

## **Interview with Fevziye Sayılan**

Education and Science Workers's Trade Union

### **“Organized Intervention”**

*Fevziye. You have been involved in the training works of both Eğitim-Sen (Eğitim ve Bilim Emekçileri Sendikası, Education and Science Labourers Union) and KESK (Kamu Emekçileri Sendikaları Konfederasyonu, Confederation of Public Employees Trade Unions) from the very start until the end. You took part in both the organizational works and in the training process. You were involved in not only the women-only training but also in the mixed ones. Especially there is this that we couldn't put into practice – for instance, you organized a training program for the central executives of the KESK. Would you like to talk about those training sessions? If you could talk about the earlier training process, progressing towards the present, we can perhaps and if you could also include today's conditions we will have the opportunity to hear both the changes and unfortunately the continuities.*

Yes, this is possible. My most active relation as a trade union member was through education. Thus, starting with the 1990s, let's say 1995. We have KASAUM (Kadın Sorunları Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi, Women's Studies Research Center) and, we had, let's say, somewhat organized intervention by means of KASAUM study group. I was involved in many of these, I mean, it is an exception that I was not there. In some of them I was involved in programming. But mostly I participated as a speaker. We programmed with friends. In the training sessions in the first period, we had this goal. Through time this became a routine. After our meeting yesterday I thought on it. In the first period, how can we achieve structural transformation in the somewhat mixed structures, like the structures in trade unions, how can we achieve structural transformation with a view to gender equality, and how should we use training for this goal. We had this issue in focus. And thus, we also had commissions on women's issues in the trade unions, formed in the labour movement, in general. There is this historical experience in our legacy, a form of commission, called women's commissions. But we did not want to settle with that.

*You were already involved, right?*

Yes. We did not want to be locked into these commissions. What kind of structures we would find Perhaps, in that first period that meeting we held through KASAUM meant this: for KESK, too, meeting feminism.

*Ok. Was it the trade union, voicing the demand?*

Yes. The trade union was demanding, certainly. But I think, the demand was there because we enabled connection. For, we were also the women members of the trade union. Since we were all in the field of education, in general... Eğitim-Sen was not called Eğitim-Sen in that period. Right?

*Eğit-Sen.*

It was called Eğitim-Sen, right? Before KESK we started the trainings in the Eğitim-Sen. The trainings that we held in Eğitim-Sen were more like the ones in the ÖDP (Özgürlük ve Demokrasi Partisi; Freedom and Democracy Party). I mean the first experience of the feminist movement in terms of the relations with mixed structures, with political structures and trade unions was in the ÖDP. Thus, how to transform these structures, where do we meet resistance, which instruments we have, what shall we do. We were involved in heated, productive debates in that period. Now, as I said yesterday, too, I am really sorry that we did not leave much written material on this topic; this is a significant shortcoming. For example, we wanted to start by using gender as a concept, as a term. Today, our analyses are normalized, it came a part of our word, our politics; but what was gender in that period? It is, in fact, a simple term. There is sex and there is gender. It is, certainly, that simple. It is so much loaded ideologically. As soon as we explain gender there is the feminist introduction. And simultaneously reaction rises. With that you need to deal with this; this is reasonable. But there is more to that. It's not only about feminism, the fact that we are from KASAUM, we, too, rely on science. I mean what we say is more possible to be right. Hence, we really emphasized the concepts. I even remember that I explained feminism. Feminism, patriarchal capitalism, gender, I mean we proceeded with these concepts. Certainly, there was resistance. There was a mass, having difficulty in locating these concepts within the scope of Marxist terminology. There was serious ideological resistance. We were involved in unnecessary, sometimes boring discussions. That was the first period, and the training process was not that quiet and reliable. In any case as I look back I see these as productive discussions. There were friends who resisted strongly against the use concepts,

signifying resilience started to use these without much problem in a while. At least, these concepts/terms turned out to be parts of trade union discourses.

This is actually a noteworthy achievement; but in terms of transforming the structures, we were not daydreamers. Of course, structures, those connected to labour organization have a historical memory and there is big and important masculine habits. Hence, those structures were adopted or accepted for a period; but it is not that easy to integrate and put them in practice. We still have these problems. I mean similar problems might arise; but at least there is no more ideological resilience. Not a meaningful resilience. Ideological resilience points might exist; but these terms reserved themselves an important place within the scope of the general trade unions discourse. I mean, we called it equality between women and men, perhaps gender equality, but at the core lied this. The other convincing reason was that we were all from leftist origins. It is not only ... we also use a socialist jargon. For a simplistic liberal, liberal feminist resistance might have been more, but the analysis of capitalism, also neoliberal policies, and the labour regime that neoliberal policies brought in. As we started talking about these topics the ideological resistance of the broader male group dissolved. Of course, this was an important stage.

