

The *Silenced* Students

Student Resistance in a Corporatized University

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#### Abstract

A silenced student merely receives pedagogical messages, consumes educational goods and is supposed to obey taken-for-granted orders of the university. In this article we illustrate how silencing happens as a consequence of a structural change in the balance of power between the Finnish government and the universities. The universities try to play safe due to the increased directive power of the government. This has had effects on how universities define the roles of students: in the changed conditions, the universities see students as clients whose purpose is to study and graduate, but not to revolt or act as political beings.

Keywords: Higher education, student protest, activism, education cuts, critical performance pedagogy.

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### Student Resistance in a Corporatized University

#### **Introduction**

These may be dark times, as Hannah Arendt once warned, but they don't have to be, and that raises serious questions about what educators are going to do within the current historical climate to make sure that they do not succumb to the authoritarian forces circling the university, waiting for the resistance to stop and for the lights to go out. Resistance is no longer an option, it is a necessity. (Giroux 2015, p. 15)

Our article focuses on the problem of “a silenced student” in the neoliberal university. By a silenced student, we understand a position in which a student is defined as a silenced party of an educational institution in the era of corporate university—one, who merely receives pedagogical messages, consumes educational goods and is supposed to obey the invisible, taken-for-granted orders of the university. When students become activists, and start to resist and demonstrate against the education cuts, as in our two cases analyzed in this article, the universities seem to prefer passive students rather than active ones. Based on our cases we argue that the new economical autonomy Finnish universities gained in 2010 has in fact created a situation in which the universities act as opportunists in trying to gain advantage in the allocation of funds. The reason is that after the university legislation reform the state, through its economic power (the Finnish universities still get about 70 percent of their funding from it), can direct universities easier than before. This, in turn, has had effects on how universities define the role and function of students: in playing safe in the changed

conditions of power, the universities see students as consuming clients whose purpose is to study and graduate, but not to revolt.

In this article we describe the students' resistance to the education cuts by the Finnish government, analyze the university administration's response to the resistance and take four viewpoints to understand the relation between students' resistance and the administration's reactions in the context of a corporatized university.

We gathered our empirical data during the months of November and December 2015 in Tampere, Finland. The data consists of various sources: field notes, videos and photos from participating in the closed, student-led Facebook-group planning the demonstrations, and to two demonstrations held in the University of Tampere (in November 30, and December 4, 2015), news reporting the events, leaflets made by the student-group, and private email communication with the university administration. In analyzing the material we applied the ideas of micropolitical analysis (Willner 2011), Zeitgeist analysis (Moisio & Suoranta 2006), and Foucault's (1977) genealogy in "recording the singularity of events" (p. 139) as we related our case examples to the macro-structures of current education policy-making and neoliberal politics. Methodologically we followed C. Wright Mills (2000) who advised social scientist to take into account the dynamics between historical conditions and structures, and individual biographies in understanding social action.

### **Turn to the Right: Context**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Finland began to turn to the right in the early 1990s. During the same decade the welfare state was deemed too expensive to continue (Rantanen 2003) and various Finnish governments embraced Washington consensus policies, leading the country to embrace free market reforms at the

expense of state interventionary initiatives. The rejection of interventionism and the bringing forward of market reforms were the hallmarks of Finnish consensus politics for the last two decades regardless of the parties that took part in government coalitions. This all came to a head in the spring of 2015 when a “pure” right-wing government was formed being led by the Centre Party of Finland.

Just after the victorious Parliamentary elections the government launched, as part of its continuous debt-talk and contagious oration of “crisis consciousness,” a “growth package” that contained large budget cuts to the public sector, including education. The Prime Minister Juha Sipilä argued that the cuts were necessary to improve Finnish competitiveness in the global market and, thus, to save the welfare state. The current right-wing government established a capitalist hegemony in its purest form: it now controlled both economic and political power under the hegemony of the free market. During the previous two decades such power was slightly weakened because of the social democrats and other left oriented parties in the government: from the late 1960s to the 1990s, there was a fine balance between the economic power of the elite and the political power of the center-left.

The new right-wing government decided to break an election pledge not to cut the education budget after it was elected. To soothe the hurt, the education cuts were commented on by the Minister of Education as painful, “nobody would have hoped for them”, but they were still necessary in achieving “structural changes”—another Washington consensus buzzword—in the Finnish university sector. The rationale of the right-wing government’s education policy is summed up in the following sentence by the Minister of Education: To “achieve as much savings as possible through structural reforms so as to guarantee the quality of teaching and research” (Myklebust 2015, para. 7).

Shortly after the announcement of the cuts the opposition parties (Greens, Social Democrats and Left Alliance), trade unions, faculty associations, student unions and non-

formal student groups reacted by denouncing the cuts. The National Union of University Students in Finland published the statement “Education cuts put Finland out of the frying pan into the fire”:

The Finnish Ministry of Finance on Friday 14 August published its budget proposal for 2016. The list of cuts planned for the education sector is gruesome. Already for 2016, education cuts total 210 million euro, and the education sector is one of those hit the hardest by the budget proposal. The planned cuts endanger the Finnish education system as a whole and its foundation of providing everyone equal opportunities for education regardless of background. If realized, these massive cuts threaten to break down the Finland of education and know-how we depend on.<sup>1</sup>

The latest degradations in Finnish higher education are part of long processes of structural reform of universities globally. As Elsa Noterman and Andre Pusey (2012) state:

Universities, as well as other educational institutions, are currently facing economic instability, debt, and an uncertain future. The squeeze on higher education is like the crisis of capital: global. But so too is the emergent resistance. People around the world are challenging the neoliberal model of the university, which produces ‘skilled’ workers to be put to use for the (re)production of capital. (p. 175.)

Beginning in the 1990s Finnish higher education policy has been affected by neoliberal political ideologies that have their roots in the Thatcher era, the EU and the OECD. This has meant a dramatic shift away from the former ideals in higher education that were focused more on collective than individual learning (Kivirauma, Rinne & Seppänen 2003; Rinne

2000). Thus, during our collective teaching experience of over 40 years we have seen dramatic changes not only in university policies but also in how students are positioned, how they are treated, and how teaching, knowledge and the university itself have been defined (see FitzSimmons 2014; FitzSimmons 2015). While Finnish students are encouraged to go through the diploma mill as soon as possible, teachers are increasingly becoming entrepreneurs required to search for funding grants to preserve their jobs (Levidow 2005, 156; Halffman & Radder 2015).

### **The Movement Against Educational Cuts**

Our cases stem from the Movement Against Education Cuts (MAEC) in Finland during the fall semester 2015. The movement organized in several university cities including Helsinki, Tampere, Turku and Jyväskylä. The Education Strike movement has used several means to further its cause. It has organized demonstrations and petitions against education cuts, published leaflets and blogs, and occupied campus buildings<sup>2</sup>. Finnish media has been alert in reporting the cuts and the protest movement<sup>3</sup>. In what follows we describe two examples of the MAEC activities and then analyze and interpret their general meaning in the context of new Finnish university legislation.

#### *Case One - Rumble in the Lecture Hall*

One of the main architects of the recent education cuts Alexander Stubb, the Minister of Finance, visited University of Tampere as a guest lecturer November 30, 2015. When students in the MAEC Tampere heard about the lecture they decided to seize the moment by arranging a demonstration against the government's diminishing education policies. A group

of students gathered in front of the lecture hall wearing masks caricaturing leading politicians, and carrying banners stating “Who Cares About Truth?” and “Full Support” (see picture 1).

In the beginning of the lecture, one of the students started to oppose current cutting policies loudly in both national languages: Finnish and Swedish. The students shouted out: “We are not in the same boat. You have destroyed 3,000 jobs in higher education. Alex, we are not in the same boat.” After a short while a police officer, who was not in uniform, showed up and whispered something in the student’s ear. Then came the security guard who was hired by the university and the two grabbed the student by his armpits and led him out of the lecture hall as he was still presenting his opinions<sup>4</sup>. Out of curiosity, one of us went to see where they were taking the student because of concern for the student’s wellbeing and when one of us saw that the student was in danger of being arrested one of us stopped the police officer and the guard right outside the lecture hall.

