

Education is not for \$A£€

Student protests in Germany

In November and December 2009 – responding to the signal from Vienna, where the University's main lecture hall was occupied – buildings, lecture theatres and seminar rooms in fifty West German colleges were occupied. The number of participants in these occupations, some of which lasted several weeks, was never huge in total and it rarely reached more than 200 or 300 students at any one university. What was remarkable, though, and new, was that some of these actions took place at the smaller universities. On 17 November 2009 around 80,000 people took part in demonstrations. An important characteristic of these protests was that they were not spontaneous and, also, they did not immediately collapse. They were drawn out of an alliance that was already in place from an earlier wave of protests. This means that the latest wave is not simply a reaction to an immediate provocation, as was the case in previous student protests – largely a response to the introduction of student tuition fees. The new wave picks up on things that were set in motion last Summer.

In the week of 15 June, school and university students engaged in an 'educational strike'. Surprisingly large numbers of students were involved, though there were more school than university students. Many university students kept their distance, lukewarm and uninterested. The high point of mobilization was on 17 June, when around 265,000 demonstrators took to the streets in cities and towns across the BRD. But the movement goes back further. In November 2008 about 100,000 school students took part in demonstrations and actions. The phenomenon of the educational strike is not confined to Germany. There are mobilizations in various European countries in response to a neoliberal reorganization of the institutions of learning, from nurseries to schools to universities: for example, in Greece, Italy, Croatia, France, Austria and Switzerland. Universities or individual research institutes are under occupation. Teaching has been cancelled for weeks or even months. In France, the large demonstrations have included teachers and lecturers. Ruling politicians have

reacted to these protests in a variety of ways. In Italy and France certain paragraphs in the planned reform laws have been excised – though even those concessions have been unable to pacify the movement. In Germany those responsible for education policy seem especially hard-nosed. Even so cracks and contradictions can be seen.

University lecturers, many of whom have happily gone along with all the nonsense about 'the entrepreneurial university' – third-stream funding, rankings, excellence, accreditation of courses of study, tuition fees, BA and MA, external assessors, and so on – have realized that their ability to operate as scholars is now increasingly circumscribed. There does not appear to be an end to the expanding workloads attendant on ever more benchmarks and the like. If lecturers were able to live quite comfortably for a period with the attacks on students, it is now clear that they cannot remain unaffected by the new situation: low wages, performance agreements and the formation of hierarchies – which means that those who work in the pockets of excellence get less teaching, more support services and higher wages. The conservative German Lecturers' Association has decided not to adopt the second phase of the Bologna process (2010–219) as passively or, even, as approvingly as they did the first. After the latest protests and the extensive criticism of the Bachelor model – which has been newly introduced in Germany and elsewhere – the organization has recommended that university lecturers no longer participate in the accreditation of courses of study. This is not unimportant, as part of the process of accreditation means that the various disciplines are split up into the smallest specialist areas. It becomes very unlikely that a student would then be able to change their place of study. In addition, accreditation processes occasion excessive bureaucracy, and deny students the ability to take decisions about their own course of study.

Politicians are split on how to respond to these developments. This summer some of the regional politicians, such as Jürgen Rüttgers, warned about the

danger of 'semi-education'. In contrast the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic, which has little time for debates with parents, school students or university students, does not consider 'Bologna' to have failed, or, if it has, then only in small rectifiable areas. On the other hand, the most important representative of the neoliberal strategy of restructuring the universities into entrepreneurial and elite institutions, the former president of Berlin's Free University, Dieter Lenzen, declared that he supported the protests and requested that lecturers at his university be sympathetic to those students who were missing classes. Clearly he has spied an opportunity to instrumentalize the protests for his own aims: to gain more money for the pockets of excellence, of which the Free University Berlin is one. Others, in contrast, such as the rector of Heidelberg University, allowed the police to take action against the students on campus and students were sanctioned if they missed lessons. In November and December 2009 there were similar contradictions: at many universities the management remained cautious, as long as the occupiers accepted some of the rules of engagement and the business of study was not disturbed. In contrast, at the University of Frankfurt – another model of the neoliberal type of university – there was a rapid and large-scale break-up of the occupation by the police, which was justified by alleged damage to valuable pictures and rooms. In June, Annette Schavan, the minister for education and research, labelled the protesters 'yesterday's people'. It may not be surprising that, as a prominent Catholic, she has her issues with science and scholarship, and she would certainly not count as one of the staunch defenders of enlightened thought. She deployed the age-old trick of writing off the protests as outmoded. According to her, the transformations of European education are irreversible.

