

Ukraine, Italy, Poland : an new international network of student-worker militants

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Our Common Statement

At the end of April 2024 a group of student activists between Poland and Italy organized an online assembly to build a space for international discussions, reflections, and actions between students and militants of the global university. Several organizations and militants welcomed their effort worldwide. An international network was born with the name 'Universities at War' (<https://universitiesatwar.wordpress.com/>), underlying the necessity of bringing a war, our war, inside the universities. On the 13th and 14th of July the first in-person meeting of this network was held in Poznan, Poland. Several organizations and countries from all over the world took part in it. We have no doubts: there were two days of high quality political discussions and very much needed sharing of practices, ideas, and viewpoints. While the text below serves as the collective manifesto from our assembly, it shouldn't be approached as a finalized set of ideas. It is the outcome of a collective writing session that needs a lot of work. We ask you to engage with it, as if you were part of this writing session.

We are student-workers who, in the face of the housing and knowledge production crisis caused by the neoliberal politics of austerity, are organizing together to transform the conditions of our study and work. We are aware that this cannot be achieved under capitalism and without acting across borders. We are writing this manifesto to summarize the results of our joint discussions held as part of the meeting of international student movements in Poznan (Poland) on 13-14 July 2024 Universities at War: Student-Worker Struggle in Time of Crisis. We want to bring together all aspects of our struggles and prepare fertile ground for a stable and growing international student movement. We address this manifesto not only to all students who want to join our movement, but also to academics, workers in other sectors of production and reproduction, tenants and migrants - all those whose daily work reproduces the capitalist system. We realize that today students are not on the frontline of the struggle - this is just another beginning. But starting again does not mean going back.

The reason why we decided to write this statement is that we share the same struggle against capitalism and want to go beyond it. While emphasizing our distinct political subjectivity of different organizations, we should share our knowledge and the lessons of our struggles through direct contact (face-to-face) and by listening to voices from various contexts. We also have to thoroughly document both our wins and losses. We have got to build solidarity in struggles across spaces.

Universities in Our Time

Our experience of the University is an experience of loneliness and solitude. The path of education is designed to favor competition among students, instead of cooperation. Capital benefits from this

competition because it gives form to an acceptant subjectivity. A subjectivity incapable not only of simply struggling, but even imagining and desiring a different world and university. The whole structure of the university works according to political and economic laws, where students, like workers, are deprived of the knowledge they learn and co-produce. In this way, they are alienated because they are not studying for their autonomous and critical development, but for capitalistic aims. This is the essence of the capitalist university and it also shows the tension between two directions which contemporary university takes. On the one hand, the programme of study is designed to forge a labor power to insert in the production process. On the other hand, this causes an internal contradiction with the very original purposes of university: science. Science cannot live in the house of the capitalistic university.

Knowledge is neither bad nor good, but it is not neutral. The knowledge produced by capital is against us: it is always measured since, in order to be sold on a market, it needs to have a quantity. Therefore, it leaves us only with stupidity. We want to organize a production of our autonomous knowledge. But we are aware that this knowledge - the knowledge coming from the common - can be obtained only from struggling within contemporary university.

Common against Capital

The student common are built from below and are entrenched within the student body. Thus, they cannot be separated from other struggles and it is inherently intersectional. We build common as prefigurative free spaces. To learn and unlearn, to trust each other, to engage in critical education, to build our communities and care for one another. Change can only happen through the collectivity of students themselves. Through our collective struggle within and against production in our own communities, starting at the university. This is where we abolish the repressive institutions, and, ultimately, the state. We see student struggle as a starting point of broader change within society.

The contemporary university is under control of the state and the capital, while we are being divided and alienated from each other. They steal the knowledge that we produce. We want to break free. We want to imagine and practice the university of the common. A new university which goes beyond gender and race hierarchies and bypasses borders. That will produce autonomous knowledge. This is the fight for transforming the academic community towards transnational solidarity. Let's join the common struggle against the neoliberal university.

A common ground between cognitive workers of the university (professors, researchers, etc.) and students is based on this assertion: the greater the intellectual labor power is exploited (bureaucracy, publish or perish, overcrowded courses), the more students experience a greater impoverishment of knowledge. Moreover, by recognising students as directly involved in the production and reproduction of knowledge and, thus, fully inside the processes of capitalistic valorisation, we are driven to fight (as a minimum objective) for the costs of reproduction of our lives (canteen, dormitories, transport and services in general). We want all these services to be free and of quality and we believe that we are entitled to a student wage.

Universities at War

We can't pretend that our universities are not involved in wars. As students, we recognize that it raises a lot of contradictions in our struggles and between leftist movements in different countries. But our struggles are more important than any contradictions between different leftist movements, people or groups. We believe that universities must be free from imperialist and colonialist ideology. Students and workers should understand that capitalistic ideology requires wars which are always associated with war crimes, human rights abuses and brutal oppression, so our fight against capitalism is the fight against war. We express our solidarity with all the leftist movements who

continue to struggle against authoritarian tendencies in the countries experiencing war, bombing, violence and destruction in their territories.

To build a cohesive transnational movement, we need a shared perspective to inform our decisions and steer our actions. We must create and maintain tools for creating and exchanging both practical and theoretical counter-knowledge. The existing capitalist institutions of knowledge reproduction are neither willing nor able to provide this space for us, unless we trick them and exploit the gaps in the system against it. Hijack the resources where possible, cling to every opportunity that is given to us and actively seek opportunities to give back from the public to the communal. At the same time we must not avoid conflict for the sake of unity and be willing to confront our different perspectives, clash and disagree, because we will not find common ground through ignorance. Instead, by opening honest exchange of perspectives, we will gain a deeper understanding of each other's views that will allow us to work together despite disagreements.

Women Studying and Subverting the Universities

Women make up a significant part of universities globally, but they are treated differently than their male colleagues. Their needs, problems and interests are overlooked by not only authorities, but also communities they function in. The abuse of power within universities cannot be overlooked. It affects both students and workers. One of the most brutal forms of such abuse is sexual violence that is being committed on a mass scale in places that should be free from such violence. We do not consent to that state of affairs and we demand that our universities are free of patriarchy, misuse of power and exploitation.

Lack of social infrastructure influences women's abilities of getting education. Canteens could become tools of liberating women from additional housework and nurseries should provide mothers with support. Both should become accessible and free.

Therefore, the presence of women in student organizations - trade unions, collectives and others - is extremely important and irreplaceable. We can't ignore opportunities to mobilize both ourselves and others in order to struggle against injustice and patriarchy.

What is to be done?

Subverting universities is a global and local affair: either we keep these together, or capital will always win. To build a true international network of student-worker militants:

- We will start sharing publications on types and forms of actions taken in our national contexts, including practical-manuals and toolboxes of effective practice of struggles, via our website (<https://universitiesatwar.wordpress.com/>).
- We invite organizations from all over the world to translate this manifesto and to engage in a discussion, even critical, with it. We will publish your contributions on our website.
- We will break the silence on the ongoing international conflicts.
- We will organize an in-person meeting in Autumn 2024 in Ukraine and one in May/June 2025 in Bologna, Italy.

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Officine della formazione / Workshops of Education (Italy)

OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza / Workers' Initiative (Poland)

Пряма Дія / Direct Action (Ukraine)

Contact : [organising.againstuni yahoo.com](mailto:organising.againstuni@yahoo.com)

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