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Italy

No to the University-Firm

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Student resistance to the EU 'Bologna process' of reforms in higher education has been taking shape in different European countries. These reforms explicitly consider university degrees should be relevant to the labour market and 'increase the employability and mobility' of citizens. They also aim for 'convergence' in educational systems to promote mobility, with a first degree of no less than three years and a masters of two (the 3+2). Italian students are taking the lead in the current phase of the fightback.

25 October, taking parliament by storm, was a baptism for the first student movement against the University-Firm. There had not been so much participation since the Panther movement in the early 1990s attempted to block the incipient "reform" movement, the beginnings of the process of treating learning as a commodity, a process sped up definitively by the Berlinguer and Zecchino measures.

[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/italian_students.jpg]

The student condition, a complex and ambiguous one in the Universities of old, has changed profoundly. Eight hours of classes daily, spread over the day as determined by the professors, without appeal, examinations every month, play a part in the development of a generation of students defined as service consumers, required to spend many hours at the university premises. These material conditions are an excellent training ground for casualised work, by getting students used to a loss of control over their own living hours, exposed to lowest-common-denominator learning, thereby eliminating any residue of intellectual endeavour. Cuts in funding for studies mean students have to do odd jobs or give up on specialised graduate studies. This all adds up to training for precarious work. Students are not contingent workers as such, but social subjects viewing themselves firstly as students and secondly, are aware that they are heading for a precarious future. Thus, this movement comes out of an overall sense of unease; the reforms and the Government's arrogance (perfectly summed up in the so called Santaché measures) were an outcome of this. The reforms are an expression of the growing precariousness of an entire generation's experience. This generation is demanding one thing above all others: its own future. It is not by chance that the banner at the opening of the meeting on the 25th, "Our time is here and starts now" summed up the aspirations and the practices of the Genoa movement.

A professorial block on pedagogy and a "united front" on the reforms played a part in this explosion. It saw all the components of the university and all opposition forces join in the 25 October movement. Now, the approval of the Ddl is taking away the unifying aim. Within the centre-left, there is a sort of lack of preparedness to push forward clearly the idea of the total abrogation of the Moratti measures. There are also proposals that would actually strengthen the University-Firm by demanding the 3+2 and calling for foundations under private law in the place of the Universities. Only support to the movements in schools and Universities can produce concrete progress. For this reason the centre of the Young Communists initiative over the coming months must be creating collectives in the Faculties, student self-organisation experiences (and a say in research) in all the universities as well as promoting and supporting the autonomy of mobilisations and the process of developing unity among different subjects. Indeed, the objective explosive conditions have not come into play everywhere with the requisite subjective conditions. This is also due to the lack of emphasis on meticulous, long-term intervention in the universities, common to all political youth movements in recent years.

The upcoming World Education Day event on 17 November, called in Porto Alegre, will be an important date for the struggle, to demand the abrogation of all the Moratti measures but also to provide backing to the summit meetings opened up in the Faculties to delink the 3+2, starting out from a radical change in students' living conditions to build subsequent mobilisations that will be capable, in the heat of the struggle, to carry out an actual self-reform of the university and of learning.

It is also essential to seek social alliances that will make it possible to pose more general objectives, starting by booting out a Government that remains utterly unresponsive to mobilisations, knowing that only if it is swept away by the movements can lay the groundwork for a real alternative to Berlusconi's rule. The 25 November general strike can be an opportunity to raise this necessity. Finally, it seems to us that the National Assembly is a decisive step. This movement still remains limited in scope, it would be an enormous step forward to succeed in forming an Italy-wide student network on the basis of the current struggles. Such a network would be in a better position to get a handle on the cycle of struggles that has opened up, and which we predict will not be a brief one.

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