

## **Işıl Ünal**

Education and Science Workers' Trade Union-Eğitim Sen

### **"Communication with the teachers was very instructive"**

Hello everyone. This is Işıl Ünal. I worked in the Faculty of Education Sciences. My connection with Eğitim-Sen (Eğitim ve Bilim Emekçileri Sendikası, Education and Science Labourers Trade Union) started with merger between the ÖES (Öğretim Elemanları Sendikası, Teaching Staff Trade Union) and the Eğitim-Sen. Previously, I was organized in the ÖES. Actually, immediately after the merger a significant problem emerged. We as academics stepped into a trade union where almost only teachers were organized. And thus, there was a long discussion on how the academics would struggle and position in Eğitim-Sen. I mean, we can say that discussions that have not yet been resolved, continue. From the perspective of women's struggle or gender struggle, my interest on the topic had already emerged years ago in the İlerici Kadınlar Derneği (Progressive Women's Association, İKD). The struggle there was very significant for me to see the issue in-depth. I was not an academic then. I was just graduated from the university. I am talking about the '70s. Then after I joined the academic life my interest turned out to be more academic knowledge. I mean, doing academic studies on gender. Something like that. Due to a change in the structure of our faculty departments to train teachers were also founded in the faculty. While it was the Education Sciences Faculty, by the addition of a department for training teachers there emerged a different structure in the faculty. Since I thought that teachers' perspectives on gender are especially important and that it would be significant for their relations with the students or in continuing the struggle in the schools I offered gender courses, especially at the undergraduate level. Later on I offered these courses at the graduate level; but for me undergraduate (student) groups were more important; I also offered courses on discrimination.

Afterwards, after we joined Eğitim-Sen, I took part in the women's convention; but I don't recall participating in such works beforehand. Unfortunately, I was not involved in such work; but I performed conversations in the branches within the scope of March 8 events, and generally November 25 events. For, I valued these: I could interact with the teachers, I could get to know them more closely; and conversing with teachers on this topic was teaching for me, too. It helped me gain experience. You do not come across such meetings, conversations, as I said, in the way you participate in the women's convention in relation to gender. I also took

responsibility in certain commissions in almost all democratic education conventions. For example, financing, multi-culturalism and the like. But I think I was not that much involved in the preparatory periods of the women's conventions; I mean I remember as such.

For example, women's employment symposium and similar symposiums were organized from time to time; I prepared and delivered talks in such occasions. These, certainly, had contributions to the trade union, in relation to the women in the trade union, regarding women teachers, and for me and for my relation with the teacher candidates in the faculty. For, I mean, knowing what is happening in the schools also affected my relation with the professionals who would be working in those schools. This was important; it was a significant experience for me.

What was my contribution to the trade union? These works that we pursued together with the women's secretariats certainly had much contribution personally on my part. But there might have been some positive developments in the trade union, in its environment. But still, I do not think that much progress have been made in Eğitim-Sen and in other trade unions, affiliated to the KESK on this matter, even today. I mean, it must have been meaningful for the women to reach a certain consciousness or our male friends might be practising auto-control in decision-making or observing representativeness considering that in general women's secretariats would come against... But basically, I think that these structures are still male structures, unfortunately. Wish it were not like that. Certainly, in the final analysis, it needs time. It needs long times to spend together, to stay together for a long time. I mean, for example, when it was necessary to talk in the trade union, here I am talking about Eğitim-Sen; I did not do much with the KESK (Kamu Emekçileri Sendikaları Konfederasyonu, Confederation of Public Employees Trade Unions), I did not take part in the activities in the general structure. I mean, I remember criticizing this masculine structure, masculine relations, this point of view; but you know you do not get much by criticism. This can be achieved by developing relations among equals; bringing attention to power relations, making their questioning possible. But I remember that we changed the milieu of the faculty significantly by founding women's groups, organizing many activities with the women students in the faculty. Certainly, my observations about the trade union is also true for the faculties; I can say that they continue to be masculine structures.

Yes. I mean the academic knowledge that we produce transform with these works. In the beginning we might not be too sensitive; but after some time when considering an issue we start to question it with a gender perspective. Perhaps we first just mention the gender issue, but

afterwards we include it into the analysis. I think that I did so; through time. For example, now I am not in the university; but I get together with women outside the university. We discuss gender issues. In the period when I have been outside the university we edited a volume with my students and other colleagues, working on education; Eđitimin Cinsiyeti (Gender of Education). Now, we organize Gender of Education Seminars within the Scope of Bir-Arada Association, especially inviting Eđitim-Sen members. Mostly women members of Eđitim-Sen attend these seminars; we have really good discussions, enthusiastic ones. I believe these will continue and expand more.