[INSERT PICTURE 1 HERE]

**Picture 1: Students demonstrating against the education cuts and the visit of the Ministry of Finance at the University of Tampere, November 30, 2015**

The student was now firmly in the grip of the police officer and the security guard. One of us introduced himself to the police who then presented his badge. As the police officer responded to the query (“the student was removed because he disturbed the lecture”), the apparently frightened student said to the police officer: “But you said you are going to take me to the lockup.” One of us said to the police that no one is taken anywhere from the university because of expressing opinions, even if loudly. The student was suddenly released

and immediately he went away as one of us reconfirmed with the police officer that it is now sure that the student is free to go anywhere he likes. Later that day the student wrote one of us the following email:

For me the police officer said that, “we will check your papers outside”. At the same time he said to the headset that, “one is coming to the lockup.” When I ask that isn’t it little bit of an exaggeration to take me to the lockup for shouting, he said that, “we check your papers outside.

### *Case Two - Occupy the University!*

In the eve of the Finnish Independence Day celebrations the MAEC Tampere decided to occupy one of the campus buildings (titled “Castle”) as a form of educational protest. They designed an invitation letter that took advantage of the decorative Finnish Independence Day celebration imagery, especially the Reception at the presidential palace (in Finnish, “the Castle Ball”): that is why the invitation leaflet, widely distributed in the campus, welcomed all to the Castle Ball planned to be held in the Castle-building (see picture 2).

[INSERT PICTURE 2 HERE]

**Picture 2: An Invitation to the Castle Ball by MAEC Tampere (“The Tampere Education Strike Committee Invites You to the Castle Ball Held in the Castle-building on Friday December 4th 2015 at noon”)**

From the start MAEC occupiers emphasized direct democracy and held their second general assembly right before the occupation:

The second general assembly of Tampere Education strike is being held at Linna campus on Friday 4th this week at 12:00 forwards. The formation of the assembly takes place at the main stairs. After the assembly, there will be program including ‘pointless lectures’ and music and dance. You can participate in the program—just send us a message! The event is a demonstration against the government's educational budget cuts which affect us all and will have an effect long after.

For a brief moment, the occupied campus building was a site of transgressional learning. One of us participated on the “all male panel” a parody of the male hegemony in different professions<sup>5</sup>, particularly the male dominance in tenured professorships. There were also lectures, free microphone areas, coffee serving and the weaving of wool caps for the refugees who had come to Finland as part of the recently arrived thirty thousand asylum seekers. Stanisław Lem’s Solaris film was planned to be screened later in the evening but, again, the police were called by the university administration.

Similar occupations happened in other cities. In the University of Helsinki and the University of Turku students occupied the campus buildings. But unlike in other universities, the University of Tampere administration called the police in the middle of the night, around 2.30am, to evict the occupiers.

We contacted one of the top administrators (who we intentionally treat as anonymous here) about the reasons why the occupiers were evicted from the facility. The administrator replied in a laconic tone that at that late hour “the situation was seen as such that there were no conditions for the continuation of the occupation.” There were only a few students left in the occupied building and, according to the administrator’s logic, it was only reasonable to eject them, to empty and clean the premises. It is worthy to note that the administrator did not

mention the police at all in his reply, but finishes with a short sentence: “Nothing dramatic in this.”

