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PROFESSORIEN, TIETEENTEKIJÖIDEN JA YLIOPISTOJEN OPETUSALAN LEHTI

Demonstrating against the Active Model





The demonstration against the active model gathered 7 000–8000 protesters, according to the police. The writer of this article, Melissa Plath, is standing on the right side of the "Yliopistotyöläiset" banner.

Members of the Association of Researchers and Teachers of University of Jyväskylä (Jytte) took part in the February 2nd demonstration against the 'active model' for unemployed persons, along with thousands of union members and other concerned citizens. Carrying a banner reading "Yliopistotyöläiset", Jytte members added the voice of university workers to the demonstration.

For those of us who travelled to Helsinki from Jyväskylä, the visible and vocal participation from the university sector unions was important. The active model, under the guise of supporting quick re-employment, punishes unemployed people who are not deemed active enough by the employment office. It increases inequalities by cutting benefits of people who are already in a precarious situation, and by failing to recognize the varying employment situations in different sectors and cities. The active model is a problematic response to unemployment, and one which will have a negative impact on traditional employment sectors, including academia.

In the academic sector in particular, it is not uncommon for researchers to have periods of unemployment. Funding for research is competitive and limited and universities have dealt with shrinking budgets by reducing staff. Researchers' employment is increasingly linked to external funding and the failure to ensure continuous external funding can result in unemployment. The active model creates significant hurdles for academic workers by implementing a set of requirements to be met each month which will take away from a researcher's ability to actively engage in ways that will support their re-employment, such as developing proposals, pursuing new opportunities for research collaboration, etc.

Both Finnish and international members of Jytte took part in the demonstration, highlighting our concern about the implications of the active model on the international members of the union. A recent study by the Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment shows immigrant unemployment has been 2 to 5 times higher than the native population, which means that the model will have an undue impact on international members of the Union. In a sector where international mobility is considered de rigeur, the potential negative affect of the active model on the ability of universities to recruit and retain international staff must be brought forward.

Finally, for the Jytte members taking part in the demonstration, participation was also about solidarity. We stand alongside the unemployed and with the other labor unions. We support the right to protest unfair conditions, whether they are from the employer or the government. We add the voice of university workers.

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Photos: Milla Talassalo

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