

Dear Friends,

As you might know I'm the head of a small union local of University lecturers (www.ig-elf.at). That's why I am also involved in the present protests of our students. We, the lecturers also work under precarious conditions of employment and we are struggling together with our students for an open university and against the Bologna-process and the economisation of education and science. Therefore I send you a paper of the protesting students, that shows you the situation at the Austrian universities. Distributing this text to other scientists is welcome.

best greetings
Thomas Schmidinger

In the last two weeks students of the University of Vienna - and subsequently students of all major Austrian universities - have been protesting against the recent developments in the educational system.

The movement's aim is to force a critical discourse about the current concept of education prevalent in all European countries. In our opinion, the present-day concept of education endangers everybody's right to free access to high-quality education. We want our governments to consider education as an investment in the future, and not as a mere 'manufacturing process' to ready students for a specific vocation.

The protest movement is not led by any particular group. It is based on the concept of grassroots democracy, thus ensuring everybody's participation on equal terms. It is neither ideologically driven, nor is it linked to any political party; in response, we receive countless solidarity statements both from within and without Austria that confirm the broad societal interest in our cause.

Our protest includes the occupation of several lecture halls - most notably the "Audi Max" (the largest lecture hall) - in the University of Vienna, daily plenary sessions, the setup of more than 60 working groups, the organization of lectures concerning the problems of the educational system, constant demonstrations and actions, and also the attempt to establish the basis for dialogue with the responsible politicians. The various groups concern themselves with the protest's goals, international networking, infrastructure, public action, and much more. The structure here also includes a canteen, a first aid station, cleaning forces, an IT team as well as a PR/press group and several networking groups.

We think that most of the problems we are dealing with concern all European students, and that a satisfying solution needs the participation of all - otherwise our concerns will be ignored.

We demand:

- an anti-discriminatory consensus with regards to gender, sexual orientation, race and religion for all educational institutions
- a democratization of the universities – professors, students and other academic personnel should be involved in the decision-making process
- a stop to the domination of economical aspects in education and to the neoliberal structuring of the universities
- a maximum of self-determination during the course of the study (disposition of free selectable subjects for specialization towards personal interests)
- free access to all studies – no financial barriers or other selectivity mechanisms
- sufficient funding for all universities
- adequate terms of employment for all members of the university personnel

History:

The protest movement was initiated on the 20th of October at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and soon spread throughout the country. On the 22nd, a solidarity demonstration led to the spontaneous occupation of the auditorium maximum in the University of Vienna. Within the following days, more and more universities and students joined the protest and finally approached the public on October 28th with a mass demonstration in Vienna (estimated numbers vary between ten and fifty thousand participants), thus sustaining the massive media attention of the first days. At the moment, 10 Austrian universities are held by students and professors.

Against the background of these developments, we will continue to work for our aims, not only expecting a step towards the fulfillment of these goals, but also to raise long-lasting awareness for the problems European students face today.

If you decide to engage in protest yourself, we would be glad to establish an international, mutual exchange of ideas, thoughts and actions – we share the problems, and we need to share the commitment, too. Together we are able to form a voice that puts the emergency brake on, stops the current system and opens a space for a new debate.

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