

**High time for a U-turn in education policy:
Students and staff unite against educational ruin**

Education unions support protests by students across Europe

Appeal submitted by

GEW – Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft (Germany)

GÖD – Gewerkschaft Öffentlicher Dienst (Austria)

Warsaw, 23 November 2009

School and higher education students in Austria, Germany, and several other countries have started to protest against educational ruin. The students' protests are supported by school and higher education teachers and their unions. A widespread European movement for a U-turn in education policy is developing. Therefore GEW and GÖD have submitted this appeal in order to support the students. We invite education unions all over Europe to sign the appeal too. Please contact Dr Andreas Keller (GEW board member in charge of higher education and research): andreas.keller@gew.de.

There's something rotten in Europe. Schools, universities and other education establishments are chronically underfunded. Whereas billions of euros were mobilised overnight to salvage the banks, governments find it hard to put their fingers on the money so urgently needed to invest in the future by committing to education. Young people are deprived of prospects by a lack of education opportunities and a shortage of places to train and study. Children from families with little education and low incomes are severely under-represented in higher education. The Bologna Process promised better courses and easier mobility, but in many European countries its implementation is actually making things worse. Schools and universities are exposed to markets and competition and they are being restructured as education companies. Working conditions and terms of employment in the education sector are increasingly subject to demands for flexibility and fixed-term contracts are spreading fast. This is damaging the quality of education and the appeal of challenging professions in teaching and research.

We have to put a stop to this! It is high time for a U-turn in education policy, which should be aimed at fighting education poverty, creating equal opportunities and providing a decent education for all!

Therefore education unions all over Europe demand

- a marked improvement in funding for education establishments, not in spite of the financial and economic crisis, but because of it: investing in education and in the future prospects of young people are the best stimulus package there is;
- equal opportunities for all young people – founded on a solid schooling for all which stops children being filtered out and ensures that every individual can develop, with effective grants for all students and a reduction and ultimately abolition of all education fees from nursery to university;
- a change of tack for the Bologna Process which strengthens the social dimension to the European Higher Education Area, ensuring an unconditional transition from a bachelor's to a master's degree, mobility for students and higher education staff and a boost to the quality of teaching and studying;
- innovation through democratic participation in schools, universities and other education institutions – with more consultation rights for staff and students alike;
- improved working conditions and terms of employment for the staff of education institutions – founded on employment contracts negotiated by their trade unions, social insurance rights and appropriate pay.

The quality of education and the quality of working in education are two sides to the same coin! The time has come for a protest movement in which higher education and school students join with teachers, researchers and everyone else working in the field to pull together, adding their combined weight to calls for a U-turn in education policy. Together against the crisis – for decent education and decent work!