

# Italian students fight back: 'We are the solution'

Tuesday 18 November 2008, by [DOBSON Tim](#) (Date first published: 15 November 2008).

On October 23, an estimated 30,000 university students took over Rome's streets. Marching to the chant of "Berlusconi is a piece of shit", students passed the train station, receiving cheers from young Kurdish immigrants.

The students then joined up with young people from the Horus social center, which was brutally cleared out by the police a few days earlier. The students were met with a large police presence.

This kind of protest has begun to be the norm for Italian students, with protests, occupations, sit-ins and other forms of civil disobedience occurring daily. All night public assemblies have been held, where students and others discuss the issues behind the protests.

All of these are posing a major threat to the right-wing government of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.

The mass movement of students has emerged in response to Law 133, known as Gelmini reform after the education minister Mariastella Gelmini.

Under the law, 130,000 jobs will be lost at state schools by 2012, including 87,000 teaching jobs and 44,500 administrative posts, as the government seeks to cut 8 billion euros in the education budget.

Italian primary school students will now only have one teacher per class; currently every class has two teachers. The school working week is to be reduced from 40 to 24 hours. Schools in smaller towns are expected to close.

The education "reforms" continue the racist attacks of the Berlusconi government, with segregated classes being proposed for immigrants.

The reforms of the public universities have yet to be finalised. It has been proposed that universities will only be allowed to take on one researcher for every two whose contracts have expired. Thirty per cent of funding for universities will be linked to "performance", and the number of courses will be cut.

One proposal would also allow universities to set up privately funded foundations, believed to be the first step towards complete privatisation.

Interior minister statistics give a feel for how widespread the anger is. From October 1, there have been 300 recorded demonstrations against the reforms; 150 schools (including 60 high schools in Naples) and 20 university departments have been occupied.

The biggest demonstration occurred on October 30, a day after the laws were passed, as an estimated 1 million students and teachers took to the streets of Rome in a demonstration called by the General Confederation of Labour, with a general strike of teachers.

In Milan, the figure was 200,000, 5000 of whom engaged in an occupation of the Milan Stock Exchange while chanting, "We won't pay for your crisis"; 50,000 students marched in Turin, where the city's orchestra played music for them.

A day earlier, the Italian senate was forced to delay the vote twice, as students broke their way into the senate and demanded the withdrawal of the decree.

On the same day fascist youth attacked student demonstrations. Student have declared that they are building an anti-racist movement and expressed solidarity with immigrants under attack.

The response of the Italian government has been predictable. Gemini has called the students terrorists, similar to the Red Brigades of the '70s.

After the October 30 demonstrations, Berlusconi stated: "I want to give a weather warning: We won't allow schools and universities to be occupied ... I will call the interior minister and give him detailed instructions on how to intervene with the police forces to stop these things happening."

Former PM and president Francesco Cossiga advised that "the forces of law and order should massacre the demonstrators without pity and send them all to hospital. Not arrest them — the magistrates would set them free straight away in any event—beat them bloody and beat the teachers stirring them up bloody too."

Students have not been intimidated. On November 7, demonstrations were held throughout Italy.

In Rome, an attempted occupation of the train station was met with police violence. Thousands of students marched through Naples chanting, "If they block our future, we'll block the city".

Another general strike of the education sector was planned for November 14.

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