The autumn strike has also met with contradictory responses. There have been expressions of sympathy from politicians. Yes, some of the bureaucracy and demands on students should be reduced. There should not be so many exams. There should be more money for student grants. Attendance registers for students should be limited or even abolished. Chancellor Merkel's summit on education in Summer 2009 promised more money. Politicians also accepted that there should be more university lecturers. One of the consequences of underfinancing the education system is that there are too few teachers and school classes are too large. The number of students has gone up fivefold in the past thirty years but the number of lecturers has remained

roughly the same. A large part of teaching and research is now carried out by those working under precarious conditions: two-thirds of teaching and 80 per cent of research. The wily argument states that this proves how much can be achieved with fewer means. If only university lecturers were not so lazy and the structures of the universities could be finally organized according to shiny new neoliberal principles.

Despite several vague admissions, the culture minister, university managers and a number of university lecturers have made it clear that there is to be no tampering with the essential features of university reform. The distinction between BA and MA programmes is sacrosanct, students' role in the co-determination of study will not be increased, and new teaching assistant and university lecturer posts will remain largely temporary. Teaching, learning and scholarship will be trammelled by the rigid Bachelor system.

The protests are hopefully not going to die down. The number of students in Germany is about to increase drastically, given that at the end of 2010, with the reduction in the number of years spent at school, two age groups will begin studying at the same time. School and university students have taken on themselves the responsibility for the continued existence of scholarship, neglected by many established university lecturers and politicians. Among the current protesters are those who will be the researchers and teachers and strategists of the next forty years. They are yesterday's people in a positive sense, because they will not accommodate themselves obediently to the dynamic of capitalist valorization and will not let themselves be fobbed off with a cheap, devalued programme of study.

Unlike previous protests, where the accent was often on rejecting tuition fees and criticizing the social exclusivity of the universities, today's protesters demand better conditions for knowledge and education. They object to the ways in which university is being turned into something much more like a school. They object to constant surveillance. They want to abolish the new BA and MA. They reject the elite university, demand free access to study for all, internal democratization of the entire education system and the implementation of alternative modes of education. In so doing, they turn against those who want to hold on to their academic positions of power and their salaries, for whom broad intellectual competence, education for all and critical knowledge have always been anathema. The demands of the students are historic and rational: they stand for the uncompensated, for good education beyond the valorization imperative, for all that that has been

demanded, again and again, over the years, in order that the universities might, finally, become places of genuine research, teaching and learning.

The protests and strikes of the past months are a response to a significant shift in education policy. For years the idea has been that through education everyone can improve their prospects and work their way to the top. The middle class reproduces its class position through schooling and gaining qualifications. It might have expected that its own children would get the chance to ascend into the professions through their schooling and university education. The restructuring of the educational apparatus could have been an opportunity to improve things; inequalities could be further reduced – for youth from the migrant milieu and the working class. Instead, the middle classes have discovered that the ever-higher investments demanded of them are bringing ever lower returns: school education is more compressed as it runs for a shorter period; leaving qualifications are now delivered by a centralized body; university entry is made more difficult for numerous reasons; universi-

ties are now able to select the students that they want, tuition fees have been introduced, university courses are reduced in length (BA in six semesters), and, at the end of it, the students receive qualifications whose market value is opaque; and those condemned to school and universities that fail to reach the top-ranked spot receive qualifications that are devalued, irrespective of the students' individual achievements, affecting future career and income. All of this proves to the middle classes that the ruling class is no longer that interested in an alliance with them. Inasmuch as the elite is itself reliant on scholarship and learning, they have the resources to send their children to international schools and foreign universities, or they buy the necessary knowledge cheaply on the world market. Knowledge has become a commodity that can be valorized on the global market; education and knowledge are also cut adrift from the bearers of capitalist domination. For left social movements, this is a good opportunity to appropriate it. The educational strike is one step towards that and it is taking pace on a European-wide stage.