Such use of the above words reveals that the dramatic is not only something to avoid but also to dismiss from the campus. The occupation certainly broke the chain of conventions and revealed the hidden rules of behavior. From the ethogenic perspective the campus occupation was an “enigmatic episode” (Harré & Secord 1972, p. 171), a situation or an occasion without proper rules of conduct. In this case power didn’t know how to act or respond – thus the use of force. It is also a lesson in how power can talk to the masses everywhere, and reminds us of David Graeber’s (2004) words about the relationship between power and violence, the relation based on and creating ignorance and stupidity:

[V]iolence, particularly structural violence, where all the power is on one side, creates ignorance. If you have the power to hit people over the head whenever you want, you don’t have to trouble yourself too much figuring out what they think is going on, and therefore, generally speaking, you don’t. Hence the sure-fire way to simplify social arrangements, to ignore the incredibly complex play of perspectives, passions, insights, desires, and mutual understandings that human life is really made of, is to make a rule and threaten to attack anyone who breaks it. This is why violence has always been the favored recourse of the stupid: it is the one form of stupidity to which it is almost impossible to come up with an intelligent response. It is also of course the basis of the state. Contrary to popular belief, bureaucracies do not create stupidity. They are ways of managing situations that are already inherently stupid because they are, ultimately, based on the arbitrariness of force. (p. 72–3.)

It is of course a matter of perspective whether ‘police on campus’ is to be considered a dramatic event or not, but certainly it has not always been a common arrangement. The 2015 Finnish students’ occupations join the long tradition of student activism all over the world. We need to be mindful of the past and thus a historical comparison is in place. It is, again, Graeber (2013), who reminds us that when “the president of Columbia University invited police onto campus to retake student-occupied buildings in 1968, this was considered a shocking breach of the tacit understanding that universities do not call in military-style force against their own students” (p. 257). Of course, there were other occupations in the US during the late 1960s and early 1970s like those of San Francisco State, Harvard University, University of California at Berkeley, Santa Barbara and UCLA, as well as Universities of Michigan, Wisconsin and Illinois (Urbana-Champaign) (see Bloom & Breines 2003, p. 333–346), not to mention the famous occupations in Paris<sup>6</sup>.

The campus occupation has thus a rather long and well-established history in the arsenal of student activism, but what has changed during the past decades, as Graeber concludes, is the use of police force against non-violent students. For example, when a small group of students occupied the roof of the New School in 2009, the NYPD rushed in with four anti-terrorist squads (p. 7). The use of such violence by the police in the US is different from the Finnish experience, at least for the moment. However, there are similarities in how the media reacts to the use of structural violence. For instance, as in the US and also in Finland, various media outlets did not mention the fact that there were police on the campus interrupting the non-violent, educative occupation against the education budget cuts. According to Graeber (2013, p. 257), after the terrorist attack on 9/11, police interventions have become the norm and not an exception in the US and elsewhere.

### **Understanding: Four Viewpoints**

These cases demonstrate that the most valuable side of the university is threatened in the new capitalist regime of truth: universities are—or they should be—the laboratories of public participation and action in which students are to be taken not only as audiences but also as social agents, or as Burawoy (2004) has stated as “carriers of lived experience” in the educational journey into “deeper self-understanding of the historical and social contexts that have made them who they are” (p. 9; see also Freire 1990).

In what follows we take four viewpoints to highlight the different receptions and meanings of the cases, those of disorder and troublemaking, freedom of speech, culture jamming and fear of freedom. The first two are views from the very top of the university administration in the local newspaper. The third viewpoint emphasizes our belief of universities as public arenas and sites of critical reflection. The fourth viewpoint offers a structural explanation to the question, why was the police called to the campus in the first place. Before explicating the viewpoints it is worth mentioning that for long time there was an implicit agreement in the university community that no police is needed in the above mentioned or likewise situations. This ideal seems to be broken—at least for now.

