

Luther Blissett



**Occupation, not democracy!**

## Introduction

To begin with we should write some introductory lines about the students' movement that spread throughout Greece during last May and June. We believe this is necessary since very few information on it is available in English. We write considering ourselves a part of that movement, given that at least half of *Blaumachen's* members are students themselves.

Higher Education in Greece undergoes restructuring in accordance to "Bologna Declaration" (1999) and as a part of the wider neo-liberal restructuring of the indigenous capital relations. The aim is, as elsewhere in Europe, producing a rather flexible labour force, susceptible to life-long learning and reskilling. This policy has created an increasingly proletarianized young population, doomed for its most parts to flexible working conditions and/or unemployment. The present Higher Education restructuring has met the first waves of resistance in the 2001 students' struggle. However, that struggle has ended, schoolwork has been increasingly intensified since then and at the same time some legislative reforms have already taken place (although they have not been implemented yet). The present (neo-conservative) government's efforts aim at revising the constitution which for now secures the public character of Higher Education and reforming the legislation concerning Higher Education in order to align university with the imperatives of evaluation, competitiveness, flexibilization and commodification. This attempt ignited the recent students' struggle.

"June's days" have been the most massive students' movement in Greece since 1986. 430 university and technical university departments have been occupied (451 in all), a great number of demonstrations (with the biggest of them in Athens and Thessaloniki with twenty and ten thousands demonstrators respectively), clashes with cops in Athens' centre and massive general assemblies have taken place. In our opinion, *"we can understand nothing about this struggle if we think that the draft proposal of the new bill is the only problem for this young proletariat occupying university buildings, giving up studying, demonstrating and making its own festivals. Instead, we live a social explosion which reflects the accumulated anger, the negation of an everyday life in campuses increasingly intensified, of the poverty of the limitlessly limited choices offered by the spectacle, of the promise of a future with nothing more than even more work, even more insecurity, even more fear. The strong and decided opposition to the new bill represents this young proletariat's reply to the neo-liberal fixations: don't blame us for the fact that social needs are not covered; we won't pay for this; we won't try any harder. However, this negation is segmental and (so far) not united towards a radical critique of the existing world. What emerges so far as the dominant tendency of this movement, a tendency which is continually reinforced by the Left, is the defense against the legislative reform in Higher Education, which means the affirmation of an earlier form of class settlement. This is reflected in slogans such as "Public and Free Education", "We want jobs, not unemployment" ..."*<sup>1</sup>. Eventually, this movement ended at late June, when the government announced that the introduction of the new law will be postponed till autumn; in regard to this, we shouldn't ignore both the practices of the (reformist or radical) social-democratic leftist organisations and the imminent summer break.

We know that this introduction is too short to describe and criticize a whole social struggle. This is not the place to take on such a work. We are working on such a project in Greek right now. For now, we publish in English our contribution ***Occupation, not democracy!*** This leaflet was written by some of us together with other comrades during the early days of the movement. It was distributed during the second week of the occupations and in the 10000 people demonstration in Thessaloniki. Its content was determined by what we saw then as the major weaknesses of the movement, *i.e.* the adherence to democratic procedures and generally to a democratist ideology along with the absence of any critique of schoolwork and of the media's mediating role. Another leaflet under the title ***Let the occupations become time-barricades*** was distributed in Athens and Thessaloniki during the third and fourth week of the movement, criticizing the various leftist groups and introducing the "social wage" demand. We hope that this will be also available to English readers in the future.

*Blaumachen*  
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<sup>1</sup> From the editorial of *Blaumachen* no.1, June 2006 [www.blaumachen.gr]

## **About some widely spread myths; to be used by the fighting students (and not only them) of June**

*The idea of democratically debating every day those who are against the strike on the renewal of the strike is absurd. The strike has never been a democratic practice, but a political accomplished fact, an immediate expropriation, a relationship of power. No one has ever voted the establishment of capitalism. [...] A strange idea haunts this movement, the idea of occupying university buildings only during work hours. This is an occupation that does not liberate space. An occupation where fire fighters, administrators and pretexts of authority and safety continue to make us childish, and where the university will remain simply a university. It's true that once we've taken over this space, we would need to populate it, populate it with things other than the desire to return to normal. We have to embrace with serenity the fact that there will be no return to normal, and then inhabit this irreversibility.[...] No one has the right to tell us that what we are doing is "illegitimate". We don't have to see ourselves as spectators of the struggle, even less should we see ourselves from the point of view of the enemy. Legitimacy belongs to those who believe in their actions, to those who know what they are doing and why they are doing it. This idea of legitimacy is obviously opposed to that of the State, majority and representation. It does not submit to the same rationales, it imposes its own rationales. If the politicizing consists in a struggle of different legitimacies, of different ideas of happiness, our task from now on is to give means to this struggle with no other limit but what appears to us to be just and joyful.*

From "An Update by the Sorbonne Occupation Committee in Exile", distributed during the March unrest in France.