Alex Demirovi

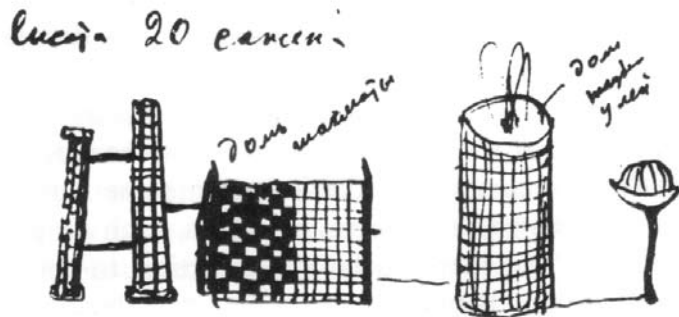
Violence and the University Sanctuary law in Greece

Shortly before one of the demonstrations commemorating the first anniversary of the death of Alexis Grigoropoulos in Athens – the event that triggered the December revolt in 2008 – a group of two hundred anti-authoritarians broke down the door of the rector's office at the central University of Athens and attacked and injured the rector. This was one of several reported physical attacks against members of academic staff on university premises in 2009, one of which took place for the first time during a class, at the Economics University of Athens. The public debate that followed revealed a conceptualization of the university as a space of abjection, where 'raw' violence is endemic, alongside deviance, anti-social behaviour, drug use and other forms of criminal activity perpetrated by the familiar abjected others in Greek society: *koukouloforoi* (hood-wearers), anarchists, anti-authoritarians and other unknown and unknowable entities. This dystopian transformation of the university was widely assumed to be a result of the protection from the police that the University Sanctuary provides to those within the university.

The University Sanctuary was formally established in 1982 (Law 1268/1982) by the socialist Pasok government in order to guarantee academic freedoms and freedom in the dissemination of ideas within the university in post-junta Greece. The law stipulates that police can enter university grounds only in cases of serious crime, or on the basis of a formal university summons or permission. In 2007, the right-wing New Democracy government reworked the Sanctuary law (Law 3549/2007) in the context of legislation mandating neoliberal educational reform, so that the guarantee of these freedoms is now limited to the academic community, academic tasks and university work, and to related spaces; removing, for example, the guarantees to freedoms in spaces where political activity takes place and for anyone on university premises. In practice, however, the university has rarely called upon the police to enter. As a result, so the argument goes, violent entities operate unhindered on university premises.

Exactly what they do, the extent of the violence, and where they are supposed to be within the university

system is unclear, as few details have been made available, beyond the handful of episodes reported in the media. Most of these reports have focused on physical attacks and material destruction, and, to a lesser extent, on the disruptive practices of anarchists and anti-authoritarians, such as blocking and disrupting meetings of academic staff.



The common-sense solution to the problem of violence, understood in these terms, was presented as the removal of the obstacles to police entry into the university. One suggestion was to abolish the Sanctuary altogether. Those who called for this claimed that, since the provisions for summoning the police by the university were rarely used, the Sanctuary should be lifted completely. This would allow free and timely access of the police to university grounds without practical complications or controversy. Several commentators also claimed that the Sanctuary is anachronistic: a ‘Third World’ institution unnecessary in a European, democratic society. This type of claim has a long history in Greek public discourse and is part of a persistent misrecognition/idealization of Greek and Western European institutions, fixated on an imagined ‘Europe’ rather than being connected to current realities.

However, the solution which predominated in discussion was the full application of the Sanctuary law; in other words, universities should make use of the provisions to summon the police, in order to deal with the violence in question. This was the position of the recently elected Pasok government, which promoted adherence to the Sanctuary law, rather than its abolition. The promotion of the entry of police into the university in the context of the government’s focus on eradicating anomie and establishing rational and ethical administration also reflected its ‘zero tolerance’ policy on ‘violence wherever it emerges’. This phrase emerged in response to the December 2008 revolt, in effect shutting down an emerging debate on the events in the mainstream media. Calls for a continued and even greater revolt, which included the cry of ‘where

are the artists, where are the intellectuals?’, were met by moral posturing against ‘violence from wherever it may emerge’ by politicians, representatives of the arts and letters, and media celebrities. This position in effect denied any distinction between different forms or types of violence.

To facilitate the process of summoning the police, the minister of education, Anna Diamantopoulou, pledged extra measures to facilitate the entry of police into the universities, suggesting for example the establishment of a system of rectors on call and on rotation, prepared to summon the police onto university grounds at any time of the day or night. Although the debate concluded with what was presented in the media as a growing consensus within the university community on the necessity of summoning the police

force to deal with violence, it was never made clear what kind of violence the police would be entering to address; which practices or phenomena would constitute grounds for summoning them to the university. However, the debate did show that violence was understood as an essential property of the ‘abjected others’ referred to above. The Sanctuary status of the university has thus given rise to a phantasmatic space from which these abjected entities, and the threat they pose to order, can be imagined. This works as a strategy of containment. With this in place as the basis of the debate, the issue of violence in the university focuses on its sanctuary status, or on how to further contain, defuse and obliterate the threat of violence at its source. There is little contextualization of violence in relation to political, social or historical realities, so the debate cannot engage with the practical implications of applying the law, and using the police within the university as discussed.

