

Gülay Toksöz

Education and Science Workers' Trade Union-Eğitim Sen

“Our destroyed rights”

We would love to hear about your life.

I am retired as professor from the Department of Labour Economics and Industrial Relations, at the Faculty of Political Sciences (Ankara University, Ankara, Turkey). I retired last year. During the dismissals I preferred to retire. My interest in women's labour has a long history. When 1975 was announced the International Women's Year, we conducted research on the socio-economic status of women in Turkey, in the Tüm İktisatçılar Birliği (Association of All Economists); later it was published as an extended booklet.

Later, when I graduated from the university, I worked in the Research Institute of the Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (Confederation of the Revolutionary Workers, DİSK), between 1978 and 1980. I worked with Professor Sadun Aren; and in this process I started to think on the women's organizing in the union. And then, 1980 military *coup d'état* took place. By then, I was a Ph.D student in the Faculty of Political Sciences. I decided to change the topic of my Ph.D thesis from women workers and trade union organization in Turkey to immigrant women workers in Germany and tradeunion organization; I thought it would be apt to do so. I went to Germany in 1980. This is the topic of my Ph.D thesis. As I returned to the country in 1992 I started working in the Faculty of Political Sciences. Together with Professor Seyhan Erdoğan we conducted research about women working and active in the unions, affiliated to Türkiye İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (Confederation of Trade Unions in Turkey, TÜRK-İŞ). This research, too, was published in 1998; its title: Türkiye'de Sendikacı Kadın Kimliği (The Identity of Unionist Women in Turkey). Hence, I have been interested in union organization and women's studies for a long time. In this respect, when the civil servants started to organize it was not possible for me to stand at a distance. Although I do not remember the distant past in detail, I recall that starting with the 2000s I have participated in the training activities, in the training activities for women in various unions, and mainly in the Eğitim ve Bilim Emekçileri Sendikası (Education and Science Labourers Union, Eğitim-Sen). I participated as a professor; I lectured. But, to tell the truth, I had not kept the record of my activities.

Thenceforth, I participated in a variety of trainings in Kamu Emekçileri Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (Confederation of Public Employees Union, KESK), and gave lectures in women's conventions. For example, I found one such presentation I made on March 15, 2008, in a symposium, registered in the KESK archives. Its title was, "Our rights are eliminated, not discrimination". In fact, I gave lectures in the following years; but now I do not remember the details.

Apart from this, I also participated in the trainings within the scope of Büro Emekçileri Sendikası (Clerical Laborers Union, BES) and Sağlık Emekçileri Sendikası (Health Laborers Union, SES).

My works were published in KESK women's journal, especially every November. I contributed to other KESK publications on women's labor.

Certainly, I was a member of Öğretim Elemanları Sendikası (Teaching Staff Union, ÖES) when it was first founded. Then, as ÖES joined the Eğitim-Sen (Eğitim ve Bilim Emekçileri Sendikası; Education and Science Labourers Trade Union) I became a member of the latter.

Hence, I participated in various activities, organized within the scope of the trade unions, by the ÖES or KESK.

Ok. Would you share your reflections on the present state of the gender equality policies of the KESK and the affiliated trade unions? About the present conditions...

Now, as a matter of fact the member profile of the trade unions that are affiliated to the KESK are quite different from the workers trade unions. At the time when we conducted research on workers trade unions there was no statistical information; let me say, there was no sound statistical information in the '90s. We estimated that the ratio of women members were approximately 10%. Roughly, in a population of one million union members there were approximately 100 thousand women members. But what is more interesting was that the majority of women union members worked in large scale enterprises. And in such enterprises the education level of women workers were slightly higher than the average education level in Turkey. For example, if the average education level is primary school the women factory worker is a high school graduate. Still, the workers trade unions are male dominant structures and it was quite difficult for women to participate in decision making mechanisms. And our research revealed that women executives of the trade unions are few and all are university graduates. In other words, they have proved themselves with their education and profession and thus, 'got the right to be executives'. On the other hand, unions of civil servants had a very

different profile – here I refer to KESK since I do not have much information about the other unions. For, the ratio of women members were much higher; so was their education level. Thus, the way these women took part in the union movement and their demands were different from those in workers trade unions. Thus, women in these union structures have been more demanding for a more just and more democratic process. For me, one increasingly solid expression of this state of affairs is that the gender quota demand could be raised. I could not keep track of the extent of its recognition. It might have been recognized partially; or perhaps it was not accepted at all. There were some setbacks in practice but this is the sensitivity about representation.

