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With the students in the struggle for a university fit for all

Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici

29 November 2010

The situation in Italy's universities is somewhat untypical compared with other areas of the public sector, all of whom are in serious difficulty as a result of the crisis and this government's actions. For years now, universities have been seeing their resources and personnel drain away, a decade of reform has weakened the university system in favour of the logic of neo-liberalism and the casualization of researchers and lecturers, to the detriment of education and research.

But there has been no united response over the years from lecturers, researchers, casual workers, administration personnel and students. Now, however, with the new law on universities about to be passed — a law which definitively puts the seal on the decline and total subjection of universities to the logic of capitalism — students have decided to take up the struggle once again.

The greatest risks of this situation, already compromised by Budget manoeuvring, are:

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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.

If this law is passed, it will end up with the destruction of the Italian university, meaning:

1. an end to the right of everyone to study at university, with access being granted only to some;

2. a further collapse in the quality of teaching and scientific research;
3. increased hierarchization and subjection among sectors of teaching staff and research staff;
4. further increases in the power of tenured professors;
5. greater hierarchization between scientific studies and humanistic studies;
6. progressive subjection of research to power groups and capitalist objectives;
7. increased State financing to private universities, which are often in the hands of religious orders or entirely on-line, with no control by State structures over their functioning.

This scenario needs to be met with unity in the struggle against minister Gelmini's reforms. It cannot be limited to simple opposition to the law, nor to the current corporative, wage and job demands. 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.

Together with the students in struggle, for the immediate withdrawal of the Gelmini Act!