

What To Do For Academic Freedom

Universities have been passing through a multi-directional transformation process for the last three decades. Students, academics, subjects of the lectures and universities themselves have been restructured.

Firstly, universities have been restructured according to the needs of capital accumulation. It is not a new phenomenon, for sure; US, Canada and EU countries had been witnessing this transformation since 1970's. The underlying change in the universities has been the identification of the university itself as a site of capital accumulation. In this process, scientific activity had been converted into intellectual capital and, hence, intellectual property. According to David Noble (1996), there had been two general phases of that transformation: The first entailed the commoditization of the research function of the university, transforming scientific and engineering knowledge into commercially viable proprietary products. The second entails the commoditization of the educational function of the university, transforming courses into courseware, the activity of instruction itself into commercially viable proprietary products.

Now Turkey has experienced the similar process. Marx addressed to German reader in the Preface of Capital I: "If, however, the German reader prosaically shrugs his shoulders at the condition of the England industrial and agricultural workers, or optimistically comforts himself with the thought that in Germany things are not nearly so bad, I must plainly tell him: *De te fabula narratur!*" Because, said Marx, "the country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future!" The same applied to us this time. Now, the process we have been passing through shows that the experience that North American or European countries had that time was indeed our story, as well.

Well, what are the dynamics of the transformation in Turkey? Let's look at the Turkish Industrial Strategy Document launched 2015 in order to understand its meaning for capital accumulation. According to the document, one of the industrial strategies is to commercialize the universities. For this, it is mentioned that the post graduate and PhD

theses, that focused on the developments that aiming to increase export power of Turkey, will be supported by government. And, according to the SWOT analysis made in the document, the possibility of university-industry collaboration all around the country can be seen as an Opportunity.

Second, while university has been identified as a site of capital accumulation, the university staff has been transformed into the service providers for capital accumulation. As it is written in the document, universities will share the stuff database with industrial corporations in order to make them to reach academics easily and directly when required. Through this transformation, on the one hand the target to raise independent researchers has been degraded, on the other, scientists themselves have been transformed into the company's stuff. In the same process, academic staff has become flexible and unsecure. In similarity with the North American and European countries, number of tenure positions have been diminished.

The third one is the political / ideological aspect of this transformation. It means, to 'clean' the universities from all kind of opponents. The last year we had seems to be the last phase of whole transformation. It is also not new for sure, we had the struggle of research assistants for 50 D (secure position), for example. However, KHK's provided an opportunity for government to make a full-scale cleaning: Now, the government wants to dismiss any opponent voice from universities - the one who calls for peace, who fights for her rights, who criticise the state policies. The dismiss of academics who sign for peace from universities in fact has been a part of this process. Therefore, the problem is not only to struggle for to go back to our universities but also to built an organized power to struggle against to whole transformation in the universities.

A documentary film was shot in METU (Middle East Technical University) in 1990s: *The Problem – My Problem*. The film was telling the story of changing profile of METU; it was told that in the 1970s, students, academics and the other stuff of METU had a common problem; but now, everyone has her/ his own problems. This transformation seems to be reproduced in every turning point of the society -not only in the universities, but also in all areas of the society. And of course, the struggle for universities is not apart from the social struggle. What we need is to organize the struggle in the universities as

well as to connect it to the social struggle: Since, *it is the Story of all of us, it is the Problem of all of us!*

References

Marx, K. (1997) *Capital Volume 1*, Penguin Books.

Noble, D. (2003), “Digital Diploma Mills”, Johnson, B., Kavanagh, P. and K. Mattson (eds.), in *Steal This University: The Rise of The Corporate University and The Academic Labor Movement*, Routledge: New York, pp.33-49.