

Nurşen Yıldırım

Education and Science Workers' Trade Union-Eğitim Sen

“Questioning ourselves”

My name is Nurşen Yıldırım. I am a literature teacher. After 27 years of teaching I retired. I started teaching in the '90s; but my involvement in the trade unions, started with the Eđit-Der (Eđitimciler Derneđi, Educators Association) in 1988. In the 1990s, until Eđitim-Sen (Eđitim ve Bilim Emekçileri Sendikası, Education and Science Labourers Trade Union) was founded I worked in the Ankara Branch of Eđit-Der. We were in Sincan, then. We would visit the branch but just for conveying news about branches, I mean it was in the form of representation. Later, in 1995, when our trade unions merged and became Eđitim-Sen, we worked in the Women's Commission in the Headquarters. In fact, I can say that we founded the commission. Together with the friends from Eđitim-İş and with those from Eđit-Sen, we saw that we need a women's commission and we started working on that. In that period, none of the biggest problems was that there was no women in any of nine executive committees. One of most important one for us was the education works. In 1996, I participated in the first training works, organized by the Education Secretariat of the Headquarters and the MLSF. Besides other topics we also had trade unions and women as a topic in this training session. We were there as friends from Women's Commissions of the Headquarters. There were friends from various branches.

In fact, that training was one of those where we developed, questioned ourselves and searched for ways to see what we could do as women. Again, we met with friends from MLSF; they were already supporting women's studies. Then we decided to write down a project; we prepared a project, together with KASAUM (Kadın Sorunları Uygulama ve Araştırma Merkezi, Women's Studies Research Center). Actually this was a three-staged project. It was named as Sensitivity Towards Gender Issues. We had its first stage on May 30 – 31, 1998. The second stage was on August 21 – 27, 1998. In the third stage, we would have the branches here to organize their training; friends from the branches would plan, organize and pursue training in their own branches. This was somewhat training the trainers. This was the first of such work. Here, 13 branches were organized. We had 13 actively working women's commissions. Because these were, I mean there was no women's secretariat but women's commissions worked and produced energetically in these branches. And these branches fed into the

Headquarters. We used the outcomes we had in these branches in the DEK (Demokratik Eğitim Kurultayı; Democratic Education Convention). We used them in the Women's Convention of the KESK (Kamu Emekçileri Sendikası Konfederasyonu, Confederation of Public Employees Trade Unions). There we produced and worked together. These trainings were great; but before them we had this project targeting women where we had trainings with trainers from outside that we started in June '97. This, for example I'd like to read. For example, our first topic was Women's Movements in the World and in Turkey. Muazzez, the OLEYİS (Türkiye Otel Lokanta Eğlence Yerleri Sendikası, Hotels, Restaurants, Entertainment Places Trade Union of Turkey) Counsellor presented on the women's issues and women's movements. Fevziye from the Faculty of Education Sciences presented on the women's issues in Turkey. Our second topic was the trade unions and working women. We held that in 1997. Aksu from KASAUM presented on capitalism and sexism. KASAUM was actively working. Seyhan Erdoğan, expert in Yol-İş presented on trade unions, trade unions from the historical perspective. And Hatice Pehlivanoglu, the Women's Secretary of KESK presented on the public trade unions. And Serpil Üşür (now Serpil Sancar) from the Faculty of Political Sciences presented on Policies for Supporting Women. Now, why were these important for us? In fact, we used the outcomes in these events in the Women's Conventions, in our training activities, in our internal procedures and essentially, these were the empowerment trainings for us. We were acquiring knowledge, and we expanded that knowledge to our friends in the branches and to the schools, to our friends in the schools. We had this goal of publishing a brochure, following the three-staged training on sensitivity to gender issues that we had with the KASAUM and MLSF We were a good team. I mean, we were not on our own. I was in the Women's Commission in the Headquarters; there, we were 15 women, at least; and we were meeting and producing regularly on a weekly basis. With the friends from the branches, volunteers and especially during the DEK, we were more productive and crowded. We published the outcomes of the trainings in the Eğitim ve Yaşam Dergisi (Journal of Education and Life), the publication of the trade union. Again, why this training was important for us? On the one hand, it was the training of trainers; on the other hand, we asked the questions, what is the perspective that the trade union should embrace towards women, what should be its women's policies, what should be the women's policies of the Eğitim-Sen, what should be KESK's women's policies? Besides, how should these be in the external relations; also how should they be in the internal procedures? Of course, we had discussions on quota, on

women's offices, on positive support. What should be, and how should it be were among the most discussed topics. We even encountered hinderances against carrying the discussions on quotas or the decisions we took on quotas to the publishing venues. Overall, we were trying to pursue our training activities; though we faced with difficulties it was nice to work with women. What did we experience? I mean, let me tell what I had on my part. As I said, the first training was in '96. I was a participant then, though we organized the women bit by bit. Above all, we had significant empowerment. Since there were also general topics, we had discussions on the basics of trade unions, why do we need collective bargaining and right to strike, what form of struggle we should launch, what should we demand, what should we follow. I mean, working class, workers' organization, collective organization were the points that we discussed in those trainings. We were getting organized, in general. Apart from that we , listened to the MLSF's women's policies, and discussed; and they listened to us. I was empowered, we were empowered with our friends; we acquired knowledge, and that was very important. At the same time, I was thinking: How can I adjust this to the trade union; how can I do this; how can I transliterate this? And then with friends we started to organize this training. I mean, on the one hand, I was the participant in a training; on the other hand, we turned out to be the organizers of a training. I mean, we were amateurs; we could not devise the program. Thanks to the friends in KASAUM; they were very helpful. Professor Serpil, Fevziye, Aksu from the Ankara University. This gave us advantage: they were, too, members of the trade union. I mean they were members of the ÖES (Öğretim Elemanları Sendikası, Teaching Staff Trade Union); then after the merger, they were in the Eğitim-Sen. Therefore, we also cooperated with the women from the KESK; and women there knew the discussions in general. I mean, they were not that much outsiders. Because they were also struggling in the trade union. They, too, produced policies regarding women. Our discussions mostly centered on positive support and quota, and on women's secretariat, on women's office. We discussed collectively, on how to do this; and these friends were always with us in the trainings. They guided us, and then we started to produce together. For, we progressed quite rapidly. I think we could form the basis very well. I mean, after each training we noticed this: we invited one woman from each branch; the women could not do anything on their own; more correctly, they were not let to do so. Otherwise they could act. Then we thought on what to do. Let's invite two or three women and decrease the number of the branches in our calls. We started to invite two women to our trainings and to our general meetings. They turned out to be

stronger. Because two or three women could struggle better and come up with better activities. Besides, these trainings could be expanded to the grassroots. For, the women who participated in the training, for example those women who opposed the positive support or those who opposed the quota or Women's Office started to discuss on these topics after the trainings; they also made these discussions in their branches; and we changed after these processes. I mean we all changed in terms of women's policies. We changed together. I think this was the best part of it. We changed together. Because it was new; it was new for the trade union movement, too. We listened to the experiences in Türk-İş (Confederation of Workers Trade Unions in Turkey), in KESK; but ours was something that we created and claimed. It was something specific to Eğitim-Sen, specific to KESK. We continued these discussions, activities and training that we had started in Eğitim-Sen, in KESK, too. I mean, training activities were held in KESK, too. We joined the training activities as participants. The organization of KESK women's convention was referred to the Ankara Branch. We organized the discussions in Ankara. We produced together with the friends in the other trade union. We were sending written notes on women to the branches, saying that, let's do this or, there is this on this day, there is this about this or there is this meeting. For example, we asked women about their unattendance. They would say that