

Knowledge Production Firms versus Universities

On a progressive design of higher education

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Abstract

This paper provides a critique of the developments in higher education that took place in the last 25 years in Europe. With the beginning of the conservative roll-back in politics in the early eighties science policy and in particular university policy became a central field of political intervention. Students and university teachers, intellectuals in general, had proved to be an element of progressive unrest in OECD countries since the late sixties, so from the perspective of conservative forces it was only straightforward to force the environmental conditions of these groups – university life - to change. The major intentions are not surprising:

- (1) To prevent students to engage too much in progressive politics a set of measures to streamline study content according to capitalist needs was implemented. This included a strict time schedule which did not allow for any additional, social activities. Possible duration of studies was shortened.
- (2) To clean faculties from progressive university teachers, new types of evaluation procedures and new types of temporary contracts were introduced. The content to be taught was partially adjusted to the immediate needs of industry and (capitalist) ideology production, thus legitimizing the dismissal of unwanted university professors.
- (3) The role of universities in modern societies was redefined as they should in the future only function as educational institutions to provide academics shaped to the pre-defined needs of industry and the capitalist state apparatus.

The measures implemented by European Higher Education Policy by and large can be understood as parts of these three streams of political intentions. From the perspective of

the actual needs of European societies in the last 25 years this type of policy today can be said to have totally failed. The first part of the paper will discuss some of these recent trends in European science policy in more detail.

In the second part a more global and more positive perspective will be developed: What types of scientific development should be aimed for if the enhancement of the welfare of the world population (and not profit maximization of transnational companies) is the goal? It is not easy and leads to an impressing variety of issues to address this question. From the design of mechanisms for the democratic control of political economy forces to well-specified health policy to environmental issues an informed judgment of relative importance seems to be urgently needed.

Finally, in a conclusion, some recommendations for contemporary science policy are given. What can be done in countries devoted to the development of a progressive global society; what should we fight for in countries, where the impasse of prevailing, capitalist university policy becomes more visible every day. In this paper we will try to provide some preliminary answers.