

ISSE meeting at University of New South Wales

Forty years since May-June 1968: The lessons for today

21 May 2008

The International Students for Social Equality at UNSW invites all students to attend a meeting to mark the 40th anniversary of the May-June 1968 general strike in France.

The events of May-June '68—when student protests sparked a two-week general strike encompassing 10 million workers—are often portrayed as merely student revolts. But the French general strike marked the beginning of the greatest wave of revolutionary struggles by the international working class since the 1920s.

May-June '68 inaugurated a seven-year period of political upheaval and industrial battles that brought 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 mass opposition to the Vietnam War, along with a mounting political crisis in the United States, leading to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. In Australia 23 years of conservative government ended in 1972 with the election of a Labor government.

Behind this political sea-change lay the collapse of the world financial order established in the aftermath of World War II under the economic hegemony of the United States. In August 1971 the Bretton Woods monetary arrangements broke up, as the ruling class in every country sought to deal with rising inflation, declining profit rates and unemployment.

Capitalism only survived the period of 1968-75 because of the betrayals of the Stalinist and social-democratic parties and trade unions, which systematically suppressed and diverted the struggles of the working class in order to preserve the existing set up.

Drawing strength from these betrayals, the ruling elite

commenced a counter-offensive against the working class. With the coming to power of Margaret Thatcher in Britain, Ronald Reagan in the US and Helmut Kohl in Germany, previous social concessions were reversed under the banner of “the free market”. In Australia, the Labor governments of Hawke and Keating (1983-96) spearheaded this agenda.

Forty years after 1968, the post-WWII economic and political order that was established on the basis of the unrivalled economic dominance of the United States has come to an end. The outcome has been an explosive eruption of militarism, mounting inter-imperialist rivalries, deepening social inequality and the development of a global financial crisis centred on the US banking system. These developments presage a new period of revolutionary struggles by the working class.

In order to prepare for the political upheavals ahead, students must draw the lessons of all the major strategic experiences of the working class throughout the twentieth century—of which the struggles between 1968 and 1975 form a crucial chapter.

Following the report the meeting will be open for questions and discussion.

Wednesday 28 May, 1 p.m.
University of New South Wales
Matthews, Room 308 (Near library)



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact