed all of his attention to the task of “aid[ing] the fundamental and protracted task of developing new cadres, without which the victory of the British proletariat is wholly impossible.” The strike did not confront an “all or nothing” outcome, but “the more powerfully it shakes the foundations of capitalism and the further back it thrusts the treacherous and opportunist leaders the harder it will be for bourgeois reaction to go over to the counter-offensive, the less proletarian organizations will suffer, and the sooner will follow the next, more decisive stage of the fight.”^[17]

Schneer’s caricature of Trotsky has nothing in common with the real, unparalleled, strategist of world socialist revolution.

Trotsky on the British “lefts”

Stalin pursued his opportunist policy by means of an unprincipled alliance with Britain’s trade union “lefts”, upon whom the more openly right-wing leaders of the TUC relied. Trotsky’s critique is ridiculed by Schneer, who writes that a case study of the North East of England—where the Newcastle and Gateshead General Council and Joint Strike Committee were formed—“strip the argument of all credibility,” having “validated” the CPGB’s line.

The Joint Strike Committee represented a powerful regional alliance of militant Councils of Action. Briefly naming some trade unionists who worked in these organisations with local CPGB leader Robin Page Arnot (later a filthy defender of the Moscow Trials), Schneer asks, “with whom else” Arnot and the CPGB could have collaborated: “These, and many other ‘lefts,’ threw themselves into the joint effort”.^[18]

This is a false polemic on every level. Firstly, Trotsky specifically said that practical steps would be taken in concert with various “lefts” under certain conditions and on the strict condition of maintaining the Communist Party’s independence and freedom of criticism and action. Attempts to paint him as an out-of-touch hothead are duplicitous. He wrote in 1928, reviewing the experience of the strike:

The possibility of betrayal is always contained in reformism. But this does not mean to say that reformism and betrayal are one and the same thing at every moment. Not quite. Temporary agreements may be made with the reformists whenever they take a step forward. But to maintain a bloc with them when, frightened by the development of a movement, they commit treason, is equivalent to criminal toleration of traitors and a veiling of betrayal.^[19]

Again, in 1931:

The agreements between the Communists and the “lefts”... on the basis of the partial tasks of the trade union movement were, of

course, quite possible and in certain cases unavoidable. But on one condition: the Communist Party had to preserve its complete independence, even within the trade unions, act in its own name in all the questions of principle, criticize its “left” allies whenever necessary, and in this way, win the confidence of the masses step by step.^[20]

What Schneer, following the Stalinists, is really opposing is Trotsky’s insistence on the necessary break when these allies betrayed. But the necessity of doing precisely this if the working class was to prevail was proved by events in the North East of England.

The Joint Strike Committee, by asserting “sole control” over the movement of food, posed a direct challenge to the state’s right to rule. But the council was following Arnot’s “Plan of Campaign” that “faithfully reflected the CPGB approach to the Strike. It did not aim at revolution but rather at a ‘limited objective,’ which was only ‘To defeat the Civil Commissioner appointed for Northumberland/Durham region.’”^[21]

That this was an artificial separation based on efforts not to embarrass supposed allies in the Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy was revealed by the very success of the working class in achieving the “limited objective”. Civil Commissioner Kingsley Wood, pressed by the national government, responded by convening “a council of war” which ultimately brought in troops, unleashed a wave of police brutality against mass pickets, seized strike leaders and imposed harsh sentences. The General Council, informed of the government’s plans against the working class, “completely... abandoned them,” Schneer admits.^[22]

As these events unfolded, Trotsky was writing with crystal clarity:

It is only one step from the general strike to armed insurrection... The fact that [Labour Party leader Ramsay] MacDonald and Thomas have sworn to renounce any political objectives may typify them personally but it in no way typifies the General Strike which if carried through to the end sets the revolutionary class the task of organising a new state power... Men who did not want the General Strike, who deny the political nature of the General Strike, and fear above all the consequences of a victorious strike, must inevitably direct all their efforts towards keeping it within the bounds of a semi-political semi-strike, that is to say, towards emasculating it.^[23]

