

ISSE public meetings in Britain

May-June 1968—The lessons 40 years on

23 April 2008

The International Students for Social Equality in Britain has organised a series of meetings to mark the 40th anniversary of the May-June 1968 events in France.

Militant student protest became the spark for a mass movement of the French working class. A two-week general strike paralysed the economy as workers took action in defiance of their official leaderships in the trade unions, the Communist Party and the Socialist Party and occupied key factories in basic industry. More than 10 million workers participated in the General Strike.

May-June 1968 was in turn the opening salvo in an international revolutionary upsurge in the class struggle. It inaugurated a seven year period of class struggles that brought about the downfall of fascist governments in Portugal and Spain, the toppling of the military dictatorship in Greece, the defeat of the Heath Conservative government in Britain and the mass opposition to the Vietnam war, major industrial battles and a mounting political crisis in the United States that led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon.

The government of Charles de Gaulle and the whole of the French capitalist state were shaken to their foundations, with De Gaulle at one point leaving the country. Yet despite this massive opposition, capitalism in France was able to survive.

In the final analysis, the fate of the bourgeoisie depended on the counterrevolutionary role of the Stalinist Communist Party and the social democrats. But they in turn were shielded by the ostensibly Trotskyist groups in France, which failed to mount a political challenge to their domination of the workers' movement.

With US and world capitalism on the cusp of an economic recession of unprecedented depth, explosive and potentially revolutionary struggles are once more

on the agenda. Success depends on a new generation of workers and students drawing the essential lesson of 1968—the need to build a genuinely revolutionary party and leadership.

Speaking at the ISSE meetings will be Antoine Lerougetel, who writes for the *World Socialist Web Site* on French politics.

University of Glasgow

Thursday, April 24, 6:30 p.m.

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