

## **Beyond the factories of knowledge: for a world without capitalist exploitation**

*»In factories and on universities - resist the dictatorship of the capital!«*

Above written sentence was one of the slogans that marked the 2007 student uprising in Slovenia against neoliberal reforms of higher education, which has since been followed by several ongoing attempts to subordinate public universities to the principles of market economy and sub-sequential student struggles against these processes of privatization. We have chosen above-mentioned slogan because it clearly shows students understood that their particular situation on the university is in fact a part of a general capitalist exploitation. In 2007, students that formed the movement called Autonomous Tribune (AT), demanded autonomy and an end to the privatization, but they have also made broader anti-militarist and anti-capitalist statements. Moreover, what is perhaps most important, they have articulated the exploitation of university workers and expressed concrete solidarity with other anti-privatization movements and workers in general. Though AT managed (with several occupations, protests etc.) to stop the passing of a new law that would introduce the privatized version of public universities, their attempts were unfortunately (mostly, though not entirely) met with the silence from university workers.

Several occupations, plenums and struggles later we are in 2010, where we have a similar situation when it comes to the governments attempt to pass a new National programme of higher education 2011-2020, which is ones again an attempt to change universities into enterprises. Parallel to this, government has introduced a new scheme of tuitions for PhD students, which *de facto* introduce the elitization of higher education. And the struggle? It seems that each group of students (under-graduate, graduate, post-graduate) and university workers (professors, assistants, lectors etc.) are (with bright and commendable exceptions who are trying to create a common space of reflection) unable to met and create a joined struggle. Let alone would they think or practice a concrete form of solidarity with other social groups in resistance (elder, workers in real and public sector, ecological and other social movements etc.). Influenced by the images of massive student and teachers uprising from Great Britain, Italy, Greece and other places, all we hear is the moaning over the lack of class-consciousness among students and university workers.

Such fragmentation is actually not surprising, since, as Rastko Močnik notices, the 'modern' university is organized according to the medieval, pre-capitalist methods (enclosed society, strong hierarchy, etc.). Such organization can easily be combined with the late-capitalist form of enterprise, which is also extremely hierarchical and exploitative towards its proletariat (assistants, lectors etc.) and sub-proletariat (mostly PhD students) that are pushed into extreme precarious living situation. Its organization into departments, competition for the positions, artificial divisions among natural and social sciences and private jargon of specific branches prevents the dialog amongst students and

university workers, which is, according to Močnik, necessary for the production of knowledge, since science can only be common (along with its concepts), and not individual. Dialog is at the same time already a production of theory, which is essential step for any class to detect common problems, reflect on its reality, develop concepts, which enable the resistance, create its consciousness and therefore constitute itself as a class. In that sense it is clear, that occupations of classrooms and hallways by the students in previous years in Slovenia were (if we know that on most faculties they do not have a common room for students), mostly the expression of the need to create a common public space in which a reflection of their situation could occur. Positive examples (for instance from Croatia, where farmers held their plenum on the university) shows, that methods created and used during such reaffirmation of common are useful to reach over to other social groups as well.

Latest worldwide governmental attempts to privatize higher education has sparked (at least) two more issues we wish to address. First one is the question of productivity, second is the question of autonomy.

The mantra of neoliberal reforms of higher education is productive knowledge, applicative knowledge, knowledge that can be used on the market; that is knowledge that is useful to the capital. In Marx's analysis of the concepts of productive and unproductive work, developed by Adam Smith in the *Wealth of nations*, he states, that (from the standpoint of the capital) the only productive work is the one that produces a surplus value, or to put it in other words, is useful to the capital. Work on university is not directly, but indirectly productive, since it educates the future working force and therefore creates a necessary condition for capitalist production. We should note at this point though, that, as Močnik suggests, it does not follow, that just because the work is unproductive, university workers are not exploited. We agree with Edu Factory collective who noticed, that the term knowledge factory is not analytically adequate for the organization of work on the universities, since the work there is not organized according to the fordistic terms. As mentioned before, today's universities are closer to the medieval organization and work according to such principles as well. This is why it is in great interest of the university leaders (the privileged cast) not to oppose the governments attempt to push for more productiveness on the universities, since the restructure of the university into modern enterprise would retain all their privileges.

When it comes to autonomy, we often hear melodramatic calls that autonomy of universities must be preserved. We do not wish to focus on such definition of autonomy of scientific sphere, since it is our believe, that autonomy does not exist in advance, nor it can be forced by governmental bureaucrats; it is won during the struggle. The more we resist the wider autonomy of our action spreads. We feel that today's challenge is not to stand on the barricades of the imagined 'old university' that has long been the place of blind reproduction of existing relations between capital and labor. We can go even further and according to Athusser's interpretation claim that educational system is actually the most important system of social cohesion. Therefore, it is clear that there is no point in defending the existing form of university. Instead, based on our experience of struggle in the education field, we believe that we have

to build autonomous, self-managed production of knowledge beyond hierarchy, alienation and commercialization. And as mentioned above, since such autonomous universities, surrounded by capitalist society are pointless, if not impossible, we have to examine how student demands and political innovations in their organizing could translate to the wider social struggle for a world beyond capitalist exploitation.

**Sources and inspiration:**

- Althusser, Louis. 2000. *Izbrani spisi*. Ljubljana: Založba/\*cf.
- Marx, Karl. 1961. *Kapital I*. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba.
- Močnik, Rastko. 2010. Delovni razredi v sodobnem kapitalizmu. In: *Postfordizem: razprave o sodobnem kapitalizmu*, ed., Gal Kim, 149-203. Ljubljana: Mirovni inštitut.
- Močnik, Rastko. 2009. *Spisi iz humanistike*. Ljubljana: Založba/\*cf.
- The Edu Factory Collective. 2009. *Towards a Global Autonomous University*. New York: Autonomia.
- Student and other social movements in resistance around the globe.