

On the state of the Universities

Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici

1 November 2010

The situation in Italy's universities is somewhat untypical compared with other areas of the public sector, and in particular in relation to schools. Faced with progressive disinvestment on the part of the State's central administration, responsibility has gradually and with difficulty moved to the country's Regions, who have occupied themselves more with the service aspects rather than concentrate on the aspects of research and education. But there has been no united response over the years to this state of affairs from lecturers, researchers, casual workers, administration personnel and students. Various Budget reforms and the still-nascent Gelmini Reform, have been continuing this trend towards the dismantlement of Italy's university system, with a series of integrated actions.

These include:

1. a reduction of the Ordinary Financing Fund [the principal source of State financing for universities];
2. a proposal for the economic measurement of productivity which does not take into consideration specific cases or the complexity of the system;
3. greater encouragement of public/private synergy, with incentives for private intervention in decision making;
4. a recruitment block on teaching and administrative staff;
5. the blocking of prospective staff members who have already won places;
6. reduction in staff numbers through obligatory retirement;
7. reduced investment into research training (doctorates, research grants);
8. non-renewal of lecturers' contracts and those of casual workers in university administrations;
9. outsourcing of institutional services as a result of the blocking of short-term contracts and drastic reductions in the casually-employed staff numbers;

10. casualization of researchers with the abolition of full-time researchers and the creation of limited-contract researchers (3 years, renewable once) with heavier workloads and lower salaries, with researchers being subjected totally to the power of tenured professors.

This trend — though still not completely stabilized — is producing:

1. a serious collapse in the quality of teaching and scientific research;
2. increased hierarchization and subjection among sectors of teaching staff and research staff;
3. further increases in the power of tenured professors;
4. greater hierarchization between scientific studies and humanistic studies;
5. progressive subjection of research to power groups and capitalist objectives.

This scenario needs to be met with unity in the struggle against the Gelmini Reform. It cannot be limited to simple opposition to the law, nor to the current corporative and wage demands — such as those of researchers currently. The needs of the various elements without power in the university structure (students, casual workers, short-term contract researchers) must be cemented through a re-launching of conflictual syndicalism within the university administrations in order to reach the only anti-authoritarian objective possible in a structure such as that of the universities — in other words, a progressive reduction in the power of the tenured professors.

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