What else can I say about these trainings? Well. Trainings were also very exciting; actually, this was a period when trainings were transformative. Training might still be transformative. But in that first period, streets, actions, trainings; these were all intertwined. In the first period, the unfolding of the training was part of the militancy process. Thus, its transformative effect was stronger. As the institutionalization to place the trainings were somewhat more like routine; as it becomes a part of the general discourse it does not lose its transformative power, but the enthusiasm of the first period was not there in the second half of the 2000s.

*And everything was new, then. I think, women had many claims and expectations and these had many implications. That is another reason.*

Yes, they had implications. Because, the questions that we were concerned about, the problems that we pointed were those critical ones, actually lived by everyone. At the same time, this was not only about the trade unions, we revealed the male dominance in the leftist structures, in the left, in the trade unions. We had the opportunity to name many problems, which we felt at unease, which we could not name, but which we could notice. This also gave way to women's power. Let's say, a womanly enthusiasm, something that is transformative, some sentimentality, and also a collectivity. And this was effective in the structures, partially. Thus,

as a result of these transformation we had some structural achievements. As we observe today, we have women's secretariat. Yes, there might be a series of problems; or the quota; opening space for women... We have discussed so much to ensure equality in representation; for, the most intense resistance was on this topic. For example, we had training in its own training space where we could interrogate sexism. Then, after a while, let's call it the de facto period; after that period, perhaps in the 2000s, we could have legal status and a recognized bureaucratic instrument. I guess so. Was it 1998? This was in 1998, I think. Certainly, institutionalization brings in both advantages and disadvantages. Institutionalization was an important position; but as it was routinized, it might disrupt enthusiasm and transformative [aspect].

#### *About the dates*

Yes. We can correct them later. I could not remember the exact dates. Yes. As institutionalization took hold; as structures were formed, more planned trainings. In the first period the trainings were more mass-based by the participation of those who were present, who wanted to attend, who wanted to be there. Later on, it turned out to be the training of the selected. This is certainly very important. After the institutions are formed, structures are formed, it is the trade union organs, the trade union bureaucracy that determines who will participate in the training. This is good to a certain extent; I mean including all administrators into the training process, I mean that they are trained, was good at least in terms developing sensitivity for gender equality. But in a while this turned into some sort of routine. So I think this caused a decrease in its transformative power. Actually, this is the case in all trainings. But, including the higher ranking administrators of the trade union into the training, making them a part of the transformation was stated in our first manifest of equality, our manifest of equality within the scope of trade union. Unfortunately, we could not succeed in this.

It seems that our friends assume they are sensitive in this matter. A couple of trials were not that successful; we had some unsuccessful trials with the executives of the KESK in the first period. They were not that good trainings. But in the following process our friends who took part in the very high commissions stayed at a distance to such trainings. We had trainings at the level of branch administrators.

This was an assumption; but it was important. I think, this is still a deficiency. None of the higher administrations each period have not taken part in this.

*Could we talk about the first women's convention? About its preparatory process. For, you were there from the start till the end. If I'm not wrong you were in the central commission, committee.*

Within the scope of KESK?

*That of Eđitim-Sen.*

Yes. I also took part in the KESK, from beginning. But, certainly, I was the organizer in Eđitim-Sen. That was, of course, an amazing period. Hundreds of militant women; I even started my speech as such, in a very ..... style. I mean, for us it was also a period of exploration. We were learning from each other. Those were very exciting and beautiful days. Besides, in the process of organizing we also pursued truly participatory methods. I think that these participatory methods had considerable contribution in the achievements of the convention. In the process we asked for the views of all the branches throughout Anatolia, reviewing them; I mean none thought that their voices were lost. We spent much effort and energy to find the common points; we spent too much time for sure; but it was worth it. And it was an important, let me say, an important moment. For, Eđitim-Sen had a transformative effect on KESK; it mobilized the KESK. The transformation [pushed] the other trade unions, affiliated to KESK, for example BES (Büro Emekçileri Sendikası, Office Workers Trade Union) was for a certain period Maliye-Sen (Maliye Çalışanları Sendikası, Finance Workers Trade Union), right? SES (Sađlık Emekçileri Sendikası, Health Workers Trade Union), likewise. From time to time we did those, too; all together, of course. But the materials we used in Eđitim-Sen, the quality of the training, the participants were very productive and transformative. I think that regarding critical training, we practised emancipatory training to the extent possible. Now, I wish that we had written all these more actively; we let the time handle the processes and collecting the outcomes. I mean if we had done so we would have more in our hands.

*Thank you.*