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Greece

Private universities out of the question in Greece!

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On the strength of his legislative victory in the spring of 2023, Mitsotakis is attempting to realise an old dream of the Greek right: the creation of private colleges prohibited by Article 16 of the Constitution, which requires higher education (and higher education alone) to be a public monopoly and free of charge.

In spite of the break-up of labour law, university diplomas are still important, especially as entry to university is organized around national examinations, the “panellinies”, where a high mark enables you to obtain the section and place of study you have chosen as a priority.

Commodification and exclusion

A strict selective system, often crammed into small private crammers, but which has given a large number of young people access to studies that are, if not free, at least less expensive than in many European countries. For several years now, this has been seriously undermined by a process of commercialization of education, with the existence of private, and therefore paying, “higher” institutions, known as “colleges”, linked to foreign universities (around 18,000 students).

The former Minister for Education introduced professional equivalence between their diplomas and those of the state education system. Three years ago, a minimum grade was introduced for admission to university. This system has already turned 38,000 young people away from university, leaving them with the choice of either going to college if they are rich, or looking for a job (in a precarious situation). There is also the continuing weakening of universities, with funding falling (by 18% between 2008 and 2021) and the number of university staff falling (by 33% over the same period). The average number of students per teacher is 47 (the European average is 13).

Mitsotakis therefore believes that the fruit is ripe and that he can try to circumvent Article 16. He is also relying on opinion polls (59% of the population would not be against private colleges...) and on a reformist opposition that is not ready for a central struggle.

A promising start to student mobilisation

Students have clearly understood the project: a frontal attack on public and free universities, a challenge to their diplomas and the possibility of studying!

Far from the “private university will help public university to improve” propaganda, they reject private university as an accelerator of the destruction of public university (less funding, closure of departments, etc.). And after information and discussions at general assemblies, 120 union sections (1 section in each university department) across the country called for the first national mobilization.

On Thursday 11 January, thousands of young people took to the streets, including at least 5,000 in Athens, along with dozens of teachers and hundreds of high school students aware of the threat.

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Proof of the government's fear was the heavy police presence, which was unable to prevent the action from being a general success. The movement is looking to expand, with general assemblies, occupations, links with the workers' unions and a forthcoming mobilization on Thursday 18 January. An encouraging determination that needs strong solidarity!

Athens, 14 January 2024

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).

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