

SEP/ISSE public meetings in Germany

1968: The lessons for today

9 May 2008

The events of 1968 are often dismissed as merely “student revolts.” However, when one examines what took place from an international and historical standpoint a different picture emerges. The protests by students were part of a broad movement by workers taking place in a series of countries across different continents. It was a movement that lasted an entire decade and rocked the capitalist system at its foundations.

This was most evident in France, where 10 million workers took part in a general strike in May 1968. They occupied factories and precipitated a huge crisis for the French government led by General Charles de Gaulle. Large numbers of workers also mobilised to take part in the September strikes in Germany in 1969, and the so-called “hot autumn” in Italy. The US was rocked by a broad movement for civil rights, together with urban rebellions. In Eastern Europe workers took to the streets in Poland and Czechoslovakia to oppose the Stalinist regimes, and in the course of the 1970s right-wing dictatorships were toppled in Greece, Spain and Portugal. During the same period the US army suffered a devastating defeat in Vietnam.

Workers lost the initiative, however, and the ruling elites were able to head off this movement and bring it under control. It did this either through social concessions or, as was the case in Chile in 1973, through brutal suppression. In so doing governments across the world were able to rely on the support of the social democratic and Stalinist Communist parties, which rejected a revolutionary perspective.

Then, at the end of the 1970s, the ruling elite commenced a counteroffensive and Margaret Thatcher (Britain), Ronald Reagan (US) and Helmut Kohl (Germany) came to power. Previous social concessions were reversed and attacks on the working class intensified. Today the gulf between rich and poor is

more pronounced than ever, a financial crisis engulfs the world economy, and the Iraq war threatens to spread across the Middle East. New conflicts and class struggles are inevitable.

In order to prepare for such struggles it is necessary to draw the lessons from 1968: Why did workers lose the initiative? How was it possible for the social democratic and Stalinist bureaucracies to bring the mass movement under their control? What was the role played by the ideas of figures such student leader Rudi Dutschke and other leaders of the “New Left”?

These issues will be addressed in lectures organized in Germany by the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG—Socialist Equality Party) and the International Students for Social Equality. Peter Schwarz, a member of the international Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site* and a member of the executive committee of the PSG, will address the meetings, which will be followed by discussion.

Meeting details:

Frankfurt am Main

Saturday, May 17, 2008, 19:00

Saalbau Bockenheim, Room 1

Schwälmer Str., am Kurfürstenplatz

(S 3,4,5,6 Westbahnhof or Underground 5,6 Leipziger Str.)



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