Another issue is the formation of women's assemblies. Formation of women's secretariats and demanding resource allocation from the budgets of the trade unions. (...) I assume the highest is around 1/3 in KESK's line of work. I can talk about the trade unions affiliated to TÜRK-İŞ but they [women] are in no way represented. There are no women's secretariat, either.

On the other hand, in the trade unions, affiliated to KESK women could make their demands for the formation of units, bound by the by-laws and ensuring that these units have a certain degree for autonomous movement, and that they are provided with resources. This is very important. I think that especially in the formation of the gender equality based demands women, who are organized within the scope of KESK have been affected by their close relations with the women's movement in Turkey. Women's movement strengthened in the late 1980s and in the 1990s and 2000s it recorded progress through action. Certainly, this movement has multiple constituents; but its overriding aspect is that it is feminist. Women who participate actively in the trade unions either come from within this movement or they are open to relate to this movement even if they do not come from within the movement. in Turkey. Hence, I think that women's presence in the KESK has been affected by the feminist demands of women's movement in Turkey and carried these demands to the trade unions. (...) When we look at the workers trade unions, even in the units where women have relatively stronger voice their demands are limited to the labor-related topics. In other words, their demands are related to worklife, and these demands target wage policies. The demands for daycare, on the other hand, are secondary; thus when it comes to collective bargaining daycare and similar demands are quickly set aside. But here I would like to underline that among union and workers' demands, none goes beyond labor or worklife. However, women's demands in KESK and affiliated trade unions are against inequality and discrimination in worklife; still these demands are integral and thus, they go beyond the problems at hand. And we observe this fact in terms of the

disposition against violence against women (VAW). (...) In this respect, almost every statement, every action represents a very solid struggle to end the VAW in Turkey. Certainly, the increasing VAW has a significant role in this. I mean, I say increasing violence; because I think it is on the rise. Sometimes we hear the following arguments: do we think that the VAW is on the rise because what is already there is becoming more visible? No, this is not the case. VAW in Turkey has increased. As women's will for a more egalitarian life in Turkey has met with broader recognition among the masses and as women continued to voice this they have been subjected to more violence. More briefly, as women stopped submitting [to male power] men's reacted violently. Battering and similar violence had already been a fact of domestic life, but I think that violence in the form of femicide increased significantly after 2000. Thus, for women in KESK and in member trade unions struggling against VAW is very important. Dolayısıyla KESK ve üye sendikalardaki kadınlar açısından şiddetle mücadele çok önemli. A similar significant issue is sexual harassment. Women members of the trade unions are sensitive to harassment not only in the worklife but also within their own trade unions; to raise this as an issue and struggle against it. Another important point for KESK and affiliated trade unions is the recognition of differences in sexual orientation and that they stand against the related discrimination and violence. I mean, unfortunately, this is not custom in workers trade unions. Even in those unions which define themselves as the most progressive. But KESK, and especially Eğitim-Sen, showed real sensitivity in this respect; and its representatives attended related activities.

Participatory democracy. Yes. Women members of KESK demanded that women take part in decision making mechanisms. They fought for this; and they stand up against gender division of labour. It is important that parenthood should be put forth in the demands related to carework in order that they go beyond considering it as merely women's responsibility and recognizing that it is a shared responsibility.

As I was going through the women's archive of the KESK, a woman, in her talk in a meeting or an event quotes from an Argentinian woman: 'We want revolution on the streets, at home and in our bedrooms.' This is very important. I think that demanding transformation not only in the public sphere but also in the private sphere, ensuring that for equality the relations between women and men in private spheres are free from domination is one of the most solid expressions of the holistic approach. Hence, I believe that women's movements have affected women members of KESK, and in general women who have been active in KESK tried to direct the trade union movement with an egalitarian viewpoint and feminist causes; this is its

distinctive feature. But how about the practice and structural transformation? This is another question; a topic for other broad research.