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WINNERS OR LOSERS? LIBERALIZING PUBLIC SERVICES

Edited by Ellen Rosskam

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE ● GENEVA

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Edited by Ellen Roskam

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PREFACE

This publication is part of a two-stage project to examine the impacts of the liberalization of public services on a number of security concerns for workers — their employment security, income security, voice representation security, health and safety, etc. The Socio-Economic Security Programme of the International Labour Organization (ILO) initiated the project and Public Services International (PSI) was happy to respond to its request to collaborate. We believe the results will be of benefit to our 20 million members and their unions in 149 countries. We are indebted to our affiliates who put a great deal of time and careful consideration into answering the detailed and comprehensive questions, and to Education International, which cooperated with us in the survey and chapters on education services.

The results of the survey will appear in a companion volume. This publication represents an important introduction to the survey results, helping to put those results into context. Whilst the survey will offer data and case studies from real life, the chapters in this volume offer an analytical overview of the impacts of various forms of liberalization, deregulation, privatization and new managerialism in many public services. While it is true that a considerable amount has been written about some aspects of so-called reforms in some of these services — health, education, public utilities, for example — much of that literature has focused on the “commercial” aspects — costs, staffing levels and crude estimates of productivity. Even in these areas many of the claims made have been based more on theory and what might happen after the reforms have worked their way through the system. In many cases, where results have not lived up to expectations, this is not laid at the door of the “reforms” but rather at the door of governments who have not gone far or fast enough, or have backed off under pressure from “vested interests”.

The “reformers” tend to select atypical services to prove their point — there is a mountain of literature on reforms in the telecoms sector but, too often, little appreciation that this sector is quite special in the way that new technologies have transformed telecoms and related services. It is assumed that what happened in telecoms can be done elsewhere. Yet, in other services, there is often no new technology and sometimes no data — simply the application of theoretical dictates.

This is especially true in the areas examined in this project: what happens to workers, jobs, and income, working conditions, health and safety, service quality. In that respect, the chapters in this publication are bringing new perspectives, evidence and insights.

PSI hopes that the survey results, put in the context that these chapters provide, will give the ILO, PSI, Education International and other policy-makers a more firm basis from which to evaluate the nature and impact of the reform process. This will help us all provide quality services to a public that expects such services to be delivered by workers who are accountable, with governments, for the way in which such considerable public resources are used.

*Mike Waghorne, Assistant General Secretary,
Alan Leather, Deputy General Secretary,
Public Services International.*

LIBERALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING: IMPLICATIONS FOR WORKERS' SECURITY

2

by Eva Hartmann, Sebastien Haslinger
and Christoph Scherrer¹

1. Introduction

Higher education is currently undergoing a fundamental transformation, characterized by a clear orientation to the market. Many governments have implemented policies that foster competition among public institutions and between public and private institutions of higher learning and training. The latest development is the liberalization of national systems of higher education and training to allow foreign providers access to formerly closed national education “markets”.

While previously the terms of transborder cooperation in higher education were discussed and negotiated at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), opening markets to foreign providers falls under the jurisdiction of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The WTO administers the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), agreed at the conclusion of the Uruguay round in 1994, which includes education and training services. To date, a total of 54 WTO member states have committed themselves to allow foreign providers access to parts of their education system and to treat them in the same fashion as domestic providers. Currently a new round of negotiations on further liberalization of cross-border education is underway.

¹ University of Kassel, Germany. This paper was written with contributions from Nalie Belgin Erdem Pfeifle, Lorenza Villa Lever and Lucien van der Walt.

3 Case studies of liberalization experiences

For a more vivid account of liberalization experiences, we asked three researchers to relay the experiences of their respective countries. Because liberalization is a very new phenomenon, the case studies focus more on the experiences with privatization.

3.1 South Africa¹³

A striking feature of the South African situation is the rapidity with which the first post apartheid government, elected in April 1994 and dominated by the African National Congress (ANC), moved to adopt a neo-liberal policy framework. The 1994 policy platform of the ANC, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), was an unstable mix of Keynesian and neo-liberal prescriptions, but with the September 1994 RDP White Paper the focus shifted decisively to creating a favourable environment for private sector expansion through fiscal austerity and liberalization (Adelzadeh and Padayachee, 1994). The June 1996 strategy for growth, employment and redistribution (GEAR) advocated large scale privatization, fiscal austerity, economic liberalization and “regulated flexibility” in the labour market (Government of National Unity, 1996).

With welfare spending in 1996 constituting the largest single item of state expenditure, and education spending at nearly 7 per cent of GDP, the stress in GEAR and the 1997 White Paper on Social Welfare was on rationalizing expenditure and increasing the role of non-governmental actors in service provision. In terms of the higher education sector:

... there is a need to contain expenditure through reductions in subsidisation of the more expensive parts of the system and greater private sector involvement in higher education. This will concentrate public resources on enhancing the educational opportunities of historically disadvantaged communities (Government of National Unity, 1996, Section 6.1).

The commitment of the post apartheid government to the “creation of new South African higher education institutions based on the values and principles of non-racism and democracy” (Asmal, 2001) was thus coupled with a commitment to fiscal austerity and liberalization in the sector. This was in turn part of a broader restructuring of social welfare expenditure: spending on education was projected in 1997 to grow by only 3.4 per cent annually (van der Walt, 2000). Total welfare expenditure fell from 46.2 per cent to 44.7 per cent of the budget in financial year 1999-2000 (NEDLAC, 2000, p. 33). Given annual population growth of 1.5 per cent, and average inflation of over 7 per cent, the education budget was thus cut in real terms whilst social welfare expenditure declined as a proportion of a shrinking overall budget (van der Walt, 2000). Moreover,

¹³ By Lucien van der Walt, Department of Sociology, University of the Witwatersrand.

welfare spending was to focus on creating a safety net for those unable to access private services.

With 21 public sector universities, 15 advanced technical colleges (“technikons”), and a number of colleges for teachers and nurses, South Africa has an unusually large higher education sector for an African country. Under apartheid, the system was horizontally tiered into universities, technikons and colleges, as well as divided vertically into institutions for different racial and ethnic groups, with funding concentrated on institutions for Whites. (Current government policy thus distinguishes between “historically advantaged institutions” (HAIs), and “historically disadvantaged institutions” (HDIs) established for Africans, Indians and “Coloureds”.) Then, as now, these public institutions received the bulk of their income from government. Given the highly decentralized nature of the sector — key policy decision-making power resides at institutional level — state subsidies remain the key instrument for policy reform.

In the 1980s subsidies began to be reduced, and since 1994 this process has accelerated. The prestigious University of the Witwatersrand, for example, saw its subsidy decline by a third from 1995 to 2000 (Barchiesi, 2000). In 1999 the government reiterated that, “given the magnitude of our other priorities”, public sector tertiary education would not receive additional resources (Asmal, 2001).

Government policy instead stressed income generation by the institutions. The National Commission on Higher Education, established in December 1994, concluded in 1996 that institutions must increase (fee paying) student enrolments, feeder constituencies and programme offerings, and become more responsive to societal needs — in particular, to market driven knowledge production and vocationally orientated training (Cloete and Muller, 1998, pp. 5). These recommendations were included in the July 1997 White Paper on higher education (Department of Education, 1997), and envisaged a shift to “mode 2” knowledge production, differing from both traditional and applied research insofar as it is, at once, applied, transdisciplinary, team based, and based in and funded by different organizations (Cloete and Muller, 1998).

However, the emergence of public sector “market universities” (Bertelsen, 1998), able to generate additional funding through an expansion in the number of fee paying students and through the provision of commercial research, has been largely confined to HAIs and the best resourced HDIs, notably the University of Durban-Westville and the University of the Western Cape. Elite English speaking institutions such as the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand have commercialized primarily through the expansion of for-profit research (Bertelsen, 1998; Orr, 1997) and postgraduate student numbers. Historically, Afrikaans HAIs have focused upon a massive

expansion of undergraduate numbers through distance education and part-time classes. Student numbers at the Rand Afrikaans University rose from 11,872 in 1990 to 22,011 in 1998 (Bolsmann and Uys, 2000, p. 12), whilst enrolments in the distance education programme of Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education rose 25 per cent in 2001 alone (*Business Day*, 2001). The concomitant of this expansion has been a stricter recovery of student fees, shifting the student profile away from poorer working class, mainly African, students towards middle class learners.

By contrast, HDIs were less able to raise additional funding from student fees, given a generally poorer and shrinking student population (Habib and Parekh, 2000, p.4) and low levels of cost recovery, or from research work, given a less qualified staff component and weak research reputation. Many HDIs spent the latter 1990s in crisis. Despite an occasional rhetorical veneer of market orientation, HDIs have focused upon cost cutting, departmental closures and lobbying an unsympathetic government for more aid, rather than on expansion and marketization. The National Working Group on the Restructuring of the Higher Education System recommended that the number of public sector tertiary education institutions be reduced to 21 through disestablishments and mergers (Macozya, 2002). This merger process will effectively end the separate existence of HDIs.