1. *Disorder and troublemaking*. The most obvious viewpoint is that of disorder and troublemaking. The position is highlighted in the following comment that the Rector of the University of Tampere gave to the local newspaper Aamulehti:

My personal view is that if guest lecturers are invited to the university, they are allowed to speak in peace. It is just the same, who the lecturer is. Troublemaking is not correct and does not fit to the university. (...) The case does not involve any real drama, for to my knowledge the troublemaker has not been punished in any way.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, these incidents can be seen as troublemaking at first glance for they break the ordinary course of events and blanket other possible meanings. We can think of them as forms of subjective violence; something which can be seen and heard and reported in the news. It is much more difficult to start to dig at other layers: what if there is more at play than meets the eye—something hidden within the layers? What if, besides the subjective violence with an identifiable agent, there are, as Žižek (2002) remarks, other forms of violence, those of symbolic and systemic violence, “the often catastrophic consequences of smooth functioning of our economic and political systems” (p. 2). From this perspective it is possible to claim that the ejection of the student from the scene was a lesson in those latter two forms of violence: the students and the faculty were taught that it is not correct to behave badly—or to practice civil obedience. Rather it is more important to engage in a pedagogy of silence in the classroom.

Of course, after the fact, it is fair to ask: What would we, as educators, do if someone started to act like that in our lecture? In the same way as the question, the answer should also be obvious: Hopefully, we would not call the police to eject the student but first listen to the student and then ask her or him to calm down, and listen to what the student had to say, and, if possible, begin a dialogue and include other members of the audience. In other words, we would make it into an authentic learning situation.

2. *Freedom of speech.* An opposite view, that of freedom of speech, was given by Heikki Hellman’s, the Dean of School of Communication, Media and Theatre, in the same local newspaper Aamulehti. Hellman stated as follows:

The university is a forum for free discussion. The fact that someone keeps calling and commenting is basically fully permitted. It belongs to the critical tradition of the university. How he or she behaves is in his or hers own decision. The shouting is not

forbidden after all. The world is full of political activity. Stubb did not come to the University as a lecturer but as a politician. And he also gets a reception as a politician.<sup>8</sup>

There is even more at play than (academic) freedom of speech as such, which should actually be taken for granted, namely the question of the power to speak and act in today's society. As Ian Angus (2007) puts it: "One must ask who is really outspoken in the society in which we live. Corporations, governments, and the media say long and loud what they have to say. They shout from all corners, and are impossible to avoid in today's propagandistic consumer environment." (p. 67.) This asymmetry of the possibility for the public speech and critical presence in the agora is especially evident in our first case of an individual student protesting the Minister of Finance and the education cuts. The Minister can colonize the university by his talk show (it really was a one man show) with the administration's and faculty's approval, but the show cannot be disrupted or denied by the silent party, the students; a typical example of a *hierarchy of credibility* in which professors and administrators act as superordinate and students as subordinate parties, and where "members of the highest group have the right to define the way things really are" (Becker 1967, p. 240–241).

3. *Culture jamming and critical performance pedagogy*. The idea of hierarchy of credibility is particularly troubling in universities, if we think that universities are the very sites in which a new generation of scholars, activists and leaders are not only being educated but also are educating themselves; casting their skin, so to speak, from the subordinate position to the democratic persona. As Giroux (2004) has put it, universities are supposed to support a new generation,

who not only defend higher education as a democratic public sphere, but who also see themselves as both scholars and citizen activists willing to connect their research, teaching, and service to broader democratic concerns over equality, justice, and an alternative vision of what the university might be and what society might become. (p. 248.)

From this perspective it is vitally important to understand and interpret both the protest in the lecture hall and the campus occupation other than acts of troublemaking and disruption of civic society. From the perspective of an active citizenship and civic activism they were forms of critical performance pedagogy, for they both are radical and risky acts of liberation: “radical in the sense that they strip away notions of a given human condition, and risky in that our sense of comfort in knowing the world is made bare” (Alexander 2005, p. 425; see also Denzin 2003). In addition, they “open a possibility of hope encouraged by social responsibility, political activism, and engaged participation in a moral science of humanistic discourse” (Alexander 2005, p. 426). As Denzin (2010) writes:

These performances interrogate and evaluate specific social, educational, economic and political processes. This form of praxis can shape a cultural politics of change. It can help create a progressive and involved citizenship. The performance becomes the vehicle for moving persons, subjects, performers, and audience members, into new, critical, political spaces. (p. 66.)

