

Teachers, pupils, proletarians: spread the fight against the worsening of our living conditions!

Once more, on the basis of the state's fiscal crisis, they want us to tighten our belts.

More hours in front of a class for the teachers within any increase in wages, fewer resources for canteens and the upkeep of buildings, temporary jobs destroyed, classes overloaded, flexi-jobs for those with “worker” status, higher tuition fees for higher education: here's the practical meaning of the “reforms” brought in by Minister Glatigny and the FWB government.

And all this on top of the austerity measures introduced at all levels of government, including public transport and child benefits. The latest budget negotiations are nothing but a series of brutal attacks on the working class in all its components and by all means. In France, the same logic of austerity hits the schools and beyond, and arouses the same anger.

There is a simple truth: nobody will act in our place. No minister, no government, no parliament, no unions will defend our interests.

They administer a system, their system, in which those who work and study are commanded to pay the bill. And all those fake friends peddle poisonous illusions. The “public service” defended at all costs by the unions and presented as a neutral common good. But the state is not neutral! It is the state of the capitalist system, which oppresses us every day, which bleeds us more every day, which claims to represent the “general interest” while it organises the social relations of capital.

And then, there is the democratic illusion put forward by the associations which demand that the Minister listens and withdraws the decree, as if the decision came from a lack of dialogue and not from an austerity policy which had been carried by the right as much as the left.

School is not a gift for proletarians.

It inculcates punctuality, obedience, hierarchy, competition. In a word, the main function of school (much to the teachers' dismay) is to discipline the future workforce (the pupils). School is above all an instrument for reproducing the social order, under cover of “citizenship”. And incidentally, it serves more and more as a child-minding facility so that parents can go to work, or a place to park the future unemployed which capital doesn't (yet) need apart from as a reserve army of labour.

Disinvestment in schools goes hand in hand with the tendency to devalue labour power. A large part of the proletariat is employed in low-skilled tasks, therefore its cost of reproduction, including its education costs, can fall without harming capital accumulation. The demand for skilled labour is met by means other than schools with a low socio-economic status: elite schools, private education, in-company training and selective immigration. Defending “quality education” as such is a dead end because it supposes that capital needs it for its valorisation.

We do not have to defend the state school but, on the contrary, we must try to reappropriate that space to lead discussions (teachers/pupils/parents) about the type of society we want. We have to organise ourselves.

Defending the school therefore does not mean politely asking the state to better manage what it imposes on us. It means building, in the places where we live, work and study, a collective force capable of resisting and deciding.

Teachers in primary and secondary schools, school employees and workers, pupils: our fate is linked.

The degradation in working conditions and in study conditions are the two sides of the same policy.

The recent mobilisations in Liège, Charleroi, and Brussels have clearly shown the common reality shared by teachers and pupils. But in the absence of mass action that would really hurt the government and management, who have hardened their line since the start of the school year, the movement failed to advance. An isolated strike here, a demo there, a petition wherever, that is not enough. We need to transform anger into organisation.

Today, we must find out how to win, and at the lowest cost to us: to leave behind the days of action which are as ritualised as they are useless, and to occupy the very terrain of the school to block, disorganise and extend the strike. The struggle will be fought out school by school, with assemblies and strike funds that can survive defeats.

- In 1990, the teachers' strike secured concessions because it was prolonged, and through massive mobilisation paralysed all components of education (primary school teachers, lower and upper secondary school teachers, and admin and maintenance staff). At the end of 1989, a wage re-evaluation of 2% was decided for everyone with the status of civil servant but the government of the French Community announced that it could not pay more to the teachers without paying less to the other staff. Strikes took place between May and November 1990 and one of the high points was the blockade of the Certifying Exams in June 1990. Victory: the agreement with the government allowed for a 2% increase over three years. But... it did not prevent job losses.
- In 1995, a plan to rationalise secondary schools intended schools with less than 400 pupils to be fused or to disappear, and 3,000 jobs were threatened. From February to May 1996, actions followed one after another without interruption. Rolling strikes were organised so that the same teachers would not always be subjected to loss of income, and the pupils were massively involved. But it was a clear defeat: 3,000 jobs disappeared faced with a government which did not give in.

Without the means to do it some harm, a determined government won't give in.

Teachers and pupils, let's unite in each establishment to discuss our conditions, compare our experiences and decide together what actions to take. And not only when the government announces a new attack, because we are only now at the beginning of the austerity measures. We have to transform the schools into a political base for discussion and action and open them up to other workers and the unemployed, for example.

**Assemblies in the schools. Teacher-pupil struggle committees.
Coordination between workplaces. Strikes and blockades decided collectively.
Solidarity with other workers.**

If we let others decide on our future, they will decide it on the basis of their own interests, not ours.
We have no need of spokespeople who negotiate away our anger. We need to organise ourselves.

**WE DO NOT ASK FOR PERMISSION TO DEFEND OURSELVES.
NOBODY WILL ACT IN OUR PLACE.**

FOR THE REVIVAL OF WORKERS' INITIATIVE

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