

OCCUPY UGC: WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The Occupy UGC movement has opened up possibilities for a new understanding of the relationship between research and the university. We have argued that students are not passive consumers of knowledge but that we also engage actively with the knowledge that we receive. "We are not consumers we are also producers". These assertions by the movement have opened interesting possibilities for the practice of politics.

- **What does it mean to be a worker?** Some have said that we produce education which is a public good, that we produce something that is useful for society. There is no denying this. But that is not all. What we produce is sold by journal publishers to make profits. It is also used by universities to produce itself as a brand, get grants and funds, and to make profits. And we know that the university and publishers have been trying to control what and how we produce because of what they get out of it. **This is why it is important to say that we are workers, because the work that we do is taken and used for the profits of others; because it is increasingly not in our control, it is being dictated by capitalism.**
- The university employs the language of fellowships and scholarships because it wants us to believe that it is being nice to us, it wants us to believe that those who get scholarships and fellowships are privileged consumers assisted by the university. But actually it is the work (classes, articles, seminars, conferences) that we do which makes the university run and publishers profit. **The demand for wages is not a demand to become workers, because we already are that. We demand wages because we are fed up of doing unwaged work. So the demand for wages is a tactical demand, a demand that declares to capital that it can't fool us any longer.**
- Capital is the accumulation of unwaged work. The moment we force it to pay us for all the work that it extracts from us IT WILL END. **Thus, the demand for wages is actually a demand to wrest our work and our lives out of the control of capitalism.** So that we can actually research freely and happily.
- What kind of wages should we demand? Is it enough to demand that we get MPhil students get 8,000 and PhD students get 12,000 as long as it is called a wage? No! **We demand a living wage.** We demand that everything we need to live happily is provided to us. We demand proper housing, good food, clean water, clean air, good education, we demand that our medical expenditures, travel expenditures and all that be covered. We are making a demand which we know capitalism can't satisfy without destroying itself. **But more importantly, having living wages, having our re-production guaranteed means that we can have control over our work and our lives.** This way we can begin to work and live for our own valorization as opposed to the valorization of capital.
- **Are we demanding living wages only for research worker? No! The demand for living wages is a demand for all workers.** To demand it for all workers also destroys another essential part/strategy of capitalism-Segmentation. Capitalism divides the working class by giving different wages to them (and no wages to some). The demand for a living wage for all ends this segmentation and hierarchy that capitalism controls us through (by pitting us against each other). **If we look at the production that goes on in the university, we see that its not only the labour of students and teachers, but also that of clerks, computer operators, librarians, mess workers, electricians, cleaners which makes it possible.** Would you be able to work on your research the way you do right now, if you also had to ensure that your thesis has been sent to and received by the external examiner, or that you had to cook your own meal twice a day, everyday? All these labours are essential, but currently they are

hierarchized and differentially remunerated. Also, the fixed division of labour means that you are stuck with doing only one of these because your life depends on it! **All for the sake of efficient production in the edu-factory.** The university is as much theirs as of the student and teacher.

- The entire university – each and every segment of it – faces a similar threat (low pay and rising cost of living, precarious jobs). **Can researchers hope to solve the problem of “sale of education” alone, when all labour connected to it is ALREADY FOR SALE? NO! When we say that “education is not for sale”, we should also ask: SHOULD ANYTHING BE FOR SALE?? And, can the struggle of other workers be met by merely sitting outside the UGC to demand a small increase for the researcher? NO! It is time to truly envisage a politics that includes all the workers in the University!**
- Some students in a public meeting in Ambedkar University had said that they were dissatisfied with their classes and teachers. In return the teachers said that it was because of the precarious nature of their jobs and the pressures of research and administrative work that they find little time to re-work their courses and their pedagogy. **These conversations provide us a glimpse into what a general assembly could look like.** It is a dialogue in which the karamcharis can tell the teachers that it is only because of their cheap labour that teachers can enjoy high salaries and clean and comfortable houses and campuses and time for research and teaching. **It opens the possibility of moving towards a realization that only by wresting control of our lives and work from capitalism can these antagonisms be genuinely addressed. We must have more of these dialogues! We must really occupy the university and run it on our own terms, and not just demonstrate outside the UGC and call it an occupation.**
- The movement has called for general strikes in support of the struggle of researchers. **Such an imagination of politics asks the different segments of workers in the university to support us but stay segmented because it only asks them to come in solidarity with us.** The general strike has not been concerned with the fact that other workers in the university might have their own issues and demands, often in contradiction to those of others!
- **A real occupation will mean that all the different segments of workers together run the university through workers councils that include students, teachers, karamcharis of all castes, genders and religions.** The fight for living wages for all indicates precisely such a movement because by demanding that everybody's basic needs be satisfied it demands an end of segmentations.

Is this too idealistic a notion of politics in the university? No! Idealistic is the belief that the antagonisms between segments through which capitalism maintains itself can be broken by sitting at the UGC. If one doesn't demand the impossible then all one does is aid and abet in the continuance of the system as a perpetual production of unfulfilled demands. So let's be practical and demand the impossible!

We need to turn this defensive situation into an attack –

Lets really Occupy the University

Lets really start a General Assembly

Let's all get what we want!

A living wage for all!

For further discussions, contact: universitymajdoor@gmail.com; zerohistory.jnu@gmail.com