We begin this small note by tracking a moment of the social explosion in France a few months ago. Indeed, we are referring to France but mainly not to what actually happened there but to what didn't happen; to the failings and weaknesses of that movement; to the revolutionary content that didn't exist and to the practices that didn't take place; to anything we need to overcome as that struggle's lessons become a part of our own memory, of our own struggle here. The movement in France has ended. What it has left is not only the partial withdrawal of the "CPE", but also a legacy in the minds of those been there, in the streets of the "City of Light" and the rest of France; moments of human poetry and collective joy.

The whole campus in our city is now occupied and under our control. We demonstrate in the streets to overthrow capital's attack against our lives, an attack represented by the new bill. We do not accept the solution capital offers us. This doesn't mean that we are satisfied with what now exists. By occupying the university, by fighting, we create a time-barricade, which we desire to become a total attack against the existing world. We are tired of working more and more intensively and always without pay. We are tired of all this crap like "student life", "knowledge" and "education". We are outraged with the fact that we get to think how capital could better manage our exploitation. We are distressed by political games, political tactics and every thought concerning political cost. Only those who go into politics could have a political cost. The only politics we are concerned with is the abolition of politics. So we need to get over with some myths haunting the minds of lots of people with whom we struggle together, side by side.

### **First myth: Majority is always right.**

The idea that within a movement one must count hands, or even that one could, makes no sense. To yield to this idea is to place oneself at the mercy of the democratist illusion according to which the collective will is the simple addition of sovereign individual wills, whereas in reality it is always the result of a complex play of reciprocal influences. The democratic myth wishes to convince us that only individuals exist, each one with its own responsibilities<sup>2</sup>, its own will and its own thoughts. Our experience, however, proves that human relationships, communities and the joy of human contact exist; what we see is that all these are destroyed day by day. Their democracy wants us to be alone, neurotic isolated individuals. Their contradiction is that we cannot produce profit for them by being

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<sup>2</sup> Let's think how far this conception is from every minister's statement that "He is responsible for being unemployed. He hasn't tried hard enough."

isolated, so the productive cooperation between us must always be ensured. In this contradiction is where our power lies.

When deliberative proceedings are constituted (an assembly, a coordination or a parliament) the principal question is not the procedures by which the will of all the participants can best express itself, but the relation between the process of debate and the action, a question which cannot be dissociated from the nature of the action itself. We don't care about procedures in which everybody's opinion can be expressed. We don't want to debate with everybody. The opinion of those who try in a certain time to change the conditions of their lives is what concerns us. If a situation is sufficiently rich in possibilities, one can well conceive of a minority undertaking its own action alongside the majority, and that the result of their actions then leads a good part of the majority to join the minority, or else shows the minority that it was mistaken. The domination of the democratic illusion would lead the minority to inertia due to respect towards the majority and the movement as a whole would lose the opportunity for a qualitative leap forward.

What we say here can be easily understood if we think of the procedure of the students' general assemblies. We are all glad that the majority supports the occupation and the struggle. But what would happen if DAP [the governmental students' organisation] (or any "DAP") mobilised more people in some schools (or even in all of them) becoming the majority? Should we accept our defeat by adhering to democratic legitimacy? Every democratic procedure ends up in turning against our revolt. The State and all parties are quite familiar with breaking the limits of the democratic legitimacy whenever it doesn't suit their aims. The proof lies equally in the history of fascist regimes and our direct experience of our struggle right now. We would be even happier if 500 people determined to keep up fighting, although a minority in a general assembly, destroyed majority's dictatorship.