In a certain sense the Finnish students’ activism could be seen as an invitation to the faculty to join forces with the students in the united campaign against the education cuts. Why was it then that there were so few faculty members in the happenings? Could the explanation be the

same as with their research work: that there seems to be a general lacking of critical points of view and analysis? Or are faculty members too busy in fulfilling the bureaucratic demands from the higher echelons of power? As Graeber (2015) states: “The lack of critical work is especially odd because on the surface, you would think academics are personally positioned to speak of the absurdities of bureaucratic life” (p. 53).” Of course, if the lack of teacher participation indicates the bureaucratization of academia, then we have returned to the stage that C. Wright Mills (2000) described decades ago when he commented on the functionally rational machine of the social sciences: “The individual social scientist tends to lose his moral autonomy and his substantive rationality, and the role of reason in human affairs tends to become merely a refinement of techniques for administrative and manipulative uses” (p. 180). This is to say that we academics are also part of the new Behemoth, a neoliberal hegemonic monster (see also Giroux 2014). In a more optimistic tone, we need to conclude that as forms of culture jamming, the students’ acts of protest opened a venue for political awareness and social change because the acts broke the ordinary everyday life of campus living:

Culture jamming operates as potentially powerful public pedagogy through the ways in which it fosters participatory cultural production, engages with the learner and the “teacher” corporeally, and fosters the creation of a community politic. We further argue that culture jamming’s “pedagogical hinge” lies in how it produces a sense of “détournement” in audience members, which can operate as a form of “transitional space.” (Sandlin & Milam 2010, p. 252.)

4. *The fear of freedom.* What then can be the reason, if any, behind these incidents in which the police are called to campus? In our analysis the answer is the “fear of freedom” within the

campus administration: it forces them to become “oppressors of dissent.” By ‘forcing’ we refer to political-structural condition that surrounds the administrators, and, if not determines, at least compels them to act as they do in order to survive in the funding competition between Finnish universities. This is certainly not only pertinent to Finland but also to other administrators in other campuses across the world. However, in Finland, we can place the problem squarely on the consequences of the structural change in the power relations between the universities and the government. To put it bluntly, under the new legislation that separated universities from the state and granted them more autonomy (especially economic autonomy), the relationship has turned into a business negotiation if not a business partnership in which one partner buys and the other sells products, that is, master’s and doctor’s degrees and research results (as publications).

In order to understand this frame of interpretation, we need to return to the time before the current university legislation. Before the year 2010, all Finnish universities were state universities, that is, they were owned by and belonged to the state. In a more administrative language, they were the accounting offices of the state. But, even though the universities were state-owned, and as paradoxical as it might seem at first, the universities were freer inside such bureaucratic administration than as individual operators in the education markets competing with each other. This was largely because of the fundamental idea of the democratic state: it is based on continuous Habermasian “ideal communication” and critical points of view, undisturbed by market mechanisms. In addition, in the old order, the course of events between the state apparatus and the universities were familiar and more or less predictable. Thus, it was the task of the students and critical scholars to bite the very hand that fed them, that is the state, as the state was to guarantee the constitutional right to freedom of speech inside safe learning environments, such as the university. In other words, the state

and the society were supposed to practice criticalness and reflectiveness, the hallmarks of the democratic development of the state and also of the society it governs.

Although the 2010 University Act in principle made the universities independent from the State, in practice this has meant that the parties involved have become business partners who simulate business negotiations in the education market. The strategic situation has become more opaque than during the bureaucratic model particularly from the individual university's perspective. In fact, negotiations are asymmetrical because the state still sets the rules with its so-called financial model by covering two-thirds of all the university's basic funding. The price of university autonomy has been met with the Finnish government's greater control of power over education, which appears to contain a certain oppressive "symbolic element". One implication of this symbolic element is related to how universities' take precautionary action against student activism whether this activism is a disruptive protest or a campus occupation against the government's public expenditure cuts. Hence, from the angle of the university manager, who basically does the bidding of the neoliberal state, the students' uncontrolled activism can also be seen as a danger to the university's attempt to engage in raising private funds. Thus, under the new right-wing legislation a student has become an apolitical learning machine, who must submit to the university administration's command structure, resulting from the university's weakened position in the tiers of educational policy and power.

