

EUROPEAN MANIFESTO OF EDUCATION

For an education towards human emancipation

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We are witnessing a multiple crisis of capitalism, which is basically financial but profoundly affects the social, political and ideological levels. In order to resolve the emerging contradictions, capitalism destroys all that has been acquired and advanced through difficult struggles everywhere in Europe and in the world. The peoples of Europe have to take action against this onslaught, enforce their political choices and join the struggle against the forces of capital and all forms of domination.

It is well-known that the various education systems fundamentally affect both the present and the future of all the people, and especially the youth. In the context of the dramatic changes brought about by this financial crisis the role of education has become increasingly important. Although the boost in the information technology has opened radical new prospects for the development of human abilities, more than ever now we perceive an unprecedented social division with the majority of the population deprived of the necessary material and intellectual potential to live well. Because the large-scale capitalist restructuring effected by globalisation requires a new kind of flexible employee willing to accept job precariousness and therefore adapt to multiple and different work environments, what is expected of education systems is to offer skills instead of knowledge for the great number of youths; at the same time, academic excellence is restricted to the future governing elite. Precisely like all other public goods, which are not for sale (health, water, etc), education constitutes one of the pillars of the welfare state whose dissolution has been the main objective of neo-liberal policies. Therefore, the state withdraws funds from public education while, at the same time, does its best to downgrade it.

Everywhere in Europe social inequalities grow rampant. Precariousness and poverty worsen. It would be absurd to believe that schools and other education institutions are responsible for the tragic consequences of this situation, namely, difficult professional integration, destruction of social bonds, violence etc. However, it is obvious that the nature and function of the education systems do play a crucial role in the reproduction of social inequalities and in the performing of class selection. For the EU countries, implementing education neo-liberal policies has been part of the development of capitalism, and consequently different national characteristics do not alter this fundamental logic. As a result of the harsh neo-liberal education policies and the cuts in public funds for education and research social exclusion, school dropping, labour flexibility in all grades etc characterise education in Europe. To this, one should add the gradual privatization of the whole system from within (for example, university competition to attract clients-students and academic research directed to profit) and from without (the spread of private schooling etc). In fact, most EU education policies are based on the dominant logic that has transformed knowledge into merchandise according to which acquiring knowledge basically serves a short-term vision of profit seeking and capitalist speculation. In this context, the mission of fundamental research is questioned as indeed is the intellectual independence of teachers and researchers.

The neo-liberal logic of the Lisbon process was defined by the European Council (2000) as follows: the EU should “become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better

jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment.” The challenge relates to an economy supposed to be “more and more knowledge-based.” In reality, the Lisbon strategy has submitted education and research to the market criteria of the capitalist globalization. Furthermore, European education has increasingly lost the humanist dimensions it was initially invested with. The public school which by the nature of its mission is the only institution capable of embracing and educating all children is *accused* of being inefficient and backward. *Although it is high time for a true pedagogic revolution in the whole education system, the neo-liberal logic is fragmenting knowledge into practical skills and destroying cultural accomplishments.* It entraps young people, and especially those belonging to poor classes, into an impoverished consumerist culture, a gadget-style imaginary world. It ultimately deprives the youth of a full, socially active citizenship which would enable them to comprehend, control the complexity of the world and fight against social injustice and exploitation. But, neo-liberal training only aims at producing submissive and docile citizens, instead of emancipated ones. Therefore it robs the Europe of tomorrow of the creative human potential necessary for its development. Overall, the education reforms implementing the Lisbon policies stand out against the need to develop a true democratization of the public institutions and promote education as a public good offered by the state. All this has to change! The EL demands:

- Education as a public and free good for all
- Equal access to knowledge for all citizens up to the highest cultural level
- The right for each citizen– regardless of his/her class, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, race and religion – to wholly develop his/her intellectual abilities and to access lifelong education

We are fighting for

1. a public and free education that, from nursery school to university, fights against the logic of the market. An education that reaffirms the absolute priority of the humans being over profit-ability.
2. a public and free education that, from nursery school to university, unites all knowledge. An education that helps our youth to develop a critical spirit and profit from the most brilliant scientific, social and political accomplishments of the past generations.
3. a public and free education that, from nursery school to university, promotes the ideas of peace and harmonious cooperation of the people. An education that aims at developing free thinking, criticism and creativity, emancipation and individual self-fulfilment.
4. a public and free education that, from nursery school to university, offers every citizen fundamental knowledge as well as the opportunity to familiarize himself/herself with the most elaborate forms of a fast changing knowledge.

This project could become, and will become, reality through our political struggles against the Lisbon strategy and its principles of a “free and undistorted competition.” This project could become, and will become, reality through the common effort of all socialist forces for an alternative European education system. The forces of the capital are neither invincible nor almighty. They are powerless against all the people who fight for an education of human emancipation and for a better life for all.