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Contribution from the FNEC-FP FO (France)

The global economic and financial crisis is used by all governments as an opportunity to make people accept what they should never accept: make workers work longer, in order to pay for a bill that is not theirs!

Thus, in many countries, governments try to attack what workers won in terms of retirement. In France, the law proposal by the government aims at making the legal retirement age increase from 60 year old to 62, to lengthen the working period necessary to gain the right to a full retirement wage in both public and private sectors, that would be gained only at 65, or even 67. Under such dispositions, many university teachers and researchers would be condemned to ridiculously low retirement wages. Close to 3 millions workers from both public and private sectors were on strike and demonstrated on september 7th. Force Ouvrière calls for the removal of this law proposal.

Higher Education and Public Research are casualties of the austerity

Staff from the Universities and other higher education institutions, along with staff from public research institutions, are also facing these austerity policies led by the government.

In the public sector, the policy called Révision générale des politiques publiques (RGPP, General Revision of Public Policies) means that, since 2007, one public worker in two, when taking its retirement, is not replaced; in primary education, this has led to **the removal of 62700 teacher positions!**

On July 7, a report by the government asked for this process to be sped up; it stated:

"The question as to apply the rules of management and expenses reduction to universities deserves to be solved. For example, the universities have had a special treatment in 2009 and 2010, that released them from the staff reduction demanded to other sectors, but no decision has been made up to now concerning years to come."

In other words, the budget for 2011 will include thousands of job cuts in Higher Education and Research!

The law "Liberties and responsibilities of the Universities" (LRU) is implemented since 2007

The preliminary report to the EI Congress in Berlin (July 2007) referred to the *"concealed privatization in the public education sector"*. It stated that this privatization *"has many facets"* and *"takes many forms"*. It also forecasted *"changes in the way schools are managed"* in the name of the *"market"*, of the *"free trade"*, and of the *"consumption"*.

In this context, the EI passed a resolution supporting the French unions in their fight against the government project to *"reform"* the universities.

The EI congress expressed *"its solidarity and its support to the French unionist organizations that, through the "Appel des Cordeliers" [asked] for the LRU law project removal"*.

The LRU Law, that has been passed on August 10 2007, rules that:

- The university buildings that were state-owned, will be transferred to the universities (this will allow any speculative operation on the buildings, as the universities from Paris already provide an example for).
- Wages will be managed by the universities, that will be given the right to remove public jobs (only the parliament had this right, in its annual budget law, as a tradition of the republican public service),

and use the money corresponding to these wages for any other use: enlist new staff under private terms, make use of external contractors, increase their functioning budget...

- Public workers wages are no longer paid by the State, but by the universities themselves.
- Many positions and job categories are to disappear because, according to the Minister, *"they are not at the core of the function of University"* (janitors, reprographers, etc.).
- Universities will be allowed to conclude public-private partnerships to ensure their funding; beyond the long-term cost it will impose on public spendings, this *"solution"* gives the private sector the right to influence and control the operations it funds, including diplomas and buildings; the EI noted in last september *"a worrying tendency to get apart from public funding, and toward private investment in education, particularly in pre-school and higher education."*

These new powers granted to them are meant to allow universities presidents to *"manage their universities like a private company"*, as stated by one of them in the press.

The statutory rights and guarantees of university teachers contained in their particular statutes, the general public workers statute, are obstacle to the implementation of the LRU.

That is the reason why the Minister, as soon as the law was passed, undertook to adapt statutes of university staff to make them adequate to fully autonomous institutions.

The university workers statutes *"reform"*

2007-2008: first decree modifying the university teachers recruitment

The recruitment process used to be led by "commission de spécialistes", which were committees elected by the university teachers working on the same discipline the position was made for ("academic peer judgment"). The

university executive board and the higher education administration then validated this choice.

According to this new decree, the recruitment decision is transferred to the University *"political power"* : a mathematician candidate can now be evaluated by the members of the University executive board, none of which may be mathematicians.

It is a grave attack against academic freedom, and against the central role of disciplines in the University.

This has been implemented for two years, and scandals are numerous.

This decree had raised a strong protest, and FO had gathered thousands of endorsements on a text demanding this project to be repelled.

2008-2009: an uprising of university staff to defend their independency and academic freedom

University staff statutes used to define the professors work time in terms of the *"teaching time before students"* that amounted to 192h a year, which allowed them to conduct their second central mission, research.

The minister put at the core of her decree project the "modulation of work time".

The University presidents would be in capacity to *"modulate"* the work time. Thus, they would be in capacity to force colleagues who do not meet the criteria they define to take in charge all a series of tasks, and even to abandon research, with no possible procedure to challenge such a decision.

The project also included an individual management of the university staff careers, inside the institutions.

This is the creation of a hierarchy above the university staff, which contradicts their constitutionally guaranteed independency and their academic freedom.

The FNEC-FP FO, with its national higher education union, the SNPREES-FO, has clearly indicated, as soon as the project was published, that the "new statute" was no longer a national state worker statute, and has defined its demand: "the project must be removed!"

At the same time, the Minister was planning the reform called "masterization" of the training of future secondary teachers.