This is exactly what was taking place in the North East, to the great dissatisfaction and anger of the workers who had put their necks on the line and were now being shown the axe by their leaders. Large numbers could have been won to a Communist Party which understood, as Trotsky summarised his views in 1931: “attention devoted to the masses has nothing in common with capitulation before their temporary leaders and semi-leaders. The masses need a correct orientation and correct slogans. This excludes all theoretical conciliation and the patronage of confusionists who exploit the backwardness of the masses.”^[24]

But Schneer lazily concludes, “Kingsley Wood had brought in the military and let the police off the leash. That was enough... the strikers had no comeback.”^[25]

The class, the party and the leadership

In essence, the argument in *Nine Days in May* resolves itself into saying

workers simply were not capable of enforcing their will over their opponents, and more often than not unwilling to do so. The strikers “had no intention of confronting the military—and could not have successfully confronted it even if they wanted to”.^[26]

Two complementary factors are at work here. Firstly, an obstinate empiricism which proclaims to take the facts as it finds them, by which is meant: cut off from the historical process which produced them and drove their further development, a process which is the outcome of contradictory and competing forces. Secondly, a conflation of the working class with the TUC, which certainly “had neither the force nor the will to oppose the government,” in Schneer’s words.^[27]

That the working class was insufficiently prepared for a clash at the level ferociously organised for by the government is undeniable. But this was neither an inevitable fact of history nor an unchangeable one. We have seen Trotsky’s efforts to shift the equation ahead of the strike. He wrote during it that “success is possible only to the extent that the British working class, in the process of the development and sharpening of the General Strike, realizes the need to change its leadership.”^[28]

Even under the growing influence of the Stalin faction of the Communist International, the CPGB had put “a lot of effort” into a “Don’t Shoot” campaign of agitation and fraternisation among soldiers, Schneer observes. He writes in his conclusion that “What would have happened if soldiers or sailors had received the order to shoot must remain an open question,” answering with a shrug, “Probably they would have done as commanded... Anyway, the orders never came. They never were necessary. Not one trade unionist leader called for insurrection during the strike.”^[29]

Not only that. As *Nine Days in May* documents, they intervened constantly to prevent the strike encroaching on the most fundamental levers of state power—the food and energy systems—in ways that might bring the confrontation to a head. In short, the TUC ensured the balance of revolutionary sentiment in the working class, among the soldiers, and between the working class and the soldiers, was never tested and challenged.

Trotsky’s analysis in *Where is Britain Going?* that “Behind the democratic pacifist illusions of the working masses stand *their awakened class will, a deep discontent with their position and a readiness to back up their demands with all the means that the circumstances require* [italics in the original],” was repeatedly vindicated.^[30] Schneer writes of the “reports of violence flooding into [the General Strike headquarters] Ecclestone Square”. His coda that these “did not presage an attempt at Communist revolution,” only the “strikers’ determination to win the defensive battle they thought had been forced on them by employers” demonstrates how his class prejudices prevent him from seeing how the latter can presage the former.^[31]

Trotsky also wrote that “the working class can build a party out of those ideological and personal leading elements which have been prepared by the entire preceding development of the country and all its theoretical and political culture.”^[32] In Britain’s case, the Labour Party was formed out of a mass working-class response to the Taft Vale assault on its right to associate and strike. However, the “leading elements” available at that time were the conservative trade union bureaucracy, the “liveried footmen of the bourgeoisie”, the Fabian Society, and, in particular, the centrist, pacifist Independent Labour Party. Trotsky continued:

this in no way means that these paths have merged for good. The rapid growth in the Independents’ influence is but a reflection of the exceptional power of working-class pressure; but it is just this pressure, generated by the whole situation, that will throw the British workers into collision with the Independent leaders.^[33]

That collision took place, on countless occasions, in the General Strike. The purpose of Trotsky’s writings so casually dismissed in *Nine Days in May* was to give this nascent rebellion conscious and organisational expression in the growth of the Communist Party: without which, as he wrote in *Lessons of October*, “the proletariat cannot conquer”. By opposing the old leaders, the party could become a pole of attraction for the most farsighted workers—including, even especially, *after* the strike’s betrayal, when the Communist International maintained an alliance with the TUC through the Anglo-Russian Committee. Trotsky said of this:

[B]efore the general strike, the British working masses did not know in the same way what the General Council is. And since we did not criticize it and prevented the British Communist Party from criticizing it by our conduct, we thereby strengthened the authority of the General Council in the eyes of the revolutionary workers...