A similar logic is at work in representing Exarcheia, the central Athenian neighbourhood where Alexis Grigoropoulos was shot in December 2008, as another space of abjection – a ‘no-go zone’ or anarchist ghetto. The efforts to contain and defuse the threat to order posed there by what are in fact more or less the same abjected others have involved periods of militarization of this neighbourhood. The new government’s ‘zero tolerance’ policy led to this immediately after the elections in October 2009, which led residents of Exarcheia to protest in a march on 12 November 2009. With a banner which proclaimed ‘the no-go zone is in your consciences’, they demanded an end to the persistent and provocative presence of police, riot squads and special forces; random pre-arrest detention;

the unwarranted use of tear gas; beatings, raids and the practice of forcing people on their knees in the street with their hands behind their head, in arbitrary stop-and-searches.

Furthermore, since the amended version of the Sanctuary law guarantees only what are specified as *academic* freedoms in teaching and research – protecting the right to ‘knowledge, teaching and work’ for all members of the academic community, within designated spaces of educational and research activities – violence can now be claimed to arise whenever teaching, research and other university work activities are disrupted. It goes without saying that this opens the door for institutional and police repression of long-established forms of political activity, such as strikes, occupations and other forms of protest undertaken by students, academic staff and any other university employee. In addition, the enforcement of the amended law also means that freedoms of expression and the dissemination of ideas within the academic community itself are also by definition restricted, as the Sanctuary does not guarantee such freedoms outside formal university activities and the designated spaces within which they take place. This has implications not only for political activism but also for cultural production and other activities which can take place within the university but outside the classroom and laboratory. Finally, the enforcement of this law lifts the protection previously extended to non-university entities on university premises. It is in the context of these changes to the Sanctuary law that the rector of Athens Polytechnic has been criminally prosecuted for ‘housing’ the Indymedia website on the institution’s server. As the Polytechnic also ‘houses’ the websites of student branches of Pasok and Nea Dimokratia, the socialist and right-wing parties, it seems that the prosecution concerns the content and ideological orientations of the Indymedia site, as freedoms of expression do not extend to this activity under the current Sanctuary law.

This expanded understanding of violence not only creates new occasions for the repression of dissidence; it also forecloses the possibility of understanding why particular forms of violence against the university itself have proliferated. This needs to be addressed in ways that acknowledge the context of a wider crisis of institutional legitimacy in Greece. This crisis has emerged from the exploitation of institutions, including representative politics, by elites both within and without them, in the name of power, privilege and enrichment for themselves, cronies, families and supporters. Although such practices have always been

present in Greek society, the adoption of neoliberal policies in governance which promoted the enrichment of the few over the many to the detriment of the public interest, and which diminished the issue of social justice in governance, appeared to create even more opportunities for undermining public institutions and their mandate, for personal and group gain. Crucially, these practices have taken place in a context where those with institutional power, or access to it, have been immune from justice. In this context, a divide has emerged in everyday discourse between those with institutional power and those without it; this is a form of ‘anti-systemic’ thinking from below, which has been increasingly adopted by those who see themselves as outside, or without access to, institutional structures of power and privilege. This was alluded to in the many slogans that appeared in December based on a divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’, such as: ‘Let’s eat them before they eat us.’ It is within the context of this anti-systemic thinking from below, or in everyday life, that the December events are meaningful. Although the recently elected Pasok government has aimed, through both policy and discourse on ethical and rational administration, to restore institutional legitimacy, the logics of the divide and of institutional delegitimation persist. Arguably, this is a factor which has played a role in the increase of certain forms of violence, both within and outside the university.

The university community itself has not been immune to the criticism that practices promoting partisan logics and advantages have undermined the promotion and achievement of institutional objectives and priorities. These practices may have precluded the establishment or defence of organizational and political cultures and procedures that could limit or at least address violence, without the kind of police force currently proposed. Similar partisan and exploitative logics by student representatives who participate in structures and relationships of power have led many students to reject representative politics within the university, along the lines of the divide previously discussed, and to respond with either atomization or acceptance of anarchist and anti-authoritarian logics and practices.

The parties of the parliamentary Left have always called upon the university community to defend the Sanctuary from instances of both blind violence and the police repression which will ensue if the amended law is applied. However, in the present context, it is unclear whether this is possible.

