

A brief outline of the student movement in Greece, June 2006

On the 28th of April, the Greek ministry of education published a draft proposal for a bill regarding the reform of university education. The key points of this proposal are the following ones: Specific regulations for the expulsion of 'inefficient' students. This category includes students failing to complete their studies after $n + n/2$ years, where n is the scheduled duration [a two year course must be completed in three years, a six year course in nine years], as well as students failing in a main course more than three times. It must be noted that the state had repeatedly and unsuccessfully tried to introduce such regulations since the beginning of the 80's. Economic 'rationalization' and cutting down on expenses by appointing financial managers, putting an end to the provision of free textbooks for university courses, as well as establishing 'retributive scholarships' for poor students. Setting university spaces practically open to police raids through the abolition of 'academic sanctuary'. Student mobilizations and university occupations will be more difficult to take place in the future since prosecution will become possible. At the same time, there is an ongoing process for the revision of the constitution which will enable the establishment of private universities. This proposal, which was to be voted during the summer in the parliament, is the last one in a series of laws passed in the previous years considering the alignment of university education with the imperatives of 'lifelong learning', quantification, standardization and evaluation of academic labour, but which have not been implemented yet. At this point, it must be emphasized that these policies conform to a broader initiative in the context of the European Union referred to as 'Bologna Process'. This initiative has codified the main goals of neo-liberal restructuring of university education listed below:

- Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees through the establishment of a system of credits in the context of a two-cycle degree system;
- Promotion of mobility of students, staff and graduates;
- Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance;
- Effective accommodation of labour market needs and, thus, flexibility of provided studies.

The publication of the planned reform was the spark that ignited students' mobilizations which started in the end of May and spread quickly all over the country. In the beginning of June, at the culmination of the movement, more than 2/3s of university departments were occupied and continuous mass protests and demos disrupted the city centres of Athens and Thessaloniki (an unexpected development since no student mobilizations have taken place in the last 20 years at this time of the year, just before summer exams and holidays). The government was obliged to 'freeze' the reform, postponing it, possibly

for next autumn. Due to the freeze and the summer break, mobilizations have stopped with a promise of reappearing next autumn.

Occupations were practically supported by the most active students (leftists and autonomous elements), but the participation in assemblies and demonstrations was high. The struggle was also supported by the union of university teachers, or, better say, those teachers who do not or can't participate in the entrepreneurial university activities. Students' high participation is attributed to accumulated discontent with the continuous intensification of the studies and the widespread experience of precarious and devalued labour. A more thorough research about the class composition of the movement, the everyday experience of the subjects of the struggle, their goals and ideas remains to be made.

What we can say for sure is that slogans and activities in the demos and the leaflets that were distributed expressed a lack of imagination and that they mostly reflected the ideas of the state capitalist political organizations active in the universities. The latter ones insist on the maintenance of the 'public and free [that is, state controlled] character of university education' and the demand for 'full and secure employment'. On the other hand, the rank-and-file expressed an inarticulate denial of the worsening conditions in the university and the workplaces and an outright desire to stop work time. Very few attempts were made to address wage workers. In one of them the Thessaloniki Medicine School students organised a meeting with doctors and nurses working in the nearby hospitals (many of them are precarious workers). In another case, some radical elements (both students and non-students) organised an expropriation of books from a big book store in Athens during a big demo, protesting against the abolition of free textbooks. They also distributed leaflets to the personnel, explaining the meaning of this expropriation. And, of course, during the demos there were the usual anarchist attacks on banks and cops.

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