

Canan alađan

Education and Science Worker’s Trade Union-Eđitim Sen

“The Period that I Learned”

I joined the trade union movement in 1995; with Eđit-Sen; the foundation process of the Eđitim-Sen (Eđitim ve Bilim Emekileri Sendikası; Education and Science Labourers Union). After the foundation I immediately became a member of the trade union. I joined Eđitim-Sen, and became active in its branch. orum branch was the first place that I was assigned. It has a special place in my life. Trade union struggle was dynamic, it was very active, so you know, the buildings are always crowded, we learn how to organize the struggle but at the same time we somewhat socialized through our relations with the members at our age, and with older or younger members. Therefore they were also places where we formed productive, satisfying friendships, and learned a lot. Afterwards, I also took responsibilities for a short while. Then in 1996 Congress I became a member of branch executive committee. I continued in that role for two terms. In that period, meetings with people, women, men, parents during the workplace visits were teaching for us. At the same time, in Turkey, trade union movement was very dynamic; we were on the rise.

Then, slowly, let me talk about the process I noticed. About the activities related to women, for example, in the branches women’s commission started to work. In this period, discussions on how the women’s studies in the trade unions should be institutionalized, that there is inequality and how this should be eliminated; I started to learn there, too.

Then, in one of the congresses in the 1990s, [the formation of] women’s secretariat was accepted. In Eđitim-Sen women’s secretariat was reinforced also in the executive committees of its branches. Hence, women’s studies started to be conducted through that secretariat in a somewhat more systematic, and I mean, in a different institutional form. Thus, for all of us that was the period when integrating the secretariat into the trade union by-laws, and apart from that positive support and its mechanisms, when all these as policies were discussed in the trade unions. I think it was an attack against the KESK (Kamu Emekileri Sendikaları Konfederasyonu, Confederation of Public Employees Trade Unions), I mean against the confederaration; the place that KESK occupies in the labour struggle in Turkey. In 2009, something similar happened in İzmir. Then in 2014; I mean we encountered many of such operations one after another. The process that we went through has a different meaning. It was just before March 8. Women’s assembly meetings were held in relation to March 8; and this

was the first women's assembly in KESK. The women's assembly was recently institutionalized. And with great excitement we talked about the process ahead of us; we made plans, programs. Our March 8 activities; we were done with the preparations. Then the journal works started. As we were working on written material there was an operation, and many of my women friends who were members of trade union branches, Central Executive Committee, and myself, too, and many activist women in Ankara, 15 women, we were all arrested in the morning, rushing. Certainly, that was a period when we could somewhat foresee the consequences of the arrests. For, the repression, arrests, custodies were turned into means to use against the organized structures, the organizations that struggle. I mean they did not need any evidence. They arrested all of us for four days, and then nine of us were imprisoned. This way they wanted to send a message to women's studies, and actually both to women's struggle in general and to the women who were active in the trade union in that period. But I think that this proved to be futile. For instance, none of the planned 8 March activities were disrupted. The journal was published, posters were published, all outdoor activities that were planned were owned by our friends who participated in the women's studies, regardless of whether they had responsibilities or not.

In contrast, I mean contra for the system, it had the following effect: it turned out to be another agenda for women. It turned out to be a means for struggle and in the prison, we, for example, everyday received hundreds of letters, postcards; we had many relations and communication networks. There were prison demonstrations; letters all the time. I think this was a response in itself. And when we were brought to court for the first time after eight months; I mean, we were in prison not knowing what we were accused of for a long time. What was the indictment, the indictment against us, its details, on what basis we were kept in prison... If I am not wrong an indictment was prepared after eight or seven or six months. I never forget the content of the indictment. I was both angry and thought that it was negligent. The minutes of women's assembly. I mean, such ignorance of the organization that is attacked, seized ... We made this public via press; to make it known that the minutes of the women's assembly for which we had worked hard was included into the indictment file as the evidence for crime. I also stated this in the court.

It's like this; claims related to the March 8; connecting March 8 to something else; I mean, approaching the activities, events that are organized by women for centuries as if they are owned by an organization. Well, it was totally baseless; and I think the ones who claimed as

such did not take it that seriously, but it was used as another form of attack against organizing through intimidation, making us look guilty. After eight months we were released by the court pending trial. I think that was an experience. I mean, in this country, I have always told so; that this is an experience of everyone who raises their voices against repression, exploitation, these relations of oppression-subordination, all this seizure, authority, the heedlessness of the authorities. Thus, we lived through that experience, too. We had the opportunity to see as insiders. We all read or observed as outsiders; the process of imprisonment was when we looked from the inside. And that is a totally different matter. I mean, experiencing the inside of the prison as a woman is the topic of a totally different conversation. There, too, is certainly a masculine place; but the mentality of putting in prison is already a masculine mentality. The way that place is organized is meant to make you remember this everyday, again and again. Prison stays as such an experience in my life.

For the dismissals, let me say, they are another form of training, specific for this period. I mean, they have no legal basis. I mean, you wake up one morning, and then you see that in a list of a thousand, two thousands... I was in a list of many more people... and you all, without having the opportunity to ask how you are related, on which basis, they seize their rights as public servants. From now on, you are not public servants. I think that this is an approach, training by hunger. Limiting life spaces in all aspects, a way of making you submit, a means of doing so. And this is not something that is totally unexpected for me. For, this has been frequently expressed by the rulers; it is both told in discourse, and we also saw that it is put into practice, and humiliation by calling as the dismissed. Hence, dismissals are not that unexpected for me. But this does not mean that they are just. I think that it is a very big seizure; I mean this is also a big expropriation of labour. For, we all come from poor families, and live moderate lives. I mean in order to live independently, to get to the positions we have... and we also need to talk the work itself...this training activity is a social activity at the same time.