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By Various

Going back to the discussions raised in Mute Issue 29 [<http://www.metamute.org/en/node/414>] around the neoliberalisation (read privatization) of the university in the UK, the potential for radical recomposition around the university and the politics of knowledge has been haunting European educational institutions for some years.

Right now it seems worth tracking a couple of recent struggles in the light of this from the student occupations in France last year, to the now almost four year wave of strikes in secondary schools and universities in Greece (all universities closed for the academic year 2006-2007), to protests in Belgrade and Novi Sad, Serbia this week. The various posts from each of these three struggles are followed by a recent announcement for a mailing list discussing the politics of knowledge production in and outside the universities

Serbia: Students protest and occupy

March 9th, 2007 by Joseph K. from
[<http://libcom.org/news/serbia-students-protest-and-occupy-09032007>]

Belgrade University Faculty of Architecture

A participant's report of new student protests against neo-liberal "reforms" of the education sector.

"Some 300 students gathered at the protest in front of Faculty of Architecture today. After blocking of the major Belgrade boulevard for some time, just few hours ago decision was made to do a sleep-over in the faculty building, which will turn into a full-time blockade of the building tomorrow morning. 400 students are currently occupying the faculty. As before, the infrastructure of the protest is provided by ASI-IWA (*libcom editors' note*: the Serbian affiliate of the anarcho-syndicalist International Workers' Association).

This is just a first step in revival of the protest in this schooling year. In the autumn of 2006, students at the University of Belgrade launched the first organised counter-offensive against neo-liberal reforms of higher education in Serbia. In this way they continued the same struggle initiated earlier in the same year by their colleagues from France, Greece and other countries across the world.

The student protests lasted three months, from the beginning of October until end of December 2006. It included eight public protest meetings, over 30 student gatherings at the Faculty of Philosophy and approximately 15 gatherings at other faculties across the city. Over 17,000 students of Belgrade University signed petitions in support of protest demands."

From The Libcom forums:

For six days now, students of Belgrade University are blocking the building of Philosophical faculty

This is just a short overview of student protests in Serbia. Longer analysis with juicy details will be published later, when all the fuss passes.

In the may and June education union of Union Confederation Anarcho-syndicalist Initiative (<http://inicijativa.org/tiki/tiki-index.php?page=SindObrBG>) and direct-democratic solidarity movement Social front (<http://www.socijalni.front.ru/>) initiated campaign against scholarships in Belgrade University "Down with tuition fee" (Dole skolarine!). (<http://protest.zbrka.net/image/tid/13>)

First few weeks in October, when the university year have started, passed in distributing of propaganda materials, collecting of signatures against the tuition fees and organizing of student assemblies at the Philosophical faculty with an intent of organizing protest in a more radical form. (<http://protest.zbrka.net/image/tid/24>)

On 12th of October protest party which gathered several hundred students was organized in front of Philosophical faculty. (<http://protest.zbrka.net/image/tid/22>)

On 18th of October student organized a welcome for Serbian Prime Minister, and Education Minister which were gathering in near by building, wearing slogans such as "I don't want to pay", "Free education", "Down with tuition fees" etc. the politicians were quite scared. (<http://protest.zbrka.net/image/tid/23>)

On 27th of October protest walk was organized, more than more than 500 people attended the protest walk. Apart from tuition fees, new demand was introduced - equalizing of the graduated student with the "master" level from Bologne process which is being introduced in Serbia (while University tried to take more money and organize extra education for students who wanted to have a "master" diploma) (<http://protest.zbrka.net/image/tid/25> - photos, http://inicijativa.org/files/video/20061027-protestna_setnja.wmv - video)

On 6th of November, while the meeting of the highest University body (KONUS) was happening, protest was organized. More than 800 people attended the protests. "Thiefs!", "Bourgeois gang!" was yelled and the deans, and they were blocked inside of the building. We didn't let them go out for some time, and students were yelling at them: "How expensive your suites are?", "Thiefs!" etc. (<http://protest.zbrka.net/image/tid/26>)

On 16th of November protest walk was organized, the main streets of Belgrade were blocked and students yelled in front of the Parliament building, Government building and Education Ministry building "These are the nests of the thieves", "Down with tuition fee"
(<http://protest.zbrka.net/image/tid/28>)

On 17th of November we have organized travel to the city of Novi Sad where KONUS was meeting again, some 100 students protested and entered the meeting where they verbally attacked the deans.
(<http://protest.zbrka.net/image/tid/29>)

Parallel with this, bureaucratic student organizations, Student Union of Serbia (SUS), and Union of Students (SSB), when confronted with big numbers of students attending the protests and actions, tried to take over the protest and to take the focus from the tuition fees and only deal with "master" issue. In a longer analysis we'll show how we managed to fuck them over. Without a doubt, our non-hierarchically structure, with student assemblies deciding on everything played a key role in that.

On 22nd of November, Protest was organized in front of Philosophical faculty, which was occupied as a result of the protest. Since, Philosophical faculty was turned into protest headquarters for the whole university. Permanently hundreds students are inside, they are eating, sleeping, discussing, singing, watching movies, and preparing propaganda materials and of course blocking the lectures.
(http://kontra-punkt.info/index.php?module=My_eGallery&do=showgall&gid=19&p=)

There are no much photos from last six days, since we are having a loads of work, but everything is being pictured and filmed and things are going to be placed online as soon as we finish with the blockade.

Big protest is announced for tomorrow.

This whole thing is, of course, huge in the media. Two liberal politicians, from different parties, tried to enter faculty building and were yelled out by the students "We don't want politicians here" and "thiefs!" was screamed at them. One of them, who came with his bodyguards, even attacked some students.

