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# Notes on the Anomalous Wave, the G8 of Universities, the Repression and What (Presumably) Awaits Us

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During last Autumn Italian schools (from primary to university level) were involved in a large movement of protest against 'reforms' proposed by the Minister for Education in Berlusconi's Government, Mariastella Gelmini.

In the university in particular, the months between October and December saw a series of occupations, marches, and roadblocks that culminated in three days of national meetings and protests held in Rome from 14th to 16th November. There, in a series of debates and workshops on the themes of research, education, work and welfare, the Anomalous Wave (for this was the name given to the movement) had sketched out guidelines of its own alternative vision for the university, and more generally, the elaboration and transmission of knowledge. Against the image of a university increasingly conceived as a factory of exams and 'professional' qualifications, the Wave, through the practice of self-education and self-reform, made felt the necessity of thinking about knowledge as

a tool of critical growth, liberated from and often antagonistic to those dynamics that would otherwise have education strictly tied and subordinated to the requirements of international and national capital.

Thus the Wave strongly contested all of the forms of self-valorisation that Italian universities, bound to a struggle to the last breath for obtaining public finance, decided to adopt without considering other parameters other than productive efficiency.

On such grounds in fact, every possibility of critical development and autonomous personal growth is cancelled within the sphere of the university, to leave space for an empty rhetoric on their relative merits that produces nothing other than intellectual conformism and highly rigid modalities of differential inclusion at the heart of the academia, giving rise to divisions between those virtuous and those not. Moreover, the heavy financial cuts that constitute the essence of Gelmini's reforms, pave the way for the transformation of the university into a private institution, with the consequent total submission to the needs (as much in its contents as in its form) of private capital.

Faced by a similar situation, the greatness of the Autumn movement was without doubt that of trying (in many cases with success) to overcome the struggle with the privately-owned media that had characterised movements in the last years (in particular that against the reforms proposed in 2005 by the Minister for Education, Letizia Moratti), instead trying to unite the demands of the precarious galaxy that represents the vital force of university institutions. Students, researchers, technicians and administrative staff and, in some cases, also some lecturers, managed to give life to a radical movement, as much in organisation form as in content. The critique of educational reforms was inserted in a wider critique

of the capitalist system and the economic crisis that struck directly those whose conditions of life had been rendered more precarious, becoming even more uncertain through a progressive indebtedness of the students (under the Anglo-Saxon model of the university) and a corresponding progressive degradation (dequalificazione) of their knowledge.

In this sense the meetings of the so-called G8 held in Turin, catalysed a decisive and radical response in the movement that many, on the side of the institutions, regarded as dead.

In the name that such a demonstration gave itself, its link with the practices that have led to the global crisis is obvious, as is evident in the tightness of the relationship that university deans intend to entertain with capitalist valorisation. The ways these meetings were organised demonstrates one more time how the model of the university that is at their basis is linked to the entrepreneurial forms that use as their only criterion of evaluation the compatibility of university teaching with the organisation of capitalist production at a global level.

The same themes that the chancellors have been found to discuss (links between universities and the world of work, environmental sustainability) become deprived of all real interests from the moment that, by excluding from the debate those who live in the university and give it life, achieve no other results than the reproduction of the model of global governance that goes through an increasingly radical precarisation and exploitation of the lives of those who produce the social wealth that is then taken from them.

Such a way of thinking of the university deprives the discourse on environmental sustainability or the fight against racism and discrimination from having any relevance, because the same

organisational models that the university uses as its own actually produce precarity, exclusion, pollution; in one word, they produce the generalised crisis that we find ourselves in.

The Wave has seized the opportunity of these meetings between the deans of the top universities from the eight most industrialised nations, who were joined by those from other universities in other parts of the world, to recast its own protest and to make once more its own alternative voice heard, to speak of a reappropriation of time, of contents and modes of production, transfer and evaluation of knowledge.

Turin took on the characteristics of a large international meeting that lasted three days and ended with an imposing demonstration on 19th May.

The meetings and debates organised in these three days should have been held at Palazzo Nuovo, seat of the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Turin, however, to impede the students from expressing their own point of view on the G8 and its contents, the chancellor of the University of Turin, Ezic Pellizzetti proclaimed on the evening of 16th May, the closure of Palazzo Nuovo from the 17th to the 19th. The official justification for such a decision consisted in fear (amply fomented by the media in the preceding days) of strikes and violence that would have used the university site as their general quarters. Nevertheless, the program of these three days was explicit and had been public for some time: debates, book presentations, exhibitions, screenings would have been prepared for the march on the 19th, the march that was motivated by the desire to make its own dissent towards the G8 heard, but that did not have for its objective the generalised devastation of the city centre that the media insisted on attributing to it.

Faced with the provocation of the chancellor, the students responded by occupying the Palazzetto Aldo Moro (adjacent to Palazzo Nuovo), bringing back to life the great experiment in self-management and sharing that had already characterised the movement in the Autumn. In this way the first two days were characterised by a debate about the transformation of the role of knowledge in the realm of globalised capitalism, this saw the participation of some members of the Edu-Factory project; a meeting with representatives of the No TAV, No del Molin and No Landfill movements (movements active on the national level fighting against 'large construction works' that destroy the environment, common resources and public health) and, finally; a meeting with Greek, Spanish and French students on the struggle that had crossed their countries in the Autumn. Moreover, these first two days saw metropolitan blockades to which the police responded with intimidatory charges.