## **Conclusion**

Based on our analysis of the two cases that it seems that the Finnish university administration and the government authorities would prefer a submissive student despite all the public talk about nurturing the students activism and the value of critical studentship. Finally, we need to

ask a question: What do these clear incidents of oppression do to the students' psyche and to the political idea of the university? Students possess a will to learn through dialogue, deliberation and reflection, and they have a basic desire to share their opinions with each other (Suoranta 2008; Suoranta & Moisio 2006; FitzSimmons 2014). Critical learning environments foster the creation of a student as subject and not as an object. Through acts of physical violence or the threats of violence that may come from campus authorities or the police, the students are in danger of becoming more fearful or, in some cases, more objectified, and act out accordingly.

As a result of the rise of the Populist Party during the last parliamentary elections and the overall right turn of Finnish politics the social position of the poor, including students and families with children have weakened<sup>9</sup>. If public benefit adjustments and reductions accumulate in a person's life, who may have lost her job, lives in debt, is a single parent, balances studying with raising a child, suffers a loss of pay due to sickness, or finds daycare too expensive, the economic, social and mental difficulties will become particularly significant, sometimes insurmountable to survive (as if mere surviving would be the aim of human existence). The right-wing government's educational and social policies mean that Finland's turn back to a class society, after half of the century, will grip the population as social status is again inherited (the first such period started during the recession in the early 1990s) and social mobility decreased. These effects are multiplied due to the cost cutting in early childhood education and higher education as well as in health and social benefits and other public expenditures.

In these dark financial times we must defend the university as a public space where teachers and students dare ask the "big" questions and allow them to connect their life experiences into their studies (see Mills 2000, p. 196). We thus believe in accordance with Giroux (2015) that

[t]he time has come to develop a political language in which civic values and social responsibility—and the institutions, tactics, and long-term commitments that support them—become central to invigorating and fortifying a new era of civic engagement, a renewed sense of social agency, and an impassioned international social movement with the vision, organization, and set of strategies capable of challenging the neoliberal nightmare that now haunts the globe and empties out the meaning of politics and democracy. (p. 14–15.)

“Where is the intelligentsia that is carrying on the big discourse of the Western world *and* whose work as intellectuals is influential among parties and publics and relevant to the great decisions of our time? Where are the mass media open to such men?” asked C. Wright Mills (2000, p. 183) decades ago. In the months and years to come what is urgently needed, both in higher education and in the public arenas, is to activate students more than before in order to prevent them falling into ignorance and ineptness. “Teaching needs to be rigorous, self-reflective, and committed not to the dead zone of instrumental rationality but to the practice of freedom” (Giroux 2015, p. 10). The alpha and omega of all teaching and action is a social consciousness as a general attitude and consecutive participation to various critical practices.

It is not just about the actions of the trade unions representing employees, or political parties actively working in parliament or among the people, but what it does mean is how citizens control the democratic process through active involvement and participation. It means peer discussions, communication with lecturers and professors, writing books and research papers, critical adult education and learning about the society and its functioning principles. It is also about debating in the streets and city squares, in schools, around cafe tables and in the workplace, contacting the politicians in and out of Parliament and City

Councils so that they know that people are awake, and will not under any circumstances tolerate destructive decisions so far taken and yet undone. It means contacting the Opposition or shadow governments so that they know that we, the people, are awake and will call for the defense of the ordinary people's wellbeing. It also means to strike when necessary, to demonstrate when needed, to protest non-violently, to build a united front with the elderly, students, workers, immigrants and families with children and to develop new ways of participation by inviting ever new people across all borders to build a good society and common humanity.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.syl.fi/2015/08/14/the-national-union-of-university-students-in-finland-syl-still-time-to-cancel-cuts-in-education/>

<sup>2</sup> This video depicts a part of student demonstration against government's education cuts and the occupation of the University of Helsinki Main Building (December 1, 2015):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RvQMeL90pA>

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., [http://yle.fi/uutiset/thousands\\_protest\\_education\\_cuts\\_in\\_helsinki/8077420](http://yle.fi/uutiset/thousands_protest_education_cuts_in_helsinki/8077420),  
[http://yle.fi/uutiset/oecd\\_warns\\_finland\\_over\\_education\\_cuts/8415474](http://yle.fi/uutiset/oecd_warns_finland_over_education_cuts/8415474),  
[http://yle.fi/uutiset/record\\_university\\_of\\_helsinki\\_building\\_occupation\\_ends/8334943](http://yle.fi/uutiset/record_university_of_helsinki_building_occupation_ends/8334943),  
[http://yle.fi/uutiset/education\\_minister\\_defends\\_open\\_letter\\_higher\\_education\\_institutions\\_must\\_specialise/8418440](http://yle.fi/uutiset/education_minister_defends_open_letter_higher_education_institutions_must_specialise/8418440), [http://yle.fi/uutiset/educators\\_fight\\_against\\_cuts\\_with\\_67k\\_petition/8229512](http://yle.fi/uutiset/educators_fight_against_cuts_with_67k_petition/8229512),  
[http://yle.fi/uutiset/aalto\\_university\\_to\\_begin\\_talks\\_on\\_cutting\\_350\\_jobs/8441639](http://yle.fi/uutiset/aalto_university_to_begin_talks_on_cutting_350_jobs/8441639).

<sup>4</sup> The actual events have been recorded in two Youtube videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mM9iTGJ6VJM> and

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9fHKR3NsyE>

<sup>5</sup> See <http://allmalepanels.tumblr.com/>

<sup>6</sup> The most famous campus occupations took place in the 1960s, especially known are the student occupations in France during the events of May 1968. Students were rebelling in the streets of the 5th

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and 6th *arrondissements* in Paris and shortly after they occupied a campus building in the city of Nanterre. Furthermore, slogans from this time such as “Soyez réalistes, demandez l’impossible (“Be realistic, demand the impossible”) are still dearly remembered in radical circles. However, what had started as a student rebellion quickly became a nationwide workers’ strike. And “[w]ithin a few months ‘the events of May’ were recognized as the epicentre of a bicontinental outburst of student rebellions, crossing political and ideological frontiers from Berkeley and Mexico City in the west to Warsaw, Prague and Belgrade in the east” (Hobsbawn 2002, p. 246). In Finland the students also revolted against the establishment during the year 1968, and occupied the Old Student House in Helsinki, the Capital of Finland.

<sup>7</sup><http://www.aamulehti.fi/Kotimaa/1195008597029/artikkeli/saako+yliopistolla+huudella+naamari+passa+rehtori+se+on+raukkamaista+.html>

<sup>8</sup><http://www.aamulehti.fi/Kotimaa/1195008597029/artikkeli/saako+yliopistolla+huudella+naamari+passa+rehtori+se+on+raukkamaista+.html>

<sup>9</sup> [http://yle.fi/uutiset/ml\\_l\\_brunt\\_of\\_austerity\\_savings\\_borne\\_by\\_children/7156614](http://yle.fi/uutiset/ml_l_brunt_of_austerity_savings_borne_by_children/7156614)

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Picture 1: Students demonstrating against the education cuts and the visit of the Ministry of Finance at the University of Tampere, November 30, 2015



*Koulutuslakko Tampere  
kutsuu Teidät*

*Linnan juhliin*

*Tampereen yliopiston Linna-rakennukseen  
perjantaina 4. päivänä joulukuuta 2015 kello 12.00*

Picture 2: An Invitation to the Castle Ball by MAEC Tampere (“The Tampere Education Strike Committee Invites You to the Castle Ball Held in the Castle-building on Friday December 4th 2015 at noon”)