Under the false claim to improve professional and disciplinary training of future secondary teachers by lengthening their university studies to 5 years, the minister was destroying the existing training, given by the state to the student that had gained the statute of training state worker by passing the competitive recruitment exam for secondary teachers. Thousands of youth, this september, are teaching full-time, even if they have not had any specific training.

At the same time, this reform was a blow against the disciplinary content of all masters.

From february to april 2009, tens of thousands of university teachers went on strike and demonstrated several times. On february 10 2009, 100 000 university staff demonstrated, together with their unions: 90% of university staff were in the streets.

University teachers were tightly linked one with another and with their unions by two demands clearly formulated:

- **the removal of the decree modifying the statute of university teachers;**
- **the removal of the reform project on the "masterization" of the secondary teachers training and competitive exam.**

This mobilization prevented the Minister to go as far as she wanted in her destroying the statutes, our defense against local arbitrary decisions:

- The work time "modulation" cannot be applied without the written consent of the employee; this is an important limit to the power of university presidents.
- Promotions by university presidents are not the only way to get raised to higher positions.
- National statutes, and the national wage system remain in application.

Dismantling the public research

Despite protests by all elected scientific representations, the government aims at concentrating its spendings on research it considers immediately useful, often profiting to

some corporate interests. For many research fields, this is a death sentence.

Such a research is often conducted through short term contracts (3 years). Jobs outside of any statutory framework become more and more common, with people recruited for the span of a 3 years contract (+4000 in the last 3 years). The researcher statute, as a full-time state worker (like engineers, technical staff, administrative staff) is threatened by this.

The funding is no longer in the hand of research institutions, guilty of trying to maintain every lab working in any research domain and of judging their work only on the basis of the quality of their work; this funding is now in the hand of agencies (ANR: National Research Agency, AIRD: Inter-institution Agency for Research and Development).

Thus, research labs that had recently been ranked A+ (the best possible ranking) have had their fundings cut, and consequently have disappeared.

This is the end of academic freedom, that used to be embodied in the major public research institutions (CNRS, INRA, INSERM, IRD, CEMAGREF, etc.), that are now required to commit self-destroy.

But, once again, staff resisted. On june 19 2008 the CNRS executive committee has been blocked by the staff and the staff set up a demonstration that had not been planned, with unions at its head, that marched to the Minister. As for today, the CNRS and the other institutions are not dismantled.

Evaluation reform

Research evaluation is also removed from the Scientific Councils made up of elected researchers and university teachers, and is given to an agency (the Agency for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education, made up of appointed experts). These experts are also in charge of the evaluation of institutions, and they are now trying to be put in charge of the individual evaluation of university teachers and researchers, which, once again, contradicts the academic freedom embodied in the evaluation by elected peers.

In any case, scientific quality is no longer a criterion of evaluation, and is replaced by an approach based on the Shanghai ranking, performance indices taking into account students employability, implication in the corporate life, etc. All these criteria put on the forefront criteria that are not the quality of research and teaching.

Diplomas and academic disciplines

The "professionalization" of studies, with multiple training periods, with self-teaching, with "certificates", results in a decrease of the time of disciplinary teaching, that amount to more than 50% in 6 years over the first three years of study.

We leave a logic in which research was intended to develop knowledge and to be dispensed to most in the framework of academic disciplines, for a logic in which universities and research institutions are to be in touch with the sphere of economy and of corporations, a logic in which some disciplines are sorted out, some Training and Research Department are merged or removed.

Concerning the quality of teaching and of the diplomas, the balance sheet for the implementation of the LMD system and of the ECTS, and for the other reforms "in accordance to the Bologna process" in the frame of "Europe of knowledges" is very bad.

Today

In this context, with the attack against the public university, higher education, and research, against their missions and their staff, whichever their category, Force Ouvrière acts at all levels:

- against the creation of Research and Higher Education Zones, that are under the control of local and private interests;
- against the destruction of Research Departments and the forced merging of Training and Research Departments;

- in defense of all institutions with their specificities (National Museum of Natural History, French Schools abroad, Engineering Schools, etc.);
- in defense of national diplomas delivered by them, which are all threatened by the Bologna process;
- against the removal of CROUS (the institutions managing the social benefits granted to students);
- in defense of all "academic" disciplines, and of the student training to research through research without any non-academic, politic, or economic intervention.

A new fight: defend the union rights

In June 2009, our federation answered to the call by NEA and AFTA, that the EI had relayed, by participating the International Campaign in favor of the Employee Free Choice Act, so that the union rights become a reality in the United States. This act would at last give the right to US workers to affiliate to a union, and to collective bargaining, without the fear to be harassed or dismissed by their employer.

In France, what is at stake is not gaining new union rights, but saving an old right. A new law has been passed, that applies to state workers unions an agreement passed between the boss' unions and some workers unions. The aim of this law is twofold:

- **reduce the number of unions that the government recognizes, which is contradictory to the union freedom granted by a law passed in 1884;**
- **transfer the bargaining level from state to local, which is contradictory to the equality of treatment of state workers all over the republic's territory, and to the existence of national statutes.**

It is through demands, through its refusal to be a partner in the implementation of counter-reforms that the FNEC-FP FO federation, with its unions, with the CGT-FO confederation, is willing to challenge this situation and make its representativity recognized by all workers from Education, and particularly from Higher Education and Research.