Krini Kafiris

The damned disunited

Trouble at the University of Leeds

At the time of writing (January 2010), members of the University and College Union (UCU) at the University of Leeds are about to vote on a call for strike action and action short of a strike in protest at recent developments, which could have serious repercussions for the entire university sector. Student groups are organizing a campaign in support of their lecturers using the model of the general assembly, and aiming to build a movement across all universities in the north of England. Blogs and social networks have been established. (See www.leedsucuw.wordpress.com for detailed and up-to-date information from the Leeds University UCU and the students' open-content group 'Defend jobs at Leeds, defend education' on Facebook.) It's still early days, and the situation is not (yet) on the scale of actions seen internationally, but there is a growing anger towards the management and, more generally, towards the entire marketization of higher education. The mood of fatalism that accompanied the onset of neoliberalization and has beset the labour movement since the 1980s is beginning to fracture. In Tower Hamlets, lecturers staged a successful strike by withdrawing their labour indefinitely – a type of action not seen in colleges for a long time. South Yorkshire firefighters won their dispute overnight. But most impressive has been the protracted, and widely supported, all-out strike by Leeds refuse workers against the local council's efforts to cut pay, under the guise of equal-pay legislation. With such precedents, there is now something palpably different about the landscape of expectations and hopes.

At the beginning of autumn, management at the University of Leeds discovered a high-level accounting error of gargantuan proportions. One of the first things to trickle down to staff was a reassurance not to worry, as the figures were 'only virtual'. Fictitious entities, as readers of Marx well know, have a way of metamorphosing with all-too material effects. The UCU estimates that the University's 'Efficiency Exercise' – £35 million cut on the annual budget, devolved down to departments to 'identify' – translates as between 450 and 700 academic and academic-related jobs (depending on where one sets the average salary), and, without doubt, will mean a significant intensification of workloads. In the meantime, the

University continues with its building projects and to take on fresh capital loans.

Equally disturbing, however, has been the way this budgetary problem has intersected with another (apparently) local issue to suggest that, far from facing an unexpected crisis, recent developments fit into a larger pattern, not necessarily deliberately designed, but certainly used to shape an expedient 'opportunity'. Months before the spreadsheet surprise, attacks had started on the School of Healthcare and the Faculty of Biological Sciences (FBS). Under the remit of a 'review', sixty jobs (since expanded to seventy) were put under threat. One aspect of the restructuring has been that the majority of FBS's 48-strong professoriat must reapply for their jobs, jobs that have been redefined under much narrower and more rigid terms, all of which raises questions of legality as well as having grave implications for academic freedom. Colleagues outside Leeds – as well as those inside – recognize the possible consequences. As do the universities' employers. The vice-chancellor of the University of Leeds is currently chair of the Russell Group. If little has been done by this body to argue against either the government's plans to cut higher-education spending or the recent announcement that instrumentalized education will be the way forward for UK universities, then we might wonder quite what the group could be mustering its energies for? Employers' eyes – and not just those of the elite Russell Group – are on Leeds, which now occupies the unenviable position of being in the vanguard of a new phase of managerialist testing.

Formally the collective dispute at Leeds is being invoked on the following grounds: the breaching by university management of Section 188 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act, which requires meaningful negotiations to find ways to mitigate and avert job losses; breaching the Employment Rights Act and the University's own charter and statutes (requiring fair and transparent processes when selecting staff for redundancies); ignoring the University's systems of governance (attempting to sack employees in advance of the negotiations and in contravention of conciliation processes); imposing inflexibly tight job descriptions on academics in FBS and putting under threat academic-related and other posts.

To many, this will all sound terribly procedural and bureaucratic, but such, in part, are the parameters within which trade unions in the UK have operated – especially since the anti-union legislation introduced by Margaret Thatcher’s government, which, shamefully, Labour did nothing to revoke. Employers’ attention will be focused on the attempts by the University of Leeds to reconfigure what constitutes acceptable practice during internal reviews and to test the scope managers have for breaking their legal obligations (either *that*, or the Leeds management really don’t understand what they are doing). In short, the call for strike action and action short of a strike is over the ‘unprecedented attack on jobs, terms and conditions and academic freedom; taken in totality... an affront to the idea of the university, its collegiality and a threat to its future’, as asserted on the union blog. There is little that is ‘local’ to the situation in FBS within the context of the University; and little that will remain local to Leeds. The student campaign argues that ‘History is in the making at the University of Leeds.’ The question now is whose history will be made and written, and whether universities will be ‘theirs’ or ‘ours’. The answer will come down to our commitment to collective action.

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