It is kind of a mini 1968 - it is a first time that something so radical (texts that are adopted by the assemblies will eventually be translated) is happening at Belgrade University since 1968. Of course, since apathy that is caused by betrayed revolutions and so called transition, all of this is happening on much smaller scale, for the time being, and maybe 1000 students are actively involved in this - but nobody else, especially bureaucratic student organizations, is capable of bringing more people - so this is the biggest thing that can happen in present situation.

My favorite picture from the protest here: <http://protest.zbrka.net/node/275>

Official web site of the protest: <http://protest.zbrka.net>

Photo galleries: <http://protest.zbrka.net/image>

Salud, Anarquía y Colectivismo

Ratibor Trivunac

Report on police repression of student occupation in Greece

From the Edu-factory mailing list

The most severe police brutality against 35.000 of students and teachers in demonstration

The new law for the functioning of the Universities is being voted at the moment, after the decision of the government to start the process in the Parliament despite the public outrage; since students, pupils, teachers and academics have been in an ongoing struggle since May 2006, including occupations of schools and faculties, strikes and demonstrations.

As the state media reported, only the governmental party voted for the new law, while the rest of them decided to leave the room after the preliminary poll. Meanwhile, more than 35.000 of students, including teachers and academics, were demonstrating in the streets of Athens, in order to surround the Parliament.

It was in front of the Parliament that some demonstrators clashed with the police while the air got full of asphyxiating and tear gas. The march was forced to split into pieces and about 100 hundred demonstrators that had randomly been at that place, were segregated and severely walloped by a heavy police force. Several attacks followed, in order to split the rest of the march into smaller pieces, when the school teachers were beaten as well. Individuals had to run away and hide into nearby buildings.

Dozens of randomly chosen demonstrators have been arrested or brought to the police headquarters, most of them plain students or even old-aged teachers. Others had to go to the hospital with wounding on the heads.

The situation is still evolving as this article is being written. As the Polytechnic faculty has been blocked by the police, 2.000 people have occupied the Administration Building, while some others are holding an assembly in the Law school. All demonstrators are currently in a very bad mood, either beaten or sprayed with tear gas and pepper spray.

Before 1 hour finished a spontaneous solidarity demonstration is taking place in Thessaloniki. More 5000 people demonstrate and fight with riot police out of university campus

see videos http://athens.indymedia.org/front.php3?lang=el&article_id=669189

http://athens.indymedia.org/front.php3?lang=el&article_id=669044

Libcom blog on the anti-CPE protests in France

edu-factory.org manifesto [<http://www.edu-factory.org/>]

As was the factory, so now is the university. Where once the factory was a paradigmatic site of struggle between workers and capitalists, so now the university is a key space of conflict, where the ownership of knowledge, the reproduction of the labour force, and the creation of social and cultural stratifications are all at stake. This is to say the university is not just another institution subject to sovereign and governmental controls, but a crucial site in which wider social struggles are won and lost.

To be sure, these changes occur as capitalism gives new importance to the production of knowledge, and in the advanced capitalist world, moves such production of knowledge to the centre of the economy. With this movement, the university also loses its monopoly in this same sphere of knowledge production. Perhaps it once made sense to speak of town and gown. But now the borders between the university and society blur.

This merging of university and society takes diverse forms. It can be shaped by the pressure to market degrees. Or it can be forced by measures that link the provision of funding to ‘technological transfer’ or collaboration with ‘partners’ from government and/or commercial enterprises. Similarly, the growing precariousness of academic work means that many labour both in and out of the university, not to mention the labour conditions for non-academic workers. And the opening of many universities to previously excluded cohorts of students, whether on the basis of social class or national jurisdiction, means that their internal composition has also changed.

These transformations both shift the possibilities for political expression in the university and initiate new kinds of struggle. In some instances, a politicised student movement has disappeared. In others has begun to grow. The transnationalisation of many university operations, including the internationalisation and diversification of the student body, introduces new kinds of cultural conflicts and tensions. At the same time, the university is derailed from its traditional mission of safeguarding the national and official culture. How are we to make sense of these changes, and, above all, how should they inform radical political investigation and action?

The university is a key site for intervention because it is now a global site. Indeed, there is no such thing as ‘the university’ but only universities, in their specific geographical, economic, and cultural locations. Even within universities there exists a range of labour practices and conditions as well as different cultures of organisation. If, in analogy to the factory of yesteryear, we are to understand the university as a paradigmatic site of struggle, we must first map and understand these differences (even as they are taking shape), not as an end in itself but as means of generating shared resources to meet

the conflicts at hand.

We propose a series of transnational web-based discussions on the condition of the university today. These will lead up to a series of moving web-archived seminars (in cities to be decided) on a number of different topics, beginning with ‘conflicts in the production of knowledge’. It is important that contributions come from all continents, from different types of universities, from people with different relations to the university, and from those involved in ‘free’ or autonomous university initiatives. The aim is to use the discussions to sound out the geographically disjunctive relations between the participants, creating a collective knowledge of globalising society that in turn contributes directly to thematic discussions and the development of new forms of relation and resistance.

Conflicts in the Production of Knowledge - First round of discussion (February-April 2006)

Knowledge is a common good not because it exists in nature but because it is produced and reproduced by living labour and social cooperation. The centrality of knowledge to the contemporary system of production applies not simply to those sectors that rest upon innovation but to the entire spectrum of labour composition. With this in mind, we propose to investigate the conflicts of knowledge produced on the (always more porous) boundary between the university and society. In the academic context, we would like to analyse—always taking concrete circumstances into account—the ambivalence of oppositional knowledges as challenges to the institution and processes of domestication.

the edu-factory collective