The emergence of public sector “market universities” takes place alongside the rapid growth of private sector higher education in the 1990s. A rarity in the 1980s, there were up to 350 private providers by 2000, mostly small and offering programmes in a single field (Subotzky, 2001). Although data for the sector are incomplete,¹⁴ it is clear that many private providers rely on courses franchised from public sector universities, making the private/public distinction often unclear (Subotzky, 2001). Other private providers franchise courses from transnational institutions such as Bond University and Monash University (Australia), Business School Netherlands and De Montfortd, which has UK links (Levy, 2003, p.8). And, whereas most private providers worldwide are legally non-profit even when commercial, in South Africa the majority are for-profit institutions (Levy, 2003, p. 3).

At present, private institutions account for only a fraction of higher education students – possibly more than 30,000 as opposed to 600,000 students in the public sector – but may be expected to increase their market share (Levy, 2003, p.7). The significance of the surge in private sector higher education in

¹⁴ This is partly a function of belated government regulation of the sector, the lack of a central data collection system, and problems of definitional ambiguity (Levy, 2003, pp. 3–4).

South Africa lies mainly in its rapid growth, its relationship to the commercialization of public sector institutions, and the manner in which it represents a general commodification of higher learning.

The subsidy cuts and the uneven process of marketization have had important effects on academic labour. At the emerging public sector “market universities” there has been a usurpation of traditional areas of academic authority by an expansive and increasingly powerful administration through the application of private sector management models (Bertelsen, 1998; Webster and Mosoetsa 2001). Coupled to the new focus on profitable core business has been a rationalization of less viable disciplines, the increased use of administrative instruments measuring productivity, and a growing salary gap between academics and management. Thus the University of the Western Cape cut 40 academic posts in 1997 and 1998 as part of “reviewing its structures and academic programs to cut costs and to shift resources towards centres of excellence and relevance within the institution” and becoming a “major competitor” (Financial Mail, 2000). At the HDIs, however, where the market university model has foundered, the focus has been upon staff reduction.

Across the public sector, there has been a sharp increase in academic workload (Webster and Mosoetsa, 2001). In a survey of five institutions, including two “historically disadvantaged institutions” (HDIs), Webster and Mosoetsa found academic staff generally felt that their professional autonomy and status had been undermined by a welter of new controls over time and work. They also felt that work had intensified and the working week lengthened — in part due to pressure to generate additional income for the institutions — and that growing competition between staff, increased job insecurity, and divisions between full-time staff and a growing cohort of contract staff undermined job satisfaction and scholarly community. At the same time, however, there is no national union representing academic staff, union density amongst academics in the public sector is very low, and academic unions tend to be isolated from other campus constituencies, undermining solidarity. Teaching staff at private institutions are almost entirely non-unionized.

A parallel process of workplace restructuring has taken place amongst support service staff.¹⁵ Although comprehensive data do not exist, support

¹⁵ This category is used here to denote non-academic, non-managerial support occupations which do not directly contribute to knowledge production and education, but which are nonetheless crucial to the function of higher education institutions. These manual and menial occupations include catering, cleaning, grounds maintenance, general maintenance and security. If unskilled and artisanal support staff are counted together, there were 15,779 such workers in 1994 out of a total workforce of 45,200 (Subotzky, 2001, p. 5).

service outsourcing seems widespread amongst private institutions. A survey in 2001 found that all public sector tertiary education institutions had outsourced at least one support service function, and that 18 out of 21 institutions had done so since 1994. For many “historically advantaged institutions” (HAIs) this was part of a general drive to focus on the “core” business of marketization. For most “historically disadvantaged institutions” (HDIs) it was a response to financial crisis (van der Walt et al., 2002, pp.21–23). At least 5,000 out of a total of 15,779 support service jobs were lost as support functions were contracted to private companies. Whilst HDIs were well represented amongst the universities that cut the most jobs — the University of Fort Hare, for instance, shed 1,000 posts — even HAIs undertook large scale retrenchments. The University of the Witwatersrand cut 623 posts and Potchefstroom over 400 (van der Walt et al., 2002, pp. 24–26).

A number of workers have been reemployed by the outsourcing companies — 250 out of 623 at the University of the Witwatersrand — but generally at lower wages, without benefits, on an insecure basis, and under a more intense workplace discipline (van der Walt et al., 2002, pp.26–30). At the University of the Witwatersrand, wages for cleaners fell from around R2,227, plus health, pension, loan and study benefits, to R1,200 a month without benefits (van der Walt et al., 2002, p.24). Outsourcing has also resulted in general deunionization of support staff. Not only are the outsourced support service workers divided amongst four or more employers, one for each service, but few of these companies negotiate with trade unions. In only two out of 17 cases for which information was available did unions have a recognition agreement with at least one outsourcing company (van der Walt et al., 2002, pp. 29–30).

3.2 Mexico

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