

## **Regaining education. Case Study: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb 2009 – The Occupation Cookbook.**

*The real education of the masses can never be separated from their independent political, and especially revolutionary, struggle. Only struggle educates the exploited class. Only struggle discloses to it the magnitude of its own power, widens its horizon, enhances its abilities, clarifies its mind, forges its will.*

V.I. Lenin, *Lecture on the 1905 Revolution*<sup>1</sup>

Lenin was completely right. Real education process, the formation of emancipated subjectivity, cannot be separated from the political struggle itself. Exactly the same thesis should be claimed in case of the political struggle. One cannot divide the content of emancipatory politics and its form. Political practice, as well as political theory, is undergoing a qualitative turn nowadays<sup>2</sup>. Students and workers' struggle is not an exception to this rule. This change can be depicted by transition from the old Leninist question of "*what* is to be done?" to this of "*how* is to be done?" As long as the enemy is well and widely known, the neoliberal policies trying to privatize the common wealth, seeking for effective forms of struggle is a task of the greatest importance.

Since 2006 we are observing an enormous wave of resistance at university campuses all over the world. *Onda anomala* in Italy, instances of campus occupation in California, protests in Puerto Rico or recent mass demonstrations of students and trade unions against budget cuts in Great Britain. All of these protests share a set of common features: fighting back the privatization mechanisms inside the higher education systems, connecting with the wide range of different social struggles and to a certain degree use of occupation method as a way to achieve their aims.

University in cognitive capitalism is said to be located on the very same structural position as once a factory was<sup>3</sup>. If we take this thesis for granted we can pose a following question: Is university to be perceived as an occupied factory? Is there any possibility to take control over it, and put the whole structure to work but for the different stakes, producing different types of subjectivities and sharing the knowledge in common? Then, the difference between occupation and taking control over a university or faculty is really important to be grasped.

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<sup>1</sup> Lenin Collected Works, Progress Publishers, 1964, Moscow, Volume 23, p. 242

<sup>2</sup> See. M. Hardt, A. Negri, *Commonwealth*, where authors tries to formulate new *Tablaeu Economique* for biopolitical era. Claiming that old, quantitative categories, are not sufficient anymore for analysing the new forms of struggle against the rule of the capital. Compare also with Tiqqun, *How is to be done?*, which is an exemplary text with a model of thinking about political action in terms of *how*, rather than *what*, proposing a useful conception of *human strike*, a mode of resistance which suits a world where there is no more a possibility to divide between life and work, education and professional life.

<sup>3</sup> See different investigations from the field of education on the website of Edu-Factory Collective: <http://www.edu-factory.org>

It came clearly to the light during two, longstanding occupations of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb in 2009. The main aim of this short case study is not to present the things in the way they really occurred but to give a short reconstruction of the method of taking and holding control over the university, which can be used in future struggles as an organizational point of reference. The basis for this reconstruction is *The Occupation Cookbook* wrote and published by participants of the Croatian takeover<sup>4</sup>.

Control over FHSS was taken for 34 days in April/May and for another two weeks in November 2009. At the same time nearly 20 university faculties in 8 different Croatian cities were occupied in protest against reforms of higher education system and introduction of tuition fees. All occupations across the country, thankfully to efforts made by FHSS occupants, were closely networked. There were two aims which pushed the students to the takeover: to resist the neoliberal policies threatening free education for all, and strong desire to experiment with direct democracy. However, the struggle was conducted also in the name of fighting for social equality and justice.

Students decided to take control over the only public space which was already available to them, seeing in that act a possibility to start wider discussion about ongoing changes in higher education policy. In the first day, the occupation gathered more than 800 people.

Main difference between occupation and takeover was to be found in establishing the plenum, a collective, open to all, working in the manner of direct democracy political body, which in common decision (always taken by the majority of voters) legitimized the act of students control over the Faculty. Plenum decided, that Faculty should remain as open, as it was possible. Despite the fact that policy of openness was a controversial issue, realizing it was perceived as a possibility to get bigger support for the protest from the employees of the Faculty as well as from the citizens of Zagreb. Regular classes were canceled, but professors got the allowance from the plenum to organize, if necessary, exams in their offices, and every other facility, like bookshop or secretariat, worked normally. FHSS was closed during the nights, but everybody was allowed to sleep and eat inside the Faculty buildings. Alternative programme was established, and classes and lectures about most urgent social and political issues (like neoliberal policy of privatization, higher education or social inequality issues) were hold.

Structure of the plenum and its technical character need to be clarified because it created the very core of political subjectivity of protest in Zagreb. Under the occupation students rejected any need for a leader or representatives. They made every important decision collectively by majority of votes. Plenum were opened to all (not only students from FHSS, citizens of Zagreb and other Faculties were included). Everyone get right to vote and speak during the plenum. Decisions were binding to all. Two different moderators were appointed to manage each session and at the end of each session two new persons are elected to moderate the next session. To omit possibility to personalize the moderators position one can take it only once in the academic year. Plenum was able to establish a working groups. The working groups do not have right to make decisions on their own. Every must be

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<sup>4</sup> See. <http://slobodnifilozofski.org/?p=1915>

approved by the plenum. The task of each working group were to elaborate specific problems, and suggest possible solutions during the plenum.

During the students' control over the FHSS, following working groups, among others, were established: the inter-plenary (to establish connections between occupied universities), document analysis group (to get clear reference about government policies), plenum technical issues, working group for spreading direct democracy (to spread the idea of direct democracy in workplaces and high schools as well), mini-actions (specific group with mandate from the plenum, which did not have the obligation to ask for permission for every action it took).

Plenum was able to give a mandate to a team which was responsible for performing immediately needed tasks that cannot be effectively mediated by the decisions of the plenum. Membership in the team was permanent and anonymous. Plenum was able to withdraw this mandate. Following teams received a mandate during the occupation: team for operational tasks, logistics and security, programme team (creating alternative programme of lectures, classes and cultural events), media team, blog team, *Skripta* team (the journal wrote by students, main organ of consciousness of the movement<sup>5</sup>). Part of their activity lasts and still develops today<sup>6</sup>.

Despite their understandable aversion to leaders, students from FHSS decided to create a function of delegate. It was used when the plenum's decisions had to be communicated or explained somewhere (during public discussions outside the Faculty, in meetings of different organizations or collectives or in conferences). This happened only by will of the plenum to establish connections with different organizations. The delegates have no right to make decisions in the plenum's name, but only to present its standpoint.

Studying carefully the Croatian situation can be a good lesson to learn for Polish, nearly non-existing students movement. Structural similarities between both transition countries, Croatia and Poland, with post-political public life containing a large dose of nationalism, and neoliberal hegemony in economics are obvious. Unfortunately, the main political aim of changing the way of higher education reforms in Croatia was not achieved, but building the strong movement, nearly from scratch in hostile political environment should be seen as a great success. It cannot be acquired in different way than creation of common time, space and language by use of the means of longstanding occupation.

On 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2010, the 109<sup>th</sup> Plenum will be hold in Zagreb. *Lotta continua!*

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<sup>5</sup> Last, 69<sup>th</sup> issue of *Skripta* was published on 10 November 2010 the archive is available at: <http://www.slobodnifilozofski.com/2009/04/arhiva-skripta.html>

<sup>6</sup> See for example the Croatian version of the website <http://www.slobodnifilozofski.com/>