Students Protest the Introduction of Tuition Fees (April 1999)

Abstract

The Action Alliance against Tuition Fees [*Aktionsbündnis gegen Studiengebühren* or ABS] formed in April 1999 to protest the Red-Green government's apparent unwillingness to make good on its campaign promise to institute a federal prohibition on tuition fees. The Krefeld Appeal functioned as the group's political platform. The students viewed the introduction of fees as socially regressive.

Source

Krefeld Appeal of the Action Alliance against Tuition Fees

The general introduction of tuition fees is at the top of the political agenda. This is nothing short of a historical turning point. In the end, it would mean that the main achievements of the period of education reform would be revised and that the basic social consensus in the area of education policy would cease to exist once and for all. Despite the fact that the new Red-Green federal government was voted into office by the vast majority of college students, not least because both parties made a campaign promise to legally prohibit tuition fees, government willingness to keep that promise in the area of official education policy appears to be flagging. Growing acceptance for the basic idea of making private, individual contributions to defray the institutional costs of the public education system can already be seen among segments of the SPD, the Greens, and the trade unions. Tuition fees – no matter which obfuscating name they are given – have already been introduced in several federal states (Baden-Württemberg, Lower Saxony, Berlin, Bavaria, and Saxony).

It is never enough to rely solely on negotiation techniques and tactical maneuvers when it comes to governments and parliaments. Instead, tuition fees can only be prevented through public pressure and a broad-based debate on the role of the education system. To further politicize the issue, the Action Alliance against Tuition Fees has been founded on the basis of the following political positions and demands:

Tuition fees must be rejected on the basis of societal, social, and educational concerns. They do not solve a single problem, but rather intensify the crisis facing the education system.

1. Tuition fees promote the privatization of social risk. Education will no longer be viewed as a public good to which everyone has a right, but rather as a service to be acquired and paid for, as something in which each individual invests his or her "human capital." In this sense, tuition fees are an integral part of a neoliberal policy agenda that aims to make the individual responsible not only for education, but also for unemployment benefits, health insurance, old age provisions, and other social obligations. For this reason, the debate on tuition fees is about more than just students. Instead, it serves as a social proxy to test and ultimately create acceptance for general, private cost-sharing for all higher education (beyond general compulsory education).

2. The social consequences and determining influences of tuition are harmful for society. Tuition fees foster anti-social personal educational behavior and non-solidarity, and thereby enforce the lack of social responsibility within the education system. They serve to further alienate so-called educationally disadvantaged social strata from higher education. Tuition fees mean that education is limited to those with the "traditional biography" (male, white, German, direct path from secondary school to military

service to university).

3. There is no such thing as “socially responsible” tuition fees! That is a contradiction in terms. Any coupling of educational opportunities with the (structurally unequal) distribution of private income and wealth in society will reproduce the very same inequality in education. This basic starting point cannot be counteracted by the student loan system, no matter how sophisticated it may be, as the development of the Federal Training Assistance Act (BAföG) shows. Student tuition fees thus intensify the social selection effects of the education system, and at the same time they also obscure the relevant political responsibility.

4. The claim that tuition fees serve to strengthen the decision-making position of students within institutions of higher education is false. The opposite is true. Tuition fees replace legal rights and participatory and contributory entitlement with a private market relationship between sellers and customers. The new “freedom” of students would thus only be disadvantageous. It would be limited to the students’ option of choosing between offers over which they have no influence whatsoever. If, for example, students are viewed only as customers and no longer as members of the university, then they will no longer be entitled to a seat or a vote on university committees or to participate in self-administered structures.

For these reasons, we demand:

– The fundamental, individual right to access to all forms of higher education at no cost. This pertains not only to the rejection of direct bills for student tuition, but also to all forms of education coupons and to private savings earmarked for education.

– The clear, legally enshrined prohibition of tuition in the Framework Act for Higher Education [*Hochschulrahmengesetz* or HRG] and in the higher education laws of the federal states. This prohibition must also apply to administrative fees and to tuition for second degrees; continuing, supplemental, and postgraduate studies; long-term studies; and doctoral studies.

– The termination of state [i.e. *Land*] pilot projects in which small, private, or semi-private elite institutions of higher education operate alongside public institutions, are substantially subsidized through public funds, and make use of the infrastructure for public institutions of higher education, but nevertheless charge considerable tuition fees.

– The fundamental equalization and mutual permeability of general, so-called vocational and academic forms of education. This requires, for example, the elimination of private fees for all-day vocational schools and master of crafts training.

– The implementation of and compliance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, ratified [in (West) Germany] in 1973, in which the federal government obliged itself to the progressive introduction of free education at the level of higher education (see also the passage in Article 26 of the U.N. Human Rights Declaration, December 1948).

Source: “Krefelder Aufruf des Aktionsbündnisses gegen Studiengebühren (ABS)” (April 1999), www.abs-bund.de/aktionsbuendnis/krefelder_aufruf/0001.html.

Translation: Allison Brown

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