And now, when the vast masses have learned from a gigantic experience what the General Council is, we say to these masses as a consolation: we propose that the Anglo-Russian Committee be left as it is, since we knew before that traitors were sitting there, but we forgot to tell you this. Isn’t it monstrous?^[34]

When Schneer claims that Stalin’s line was more realistic, he is siding with the bureaucrats who were well served by Stalin’s opportunism. Sitting alongside the head of those bureaucrats, Paul Nowak, at the book launch in London, Schneer said of Stalin: he “had concluded ... that there would be no revolution in Britain for the foreseeable future; the government was too strong, the leaders of the working class too tame and shortsighted, therefore the working class tame and shortsighted too.”

This approach was scathingly summarised by Trotsky in “The Class, the Party and the Leadership”, responding to a review of the defeat of the Spanish Revolution published by the French periodical *Que Faire*:

The historical falsification consists in this, that the responsibility for the defeat of the Spanish masses is unloaded on the working masses and not those parties which paralyzed or simply crushed the revolutionary movement of the masses. The attorneys of the POUM [which subordinated more radical workers to the bourgeois Popular Front] simply deny the responsibility of the leaders, in order thus to escape shouldering their own responsibility. This impotent philosophy, which seeks to reconcile defeats as a necessary link in the chain of cosmic developments, is completely incapable of posing and refuses to pose the question of such concrete factors as programs, parties, personalities that were the organizers of defeat. This philosophy of fatalism and prostration is diametrically opposed to Marxism as the theory of revolutionary action.^[35]

While Trotsky’s targets proclaimed their disappointment in the masses for failing to live up to their claimed revolutionary aspirations, Schneer gives an open sigh of relief: “No Workers’ Defence Corps or any other working-class organization in Britain in 1926 could have coped with police and military both, and it is a good thing that Communists did not encourage them to try.”^[36]

Revolutionary consciousness and “the British radical tradition”

Schneer is insistent that British workers had nothing in common with their Russian brothers and sisters who overthrew Russian capitalism in 1917 and established the first workers' state. The "spectre" of this revolution "did not haunt the minds of British workers, or at least not many of them."^[37]

This is a gross distortion. The Communist Party's *Workers' Weekly* and *Sunday Worker* had a circulation in the tens of thousands, with many of the readers leading militants. Large numbers were mobilised by the Hands Off Russia campaign challenging British imperialist intervention against the fledgling Soviet Union. The party's broader influence was reflected in the arrest of an extraordinary 1,200 out of 6,000 members during the strike. The fact that Schneer finds himself so frequently compelled to judge the government's concerns about revolution "mistaken" speaks for itself.

As for Schneer's assertion that "Most strikers drew heavily upon the British radical tradition, not upon the Russian," this only demonstrates his historical blindness.^[38] The anecdote of Thomas Purvis he chooses to support his argument points to the revolutionary process that was underway. Purvis, answering police officers looking for an agitator hiding in his house, "gave his unwelcome visitors a lesson precisely in British radicalism," making an argument that was "practically to quote the nineteenth century Chartists". Moreover, "He never referred to a dictatorship of the proletariat, or even to socialism, but rather, like Cromwell, to 'No King.' 'What we want in this country is a republic... I shall live under one yet.'"^[39]

It would surprise Schneer's readers to learn that these were precisely the two historical traditions invoked by Trotsky in *Where is Britain Going?* which has an entire chapter titled, "Two Traditions: The Seventeenth-Century Revolution and Chartism". The book gives a superb summary of the course of England's revolution led by Oliver Cromwell, a bourgeois revolution whose historical limitations Trotsky precisely defines. "Nevertheless," he observed:

Cromwell was a great revolutionary of his time, who knew how to uphold the interests of the new, bourgeois social system against the old aristocratic one without holding back at anything. This must be learnt from him, and the dead lion of the seventeenth century is in this sense immeasurably greater than many living dogs.^[40]

As for Chartism, the militant working-class movement of the 1830s-50s which drove forward the struggle for democratic rights, the lessons were far more direct:

The era of Chartism is immortal in that over the course of a decade [1838-1848] it gives us in condensed and diagrammatic form the whole gamut of proletarian struggle—from petitions in parliament to armed insurrection...

[T]he Chartist movement resembles a prelude which contains in an undeveloped form the musical theme of the whole opera. In this sense the British working class can and must see in Chartism not only its past but also its future.^[41]

Whether Thomas Purvis drew these conclusions or not—while sitting in a police cell for uttering words the British state certainly felt to be threatening—the fact that workers were being turned towards these traditions was part of the process of their revolutionary radicalisation. Trotsky understood this ahead of time in a way Schneer does not, or rather

will not, with the benefit of a century's hindsight. It was the responsibility of the Communist Party to free that process from the cloying influence of the Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy, which it was prevented from doing by the policy of Stalin.

1926 one-hundred years on

A closing word must be said on the "lessons" Schneer draws from these events, and the connections made to today. *Nine Days in May* describes the abysmal conditions into which British miners were plunged. On pain of "genuine starvation" they were driven to accept "savage cuts" and an "extra working hour", while across the workforce, "score-settling employers were blacklisting countless trade union activists".^[42]

Schneer adds that the defeat "meant strengthening moderate Labourism. Henceforth, the Labour Party would be more intent than ever upon proving it was 'fit to govern', as MacDonald always put it," meaning, during the Great Depression, "not only would he refuse to consider socialist economic measures...he would refuse to consider even Liberal economic measures".^[43] The result was 22 percent unemployment nationally, and far higher in the heavy industry regions of the country.

MacDonald and the bourgeois Labour Party did not need their fingers burnt by the General Strike to shrink from "socialist measures". What is true is that the manner of the Strike's defeat—a betrayal unchallenged or exposed by the Communist Party—severely weakened the ability of the working class to mount a left response to MacDonald.

Measured on an international scale, the consequences of 1926 were even more severe. The General Strike's defeat—above all the capitulation of the CPGB under Stalin's direction, which "compromised Communism in Great Britain for a long time", in Trotsky's words—was part of a chain of betrayals paving the way for fascism and world war. These included, most significantly, the abortion of the German Revolution in 1923, the drowning of the Chinese Revolution in blood in 1927 and the paralysis of the German working class in the face of the Nazis.

For Schneer to skip to *after* the Second World War launched by the Third Reich, in which 70-85 million people lost their lives, in order to sing the praises of "Clement Attlee's third Labour government" which "nationalized the mines" as just "one of the far reaching measures it carried out"—which it did only under the threat of another revolutionary wave across Europe—is to play fast and loose with history. To add that "It attained far more for miners through Parliament than the miners had dared even to hope to gain by direct action twenty years earlier" adds insult to injury.^[44]

Forty years later, of course, the whole industry was being violently destroyed by the government of Margaret Thatcher, while the TUC refused to call a general strike and Arthur Scargill at the head of the National Union of Mineworkers strike refused to demand one. For the comfortable academic Schneer, this was "Lesson reinforced, and relearned": the miners' strike was likewise "doomed".^[45] For the working class, it was further proof of the need for a revolutionary party which could lead a fight against the state.

Thatcher's assault was part of an international ruling class counteroffensive, taking advantage of how the globalisation of production had fatally undermined all national reformist programmes. The Labour Party, as with all social democratic parties, responded by completing its transformation into a Tory Party mark two. The trade union bureaucracies fully embraced their role as corporate partners, wielding anti-strike legislation against their members. This process has delivered today's world of obscene social inequality, austerity, militarism and authoritarianism.

