School Occupation in Italy

An Interview with Partito Comunista dei Lavoratori Youth

Editorial comment: With the increasing fight for the imperialist redivision of the world – the shift to the right, militarism and cuts are more prevalent than ever. Students and the youth internationally are struggling under the crisis, which is why in Palermo (Italy) students occupied parts of their school last year, to fight for a safe environment to learn. Since we as REVOLUTION believe that it is necessary for the youth internationally to organize in the places where we spend our day-to-day life, at schools, universities and at work – we interviewed the students from the Partito Comunista dei Lavoratori (*Communist Workers Party, PCL)* to learn from their experiences and discuss between young communists internationally. We believe that the overthrowing of Capitalism is only possible through an international revolution, thats why we need to discuss struggles all over the world. We urge students and other parts of the youth worldwide to reach out to us, for interviews about their struggles with the capitalist system and to discuss with us, how to fight those struggles – so we can one day together achieve a communist world.

The PCL is the Italian section of the International Trotskyist Opposition, with whom our Fighting Partner the League for the Fifth International, is in discussions about regroupment, together with the International Socialist League. (Agreement between ITO, L5I and ISL: https://fifthinternational.org/for-a-regroupment-of-revolutionaries/)

Why did you occupy your school?

We choose to occupy because of our school's very precarious structural conditions.

In fact we occupied right after the school was flooded with rain because of the sewerage

drainage system being broken and a piece of roof missing.

But this wasn't even the only problem, we also had mold on the classrooms' walls, on the

ground floor, a mouse infestation and malfunctioning internet connection.

What happened before, during and after the occupation?

We had already sent multiple emails to our principal asking her to resolve these problems,
but we didn't get any response. Consequently we choose to occupy the teachers room, we would have preferred to occupy the principal's office but it isn't in our school, it is in another school with the same principal (a school in which the structural conditions are way better, but this doesn't surprise us…). Two months before the occupation we had already changed the building for our school because in the past some pieces of the structure were falling down, including roofs.
Fortunately no one ever got injured but this made permanence at school very unsafe and
uncomfortable. Consequently the majority of the students were already angry and fed up at the school's condition, considering we had transferred there coming from an already poor situation and hoping for a better one. When we saw the principal wouldn't respond to our mails we started discussing the idea of an occupation, both in conversations with students and students' representatives meetings. Then the representatives, including on of our comrades, voted to occupy and on the 10th of May 2024, after the first hour of lessons, we occupied the teachers' room.

Were there other Groups participating?

There weren't other groups organizing the occupation, considering our school doesn't even
have a students' collective, isn't much active in the students' movement and rarely
participates in protests. Despite this we were helped by the older students, who were in our school when it still had a collective, even tough It wasn't tied to communism or generally leftism.
This collettive tough only lasted from 2021 to 2022, some months prior to when we started
High School, mostly because the majority of those who joined it were already graduating,

and by 2022 only a few of them were still in our school.)

What methods did you use to get people organized? Handing out Flyers, Newspaper,
Demonstrations?

Because of the conditions we were in, it was very easy to convince students in participating
in the occupation. The only necessary thing to convince them was talking about It in school assemblies and students' representatives' committee meetings. Consequently we did not hand out flyers or newspapers, but we did in March, some weeks after joining thr PCL, to try to radicalize students and make them join the party but sadly we didn't get any results.

Were there Structures you organized around? Did you use existing structures of
student participation? How do they work?

There aren't political structures in our school, if not the students' committee which isn't
politically sided though, so we organized only around it.

Were you able to Achieve your demands? If not, did you have a plan to escalate?

In the end, after three hours of occupation followed by a meeting between the school
representative, the principal and the mayor which lasted one hour, we were able to achieve
our demands. Our demands were fixing the sewerage system, the roof and the radiators, removing the mold from the walls and getting rid of the rats. I think the reason the principal approved our demands so quickly after weeks of ignoring us was fear of media coverage if the occupation lasted longer, which would have caused her to get a bad reputation.

