

Cuts in Italian education

Over the past two months, universities and schools across Italy have been the scenes of protests and occupation by students, professors, rectors and parents. Today, public squares remain the regular backdrop for demonstrations involving all of Italian society.

The crowds are protesting against the plan by Giulio Tremonti, minister of the economy, and Maria Stella Gelmini, minister of education, to cut funding to Italy's education system by more than 20 percent.

This assault on an already fragile educational system seriously reduces teaching staff in schools and universities. Eighty-seven thousand professorships are expected to disappear by 2011. This worsens the already shaky position of aspiring teaching professionals, as well as lowers the quality of education and research. In Italian universities, research projects are reduced to a minimum.

For years, university rectors have deplored the lack of funds to pay decent salaries to professors. Universities so far managed to continue their activities thanks in large part to the voluntary

work of researchers who have no formal employment contracts. The hope of finally obtaining an official post was what made so many of them hang on. Today, the funding cuts rob them of any hope for the future. How the Italian educational system will survive with these new cuts remains an open question. The Italian government itself has no plans for alternative funding to the cuts it has implemented and as yet proposed no reform.

Italy's political opposition has been notably absent from this mobilization. The political action, however, has been exceptional in bringing together people from all walks of Italian life. This is due to the fact that students' grievances are related to insecurities about the overall future of employment. Students and workers' preoccupations have converged.

The Gelmini law triggered the initial protests. Now it serves as a starting point for grass-roots reflection on how to better manage education reforms.

Zoe Bray and Andrea Calderaro

San Domenico di Fiesole, Italy

Department of Social

and Political Science

European University Institute