That is why there has been “loose talk,” as Schneer scolds in his conclusion, “of another General Strike.” The lesson the working class in Britain and internationally is in fact relearning is why it mounted such heroic struggles against capitalism in the 20th century. With this will come a fierce interest in learning the lesson not why a general strike should not be carried out, but how it can be won. For that, growing numbers will turn to a study of the writings of Leon Trotsky, which no amount of sneering by bourgeois historians will be able to prevent.

Jonathon Schneer, *Nine Days in May: The General Strike of 1926* (Oxford University Press, 2026), 353.

Ibid., 344.

Ibid., 350-351.

Ibid., 342-343.

Ibid., 1-2

Ibid., 351

Leon Trotsky, *Trotsky's Writings on Britain Volume 2* (New Park Publications, 1974), 12.

Ibid., 123.

Ibid., 140-141.

Schneer, *Nine Days*, 196.

Ibid., 197.

Ibid., 198.

Ibid., 195.

Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, 155-157

Schneer, *Nine Days*, 151.

Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, 238.

Ibid., 146.

Schneer, *Nine Days*, 225-226.

Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, 243.

Ibid., 251.

Schneer, *Nine Days*, 212.

Ibid., 225.

Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, 144.

Ibid., 252-253.

Schneer, *Nine Days*, 225.

Ibid., 272.

Ibid., 274.

Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, 145.

Schneer, *Nine Days*, 350.

Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, 114.

Schneer, *Nine Days*, 158.

Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, 114.

Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, 117.

“Transcript of the Politburo Meeting of the Central Committee of the AUCP(b) on the Lessons of the English General Strike. June 3, 1926”, <https://istmat.org/node/60034>, accessed May 27, 2026.

Leon Trotsky, “The Class, the Party and the Leadership (1940)”, Marxist Internet Archive, accessed May 27, 2026, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1940/xx/party.htm>.

Schneer, *Nine Days*, 226.

Ibid., 147.

Ibid., 152.

Ibid., 153.

Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, 85.

Ibid., 94.

Ibid., 342-346.

Ibid., 348.

Ibid., 353.

Ibid., 353.

1926 (Oxford University Press, 2026), 353.

[2] Ibid., 344.

[3] Ibid., 350-351.

[4] Ibid., 342-343.

[5] Ibid., 1-2

[6] Ibid., 351

[7] Leon Trotsky, *Trotsky's Writings on Britain Volume 2* (New Park Publications, 1974), 12.

[8] Ibid., 123.

[9] Ibid., 140-141.

[10] Schneer, *Nine Days*, 196.

[11] Ibid., 197.

[12] Ibid., 198.

[13] Ibid., 195.

[14] Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, 155-157

[15] Schneer, *Nine Days*, 151.

[16] Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, 238.

[17] Ibid., 146.

[18] Schneer, *Nine Days*, 225-226.

[19] Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, 243.

[20] Ibid., 251.

[21] Schneer, *Nine Days*, 212.

[22] Ibid., 225.

[24] Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, 144.

[24] Ibid., 252-253.

[25] Schneer, *Nine Days*, 225.

[26] Ibid., 272.

[27] Ibid., 274.

[28] Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, 145.

[29] Schneer, *Nine Days*, 350.

[30] Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, 114.

[31] Schneer, *Nine Days*, 158.

[32] Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, 114.

[33] Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, 117.

[34] “Transcript of the Politburo Meeting of the Central Committee of the AUCP(b) on the Lessons of the English General Strike. June 3, 1926”, <https://istmat.org/node/60034>, accessed May 27, 2026.

[35] Leon Trotsky, “The Class, the Party and the Leadership (1940)”, Marxist Internet Archive, accessed May 27, 2026, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1940/xx/party.htm>.

[36] Schneer, *Nine Days*, 226.

[37] Ibid., 147.

[38] Ibid., 152.

[39] Ibid., 153.

[40] Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, 85.

[41] Ibid., 94.

[42] Ibid., 342-346.

[43] Ibid., 348.

[44] Ibid., 353.

[45] Ibid., 353.



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[1] Jonathon Schneer, *Nine Days in May: The General Strike of*