Finally, Tuesday 19th May, the national march demonstrated what many had defined as the 'perfect wave': 10,000 people took part in a march that, crossing the city, struck with symbolic actions those responsible for the current global crisis (banks, temporary employment agencies) and ended in front of an imposing police line there to protect, for all intents and purposes, what appeared to be a red zone (in full G8 style!). Here, as was announced in the preceding days, the students did not disperse from the march, but advanced to the police line, to demonstrate the fact that intimidation and limits imposed on movement and expression would not be accepted in any way. At this point the response was predictable, but one could hardly have hoped for a better response on the part of the Wave: against the police charges the students responded by organising themselves, throwing stones, resisting without dispersing and protecting the slow and ordered retreat of

the march that, after about 15 minutes of struggle, continued on the road to the centre towards Palazzo Nuovo where a public assembly concluded three days of extraordinary mobilisation in respect to its radicality, quality of content and participation.

To such a demonstration of vitality, as could be expected, the government, judiciary and police decided to respond in a manner that was as harsh as it was in fact disorganised. The morning of the 6th July a spectacular police action on a national scale (called 'Rewind') took 21 protagonists of the Turin action into custody or home arrest.

Twelve in Turin alone, the others in Padua, Bologna and Naples. This action deserves an attentive analysis because it was clearly indicative of the transversal link between all the institutional political forces and the inability of the government to respond to the questions raised by the students (and more in general by social movements) in ways other than repression.

The case of the prosecution that led to the deployment of measures of restriction for 21 comrades (the majority of whom were first and second year students with no criminal record and lacking political experiences prior to that Autumn) was ordained by the attorney Torino Caselli, a fetish figure of that gallows-like and 'democratic' juridicalism that the Italian institutional left likes so much. Caselli cut his teeth in the repression of the movements of the 1970s and built his dubious notoriety in the fight against the mafia (which clearly did not deliver brilliant results). He now leads the offensive against the Wave. It is interesting to dwell on what Caselli declared on the day after the police operation: rather than being about striking against dissent of the freedom to protest and demonstrate, these measures were simply fulfilling the need to protect 'good students' (those who respect the democratic form in protest too),

from the 'bad ones' (the three hundred paramilitary forces prepared for anything – in the words of the attorney – who would have turned a legitimate march into an unheard of display of blind violence). His words clearly express a desire to use the police to break the movement by creating divisions and to nullify the determination that *the march as a whole* had expressed and practiced in its actions as well as in the preparatory national assemblies.

The response to such an attack was immediate: a proliferation of demonstrations, blockages, occupations of faculties, universities and so on across Italy (on the evening of 10th July over 2,000 people participated in a march through the city centre in Turin). Two weeks later, on July 20th, the Caselli theorem dangerously totters: all the people in prison were discharged, as were those under house arrest; two comrades are still under house arrest (Luca and Marco), whilst everyone else is on probation or remand.

Aside from this chronicle of the events, we would like to underline some of the factors that ought to be taken into account for a political assessment of the past year.

First of all, it is clear that the police operation had a propagandistic and intimidatory objective: the spectacular character of the action has given a display of the efficiency of the police forces, whilst the arrests were explicitly used to keep as far from L'Aquila as possible all the groups and militants who might have given life to days of mobilisation and protest there.

Secondly, striking against young and extremely young militants aims to put a brake on the participation and enthusiasm of the protagonists of the Wave movement who, obviously, will be on the front line next Autumn. We should not forget that the economic crisis bites hard into the social fabric (in September the redundancy

fund will dry out for many workers and many small businesses will permanently close down), and the Gelmini 'reform' starts showing its first effects (on Monday 6th July, the same day of the arrests, the academic senate of the University of Turin voted in favour of increasing the fees for next academic year).[1]

Finally, generally speaking, the repressive manoeuvre orchestrated by Caselli demonstrated the logic with which they intend to manage an autumn that is already promising to be particularly fiery: everything that does not submit to the logic of 'civic' and 'democratic' protest *must* be considered as 'mutant' (once again, in the words of the mindful attorney Caselli), as an infiltration, a provocation, an act of terrorism (little does it matter whether real or potential, because these philosophical-speculative distinctions appear to find little space in the attorneys' argumentations).

Therefore, with all its drama that took away and continues to limit the freedom of 21 people, operation 'Rewind' shows, behind the muscles displayed with great intent, a fundamental weakness: the weakness of those who know that the coming Autumn is not going to be sweet and peaceful at all; it will be traversed by powerful and radical conflicts. This is why the institutional left has not uttered a single word on the arrests, but has placed its own cover-man (the Democrat Caselli) at the front of an operation that demonstrates once again the radical and unbreachable gap between the political class (of whatever colour) and social movements.

Nevertheless, the conclusions we have to draw from these months of struggles are positive: not only does the Autumn movement enjoy full health, but it has also been able to radicalise its own modes of reappropriation of metropolitan spaces, showing a great ability to organise and an equally strong force of impact. One might be tempted to bring the famous refrain of the old Schmitt

back into play: today, after the 'Rewind' operation, the friend/enemy distinction is clearer than ever and the Wave, the workers who suffer the crisis, the migrants who suffer the institutional racism of this country, the precarious workers who get by amidst countless difficulties know very well which side they are on.

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[1] A brief technical digression is needed here to help explain the situation of Italian public universities. According to a law, the fees paid by students cannot exceed 20% of the Ordinary Finance Fund (FF0) that every university receives from the state. This 20% limit has systematically been breached in the majority of Italian universities, and clearly an increase in fees cannot but further exacerbate this situation. At this point only bad faith can justify the lack of understanding of the fate of the university (and of students): faced with a generalised situation of 'illegality' it is easy to predict that the law will be seen as meaningless and thus, more or less officially, abrogated. The most logical consequence will be an unlimited increase of university fees and the virtual disappearance of the public university in favour of private foundations, universities of excellence etc.