



Austria: Strike against education cuts!

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Before this parliamentary decision, entry to Austrian universities was not limited (with the big exception that you have to pay 364 Euros in tuition fees per semester - another legal change this right wing government enforced three years ago). Now, with the new laws, universities are allowed to take the arbitur exams (the notes of the high school exams) or make one or several special tests at the beginning of the semester and to select the students.

While this system exists already in a number of European countries, for Austria it is an important counter-revolution in the education system. Together with the introduction of fees a few years ago, it represents the most dramatic step backwards since World War II.

From the beginning ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt and the youth organisation REVOLUTION have been in the forefront in initiating a mass campaign against the cuts, arguing for the need

- * to organise an indefinite strike and occupations in the schools and universities at the beginning of the autumn semester
- * to build action committees in the schools and universities
- * to forge links with the workers movement

We helped initiate a united front, in which alongside us are the youth department of Austria's biggest single union GPA, the social democratic youth, Linkswende (the Austrian sister organisation of the SWP) and Funke (the Austrian sister organisation of Socialist Appeal). Lately, the social democratic school student organisation AKS has reluctantly joined too.

The official student union OH - which is controlled by a coalition of social democrats and greens - was also part of it, before finally deciding to keep out. Organising strike actions is too radical for them. They also informed some participants that they can't take part because ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt is part of the united front (The Viennese OH - where the Communist Party student organisation is part of the executive - has a formal ruling not to participate in united fronts where ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt is involved because of our solidarity with the national liberation struggles in Palestine and Iraq).

We pushed from the beginning for an early date for strike action not too long after the beginning of term in early September. Funke supported this idea, while all others argued to delay until late October. In the end it was decided to call a one-day strike on 19th October.

We also proposed an "action conference" of the school students (who are the most militant sector) to organise the struggle and link the activists and action committees. While this proposal was adopted, the reformists and the Cliffites soon recognised that the radical forces would be quiet strong in relation to them. As a result only ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt, REVOLUTION and Funke are building for this conference on 7th October in Vienna.

In general it can be said that the reformists and the Cliffites want to limit the struggle to a one day action. But they have not the slightest interest in building a movement of resistance or action committees.

However, additional spark has been put into the movement because of the possibility of a day of action of the apprentices. The trade union is considering a day of action against rising youth unemployment (up by 12% in the last year!) and combining this strike with the students' strike in mid-October. Important regional elections take place in October, so the social democrats want something to show off!

We certainly welcome this excellent opportunity to unite the struggles of the students and the apprentices.

The big danger is that the bureaucrats want to limit the struggle one day. But it is impossible to defeat the changes to the university system, or youth unemployment by a single day's action. We need to escalate the action to an indefinite strike, and broaden the militant movement rooted in schools, universities and enterprises.

ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt and REVOLUTION are working hard to implement this perspective and to argue for a revolutionary strategy. On 14th September REVOLUTION organised a Viennese meeting with activists from 16 schools present. We discussed and adopted a resolution arguing for a militant perspective of struggle, which also puts the education cuts in the context of the capitalist system. Even if the bureaucrats succeed in sabotaging the struggle, many activists will have learned important lessons for the battles ahead.

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