### **Second myth: Occupation is just a means to an end.**

Even though most universities in the country are occupied, there are still many different understandings of the significance of our occupying our workplaces. Occupation is an act that blocks the productive process, whether cars are produced, higher education or human-commodities, namely us. From this point of view, occupation can be considered as a means of pressure, since it freezes the profit-producing process (and no boss, no government can accept such a freeze). But, all the more so, occupation is an act of re-appropriating the space and time dominated by capital. Blocking university's function means that first of all we stop working, studying, going round hospitals and compulsory courses. At last we have some time... some time to live (something that we cannot usually do). At last we feel that the university campus belongs to us and we give up wasting our everyday activity in an alien place. At last we can truly meet with other people, laugh, laze, enjoy ourselves. We know that in the present situation these moments of negation are probably temporary. In a couple of weeks the occupation will end. Nevertheless, *we have to embrace with serenity the fact that there will be no return to normal, and then inhabit this irreversibility.*

To prevent this bill from being voted or implemented is important since the latter would make our lives worse. It's also important to create those organizational forms that would question the democratic myth and avoid to get fixed as such, since every fixed organisational form is alien to us. No particular form will ever guarantee the nature of the movement. But, what primarily concerns us is **to create situations able to make the possibility of returning to the former state of affairs difficult.** It is a question of starting to modify, however slightly, the conditions of existence of those touched by the movement - both within it and outside it. About 20 years ago, in France again, some postmen put forward the idea of delivering the mail for free. If only one post office had done it -for example by stamping all the letters without charge- it would have made an impact from which the whole movement would have benefited and the shock waves of which would have spread throughout society: the action of a minority would have had infinitely more weight, for themselves as well as for the others, than a hundred thousand votes in the assemblies.

### **Third myth: Images and actions.**

This movement is haunted by the idea of drawing the media's attention to its actions and "fair demands". We find this idea absurd and even hostile. The only role the media can play is that of incorporating the movement's language into the dominant one, into capital's language. The only attitude we should have towards the media is that of totally negating the domination of images. As

long as the movement remains within the limits of managing capital's problems it will be reconciled with the language of the media (or at least of those [media] in opposition to present government's strategy). Our word may escape the mediation of images and journalists' lies only by the development of its own quality and its reflection into the respective decided actions. Practices of revolt have already emerged; we have blocked the productive process of teaching and research in the campuses. We have to expand such practices into the terrain of circulation of commodities-things and human commodities by blocking roads and railway stations. We have much to learn from the French experience in relation to this. After all, don't we want to block the reproduction of capital's social relations? Don't we want to abolish anything that alienates us from our own life? Towards this direction, the movement has to find its own means of circulating its word; it must develop its own voice. *The strength of a movement is in its effective power, not in what is being said about it, and the malicious gossip about it.*

The dictatorship of images isn't restricted only to the relation between the movement and the media. It also involves the relations developed among individuals into that same movement. *Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle*; separation between those involved in the movement and those watching it (fragmented) on TV; between those just voting for actions and those taking part in them; between those just taking part in and those organizing actions and so on...these separations create spectators at different levels. This world which is founded upon our separation from the products of our activity and our creative ability reproduces us as spectators of our life. We are used to watch our life rather than make it. This fact is so firmly imprinted on our brains and bodies that it is preserved during our struggles, too. Take as an example the admiration for those with "leading abilities" or with the ability to give a rousing speech, the applause for vain unionists' words, the millions of photos from massive general assemblies, the obsessional idea that our demonstrations should head towards governmental buildings-symbols of decision making, the spectacular collision with the cops...this is the spectacle laying wait. *The spectacle is the nightmare of imprisoned modern society which ultimately expresses nothing more than its desire to sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of sleep.* What the movement must do is to crush the images through our creative actions.

#### **Fourth myth: Coordination.**

National coordination reflects the sterility of politics and essentially our weakness. Unionists, dozens of leftist groups offer platforms written in advance by their leadership. National coordination is a certain political power's attempt to dominate the movement. We know that coordinating the actions of the various parts of the movement in a broader framework is necessary; so is the development of ideas within the movement. However, not only doesn't the national coordination (in the way it has developed so far) promote this, but it is also hostile to such a necessity. The only existing debate is about whether coordination is necessary or not, about the "when" and the "where", but there is no discussion about **what exactly we are going to coordinate**. Discussion about the content of our actions is almost totally absent from the most occupation committees. In cases where only one political power dominates, content is self-evident; it is its political platform. In the rest of the committees discussion is always postponed in order for a so-called unity over the "minimums" not to be disrupted.

