

Italy: Student protests continue against cuts in education

Our reporter

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On November 14, students in Italy continued to protest against government cuts in higher education. According to organisers, up to 500,000 students demonstrated in a national mobilisation in Rome. Students came to the capital from scores of towns and cities including Milan, Turin, Pisa and Naples. Traffic ground to a halt during the day as the students made their way to the main final rally, held in Piazza Navona. The university students were also supported by many high school students.

The students are protesting the passage of Law 133, the so-called Gelmini reform (after Education Minister Mariastella Gelmini). The decree will lead to at least 87,000 teaching jobs and 44,500 administrative posts being lost at state schools over the next three academic years to 2012. Universities also face the threat of privatisation. Many smaller schools are to be closed as part of €8 billion in cuts. The law will also re-introduce the single-teacher system for most subjects for children in primary schools.

According to a report at the ansa.it web site, many students carried banners stating their opposition to Law 133 and to Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and Mariastella Gelmini. Other students left a coffin symbolising the death of education in the entrance of the Senate.

Students from Rome high schools held up banners reading, “How long, Gelmini, will you abuse our patience?”

On the same day, smaller rallies were held in other Italian cities while protests were also held by Italian researchers and students in Germany, France and Belgium.

In opposition to the large student demonstration, a small right-wing protest was held outside the Education

Ministry in Rome. At the rally placards were held that read, “Go Gelmini” and “Against the new 1968ers”. This banner was in reference to the massive student movement that occurred in a number of European countries in 1968.

According to a lecturer interviewed by BBC News, Law 133 will have a “disastrous” impact on the future viability of universities. Professor Giancarlo Ruocco, who lectures in physics at the University of Rome, told the BBC his department could lose 30 percent of its staff in three years if the full cuts go ahead.

“It would be a disaster,” said Ruocco. “Not only for the immediate future, but 10 years from now when we no longer have researchers carrying out fundamental inquiries into pure science.” Ruocco also warned that the measures could lead to the closures of universities and their eventual privatisation.

A second year student, also quoted by the BBC, said that the law “would double my fees next year.” She added, “Universities would become elitist and only attract rich kids.”



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