

This is not school, this is not work!

Last 28h of January, students throughout Italy have taken the streets to remember Lorenzo, an 18-year-old student who died in workplace accident in Udine (Northern Italy). He died while carrying out an internship provided by his school as part of a nationwide government project "PCTO" - Percorsi per le Competenze Trasversali e l'Orientamento, which aims to give secondary school students and VET students job-related skills and competences through unpaid job placements as part of their education.

The news left all of us students, from north to south, in a state of anger and dismay. To die while at school is unacceptable and next to the pain you can't help but feel so much anger.

What happened, though somewhat unpredictable, was certainly not unimaginable in a country like Italy, that saw 1404 deaths on the workplace in 2021 alone. In a precarious working environment, where protections and welfare measures are suppressed year after year, it was probably only a matter of time before something like this happened.

Although Lorenzo was not properly carrying out the PCTO (the former 'Alternanza Scuola Lavoro') but a mandatory, unpaid internship at a specialised company, we need to acknowledge the role of the 'Buona scuola', a ministerial regulation of 2015 which introduced and normalised the introduction of work paths in Italian high schools. Already widely contested then, it remains a law that turned our public school system into a company.

Faced with a difficult world of employment, in which there is no place for young people, where precarious contracts abound, often with little protection, no investment in security whatsoever, the Buona Scuola contributes to the recognition and legalisation of all that is wrong with the current job market: the moral that is imposed on young people uncritically is 'work at any cost, whatever the conditions and the pay'. Instead of challenging this model, the Italian education system welcomes the demands of the working world without really thinking about what should be its goals, promoting precariousness, making it look

like an opportunity, that of dying at 18, on a school-sponsored, unpaid work placement.

Schools should be places where the conscience and personality of an individual is formed, where the citizen of tomorrow can grow and explore, conscious of their rights and duties, where one can shape their own future - not merely a factory producing obedient workers. It is for this reason that we think it is necessary, instead, to introduce school courses that can train students on employment and the job market, starting from the 'Workers' Statute' to contemporary rules on safety, rights and contractual modalities, and what can be expected from them.

Throughout the week of mobilization following Lorenzo's death, students pulled together to have their voices heard: no more PCTO, no more deaths in the workplace. Meanwhile, from the Italian Government and the Ministry of Education came only silence.

They preferred to let the police speak. During demonstrations in Rome, Turin, Naples and Milan there were violent charges on students as a result of the riots. For us, this is the umpteenth demonstration of the total inability of the Italian State not only to listen to the students' demands, but also to manage dissent towards institutions and to repress a healthy, democratic manifestation of ideas.

In the silence of a country that fails to discuss young people and the future, the wound left by the death of Lorenzo, who died at school, remains indelible.

Rete Studenti Medi

Our own flesh and blood

Lorenzo Parelli, an 18 year-old student, died while on a school-sponsored work placement. He died of exploitation, of school and work. He was crushed by a steel beam on the 21st of January 2022 while working for free in a Burimec metal carpentry in Lauzacco, Udine (Northern Italy).

His name is only the latest in the long list of those who lost their lives in the workplace. We cannot speak of an isolated incident, of an unfathomable fatality. Lorenzo died because students are put to work in the same exact workplace where 4 people a day lose their life. It is also not the first incident involving students in a government-sponsored work placement (in Italian, PCTO stage), nevertheless, no measure was taken to ensure the students' safety, nor the PCTO model was in any way rethought or examined critically.

Lorenzo's life was broken by corporate greed. By a school system that forces exploitation upon students in the form of unpaid, unsafe work placements, thus legitimising a job market in which companies and businesses compete downward on safety, salaries and precarious working conditions. The message that passes is that it is perfectly normal to work for free, without rights, safety, and without the possibility to organise through a union.

For years we have advocated for workplace safety courses at school which can be truly formative and helpful. For years we have advocated a critical re-examination and re-evaluation of a system that exploits, harms and kills.

Of all the governments Italy had in the last decades, none is without responsibilities. No one has ever stopped to question the PCTO model of school-sponsored work placements: on the contrary, all have always encouraged a tradeoff between knowledge, skills, and labour market demands - enforcing a managerial vision of education.

Today the consequences of this political model are tragically obvious.

We want to express our utmost solidarity and condolences to Lorenzo's family.

We won't stay silent in front of all this. As a student organisation we want to appeal to all the students, all the collectives and schools, all organisations in the country to say: "enough of this". School needs to be a place for growth and relation, not training grounds for exploitation, precariousness and death.

Our answer is total, immediate mobilisation, everywhere in the country. Already in the past days we have been active in forms of immediate protest, but we also need a nation-wide day of student mobilisation that can be a real response of

students against the PCTO model responsible for Lorenzo's death. For this reason, we promote, together with other student organisations and youth organisations in the country, the maximum mobilisation possible, on Friday 28th of January, with demonstrations and PCTO strikes. Mobilisation is only the first step: we need to rethink secondary education from its foundations, we need to rethink the world of employment, the very functioning of our society. We owe this to Lorenzo and to all the brothers and sisters, we owe this to our own futures: let's pull together, discuss, build and practice the alternative.

We will not be silent in front of Lorenzo's death.

Unione Degli Studenti - UdS

Link - coordinamento universitario

Rete Della Conoscenza

Chi si cura di te

Mi Riconosci

GKN - collettivo di fabbrica

FIOM - CGIL

Federazione Lavoratori della Conoscenza - FLC CGIL