It is quite clear that under such conditions national coordination means the domination of the political platform of the organisation or the organisations that will dominate (primarily in terms of numbers) in the amphitheater's conflict. They want us to be spectators. Instead, since we don't seek for the "minimums" but for the maximum ("We don't want just a loaf of bread, but the whole fucking bakery", according to an old slogan), we must destroy their aspirations and coordinate our actions in an autonomous way.

#### **Fifth myth: You are wrong; I don't work...but when I grow up I'll become a doctor!**

Very few people have yet to understand that university is tied up with the labour market; nobody believes that higher education has such fairy aims as broadening one's horizons, creating "renaissance men" or other such crap reminding of Plato's Academy (for the lovers of antiquity we should only remind that in ancient Athens there had not only been those nice guys -male of course- debating during the procedures of direct democracy, but many, too many slaves as well, who would pleasantly piss upon the gates of the "ideal society"). On the one hand, university produces knowledge necessary for the reproduction of waged labour relations (new technology, the ideological mist of an exploitative society etc). On the other, new workers are produced furnished with those attributes that

make them more exploitable for their future employers (unskilled, flexible, categorized and of course compromised with capitalist reality - the new law is just to complete this condition).

What is well hidden is that university studies are labour, not just potentially labour. We are already involved in the productive process, producing a very precious commodity; ourselves. *Students' working hours resemble those of the "free" employable or better still those of the one who is totally subsumed under the labour exploitative relation; of them who have been working for their whole life.* In medical school (most of us waste our everyday lives here), which vomits a so-called upper crust of workers into the market, schoolwork is increasingly intensified. The modern version of the future doctor is constructed of many hours of practical training in teaching hospitals, days of duty, compulsory attendance at several courses and lectures and full-time studying, which has nothing to do with the renaissance dream of homo universalis. The ideological veil of this intensified unpaid labour consists of words like "education", "professionalism" and "conscience". A whole generation of young people has been nursed with the values of the American-Dream-Made-in-Greece, that of becoming a respectable lawyer or doctor; and when one is committed to become an expert at their object (see exhaustive work without any "free time"), complete their university qualifications with honors (see individualism and fierce competition), lick his doctors-educators' ass, they will be rewarded with the respective social acknowledgement and a big wage.

We'll probably have to remind that the era during which many doctors had been a secure middle class faction has ended for some years now. Medical students come in their majority from working class families, which cannot afford even a small private consulting room. Most of them are going to be employed in one of the various health services' enterprises (private or state funded) or otherwise be a part of the so-called industrial reserve army. A huge medical proletariat has emerged in Greece during the last 10 years; capital has nothing else to offer us as a solution apart from introducing exams in order for one to get a medical specialty, together with a system of continuously evaluating working doctors. One can advance when they deserve it. Deserve what? A reward for being more productive for capital. Exhaustive alienated labour in the school means (not for everyone) passing the exams and becoming a resident; becoming a resident means (for everyone) exhaustive alienated labour in the hospital.

### **Sixth myth: A myth that includes all myths.**

In order to conclude; we are not concerned with any discussion about the knowledge provided by the university. We don't seek for an alien, dead, indifferent, incomprehensible knowledge facing us, with ourselves just absorbing it. We are not concerned with any discussion about improving the democratic institutions of this society. We don't desire to be alone, isolated individuals with our relations mediated by money, images or voting. We are not concerned with any discussion about the way our representatives could correspond better to our demands. We don't want to be spectators. We are not concerned with any discussion about the way our labour could be organized in a different way. We don't want to work. We don't want to be fragmented: doctors, workers, citizens, consumers, men, women, now working, later entertaining ourselves and once in a while voting in procedures separated from the unceasing movement of life. We are concerned with turning our life into a unified and creative experience. In order to manage this we must abolish this university and the rest of the commodity society.

*"We've made our body a vast graveyard of murdered desires and anticipations; we abandon the most important, the most essential things, like playing and talking with kids and animals, with flowers and trees, playing with each other and being happy, making love, enjoying nature, the beautiful products of human hand and mind, gently diving deep inside ourselves, getting to know ourselves and people next to us..."*

-Chronis Missios, *Smile, man... What's so damn hard?*

**With regards  
from AUTH's Medical School's occupation,  
Luther Blissett**