

Police detain students, teachers suspected of cheating in Romanian school

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On July 5, large numbers of police and paramilitary gendarmes entered the Dimitrie Bolintineanu High School in the Romanian capital, Bucharest, where hundreds of students finished the last test in the national baccalaureate exams. Earlier that week, more than 30 teachers from the same high school had been picked up by the police and the Secret Services in what was ostensibly an operation against corruption at the national exams.

The Secret Services admitted that they had bugged rooms in the high school and had been following teachers for weeks. The teachers were strip-searched and interrogated throughout the night. They were later released without charges.

Students were rounded up and forcibly confined inside the high school for hours. Police cordons were set up to prevent parents from getting inside to contact their children. As more people gathered outside the high school, angry parents demanded that food and medical care be provided for the students. As police buses arrived to take the children for interrogation, scuffles broke out between police and the parents gathered outside.

The arbitrary and extra-legal nature of the operation was underscored when the prosecutor's office declared that the police were not acting under a court order to bring the children in for questioning, contradicting the police's earlier statements.

Fearing popular outrage, Social Democratic prime minister Victor Ponta declared that no such court orders existed, giving the signal to stop the operation. Minutes later, the police backed down and left the high school with only 17 students who had apparently voluntarily offered to be questioned that day.

It was later revealed in the media that court orders were indeed issued, but that they had not been carried

out.

Students later described their treatment, saying that they were manhandled and humiliated by officers. Three of them, including one high school girl, were forced to stand for two hours in their underwear in front of police officers. Interior Minister Radu Stroe intervened several times to defend police, saying that they acted "beyond reproach...on a strategy established by the prosecutor's office".

Forty more students have been called for questioning on Monday, and more are expected to be called in the following days.

This brutal and vindictive act of state violence, accompanied by the usual media frenzy, was meted out against young people taking what is called their "maturity exams". Most of these youth, some of whom had not yet turned 18, would have known nothing but hardship and economic insecurity as Romania's ruling classes carried out austerity programmes similar to those imposed throughout the rest of Europe. They have witnessed hospitals closed, neighborhoods devastated, and social infrastructure crumbling.

Many of the students' parents, exasperated by reporters' questions, said that they are state employees and could not even afford the sums that were being discussed for bribery.

Even youths who obtain a high school diploma or a college degree do not face better prospects. One in four young people in Romania is officially unemployed, mirroring the European average. The Labor Code enacted in 2011, modeled after European legislation, ensures that most young people that find work usually take low-paid, temporary jobs.

The national baccalaureate exams have been used in recent years as a battering ram against teachers' opposition to education reforms opening the sector to

private competition and performance-based funding.

After unions betrayed and dissipated a 2010 strike that garnered widespread public support and threatened the government's austerity agenda, the then-conservative government introduced video and police surveillance at the exams.

The then-education minister even boasted that 2011 "was the first year without any strikes or trouble at the national exams. This is also the year that we passed the Law of Education".

President Traian Basescu expressed his bitterness towards teachers and his determination to push through anti-social measures.

In 2012, he said that, "Unlike the miners and railway workers, the more educated segments of Romanian society have been so far harder to reform", vowing that cuts will be enforced against popular opposition: "Concerning education we have no more escape. The education system in Romania must be reformed."

Fewer than 40 percent of the students in the following two years passed the tests, as exams became less about the subjects than about the display of surveillance techniques.

The Social Democrats pointed to results published on July 8 as being an improvement over the previous years, with 55 percent of students passing the exam. The result is however nearly identical to previous years, as more than 60,000 students chose not to attend the exams at all—a 25 percent reduction over the previous year.

On Monday, Ponta issued a cynical condemnation of the events at the Bolintineanu high school, though it is highly unlikely that he was unaware of their preparation.

More fundamentally, his government is responsible for daily violence against workers and youth, in the form of relentless attacks on living standards. Having concluded this year an agreement with the IMF and the EU, the government has already sent a letter of intent pledging to sign another stand-by agreement, ensuring that international capital will complete even deeper attacks on the working class.

An emergency government order on June 27 provided for the elimination of a further 3,000 public sector jobs and the elimination of 60,000 vacant posts. The Romanian Postal Office announced another 3,600 layoffs as the company prepares for privatisation.

The government also liberalised the energy prices starting July 1, creating an immediate 8 percent price increase for households and a further 2 percent increase in October. Prices will continue to rise by 10 percent next year and by 12 percent every year thereafter, until 2018.

The government intends to complete the privatisation of state-owned companies. These companies, directed by private managers hand-picked from investment bankers and private CEOs and policed by the unions, have already left workers unpaid for months and now threaten tens of thousands of job cuts. The unions will not mount any serious defence against these attacks, organising small, one-day rallies to let off steam.

The use of massive police force against high school students and teachers is a warning to the entire working class that the social-democratic Ponta government, like governments throughout Europe, is prepared to use physical violence to suppress opposition to its anti-social policies.



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