Even though we were lucky and our demands were met, we didn't have a plan to escalate if
they didn't accept our demands, except occupying for a longer time and we must recognize

this as a weakness. What we obtained from this occupation was not only the fixing of the structural problems but the rebirth of a minimal political consciousness in a school that before 2022 hadn't seen an occupation or demonstration in decades.

Were there any Repressions?

Fortunately we didn't suffer any repression but at the same time repression Is very common
in Italy. For example in February students in Pisa and Firenze were beaten by police for protesting
against the italian government's involvement in the genocide of Palestinians by Israel and in
December ten students in Rome got suspended for 15 days, condemned to hours of
community service and reported to the police after they occupied Cavour High School for
one week. (1)

Also with the new DDL Sicurezza, a set of laws that are being approved by the
government, there are a lot of new norms that will be approved that make political activism
extremely difficult. For example the 14th section punishes those who blockade roads while protesting with 6 years of jail, the 19th section introduces the crime of passive resistance, the 28th section allows police officers to carry certain types of weapons even when they aren't in service and the 31th section permits members of the secret services, if they received the permission of
the president, to commit acts of terrorism and asks universities to provide the identities of
professors and students that are in the opposition parties to the secret services. (2)

How did the students React to the Occupation and Organizing?

As I had already said, students were tired about the school's conditions and the principal's

negligence so they reacted very positively to the occupation and some of them helped
organizing It.

Are these Problems Specific to your school, region, or the whole country? What
***Perspective did you propagandize*?**

These problems didn’t affect only our school but affected and affect the schools of the whole
country. Last year there were 69 collapses in schools regarding roofs and walls, 8 more than 2023.
The South, the area in which our school Is located, is the most affected, with 28 collapses
(40,5%). This underlines the connection between inadequate school structures and the questione
meridionale, which is the set of all socio-economic inequalities between North and South
Italy. 59,16% of schools don’t have an usability certificate, 57,68% don’t have fire
prevention, 41,5% don’t have static testing. The air quality also is very poor, 94% of schools don’t have air conditioning and ventilation systems. 10% of schools don’t have heating systems.
These issues are also tied to ableism. In fact 65% of schools don’t have stairlifts, 74% don’t have appropriate bathrooms for disabled people and 76% don’t have wheelchair ramps.
Also only 11% of schools underwent construction works aimed at eliminating architectural
barriers. (3)

These conditions are probably caused by the corruption of some school principals and, even
more, by education not receiving enough government funds. Indeed in Italy education receives 2,9% of the total GDP, against the 3,2% OECD average. (4)

This while the military spending increases by 13 billion euros, indicating how

the current
post-fascist government put it’s imperialist interests and the support to Israel in it’s genocide
against Palestinians higher than the needs of the people of the country they rule. (5)

An example of corrupt school principals is Falcone Middle School’s former principal Daniela
Lo Verde, who stole food and technological tools that were destined to students and
appropriated EU funds by inventing courses that never actually happened in the school, the
already unacceptable act is worsened by the fact It happened in the poorest Palermo’s
district, ZEN. Now she has been sentenced to carrying out community services. (6)

Are you going to continue to stay active in Schools?
Certainly we are going to keep being active in our school. One of our comrades has been reelected as the classroom representative and next year we would like to candidate ourselves in the students’ elections to become school representatives. We also organized leafletings about protests we participated in and events that we organized in our political circle both in our school and the other High School in Town. These sadly didn’t attract anyone to the party but they contributed to make ourselves known as a party and as communists in school, helping us in making steps forward to organize the students in fighting against the bourgeoisie and ally with the workers’ movement in our school.

Sources:

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(2) https://www.sistemapenale.it/it/documenti/pacchetto-sicurezza-il-testo-del-disegno-di-legge-e-il-dossier-del-servizio-studi-del-senato and https://ilmanifesto.it/il-grande-fratello-alluniversita)

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(6) https://www.palermotoday.it/cronaca/scuole-falcone-zen-corruzione-condanna-preside-lo-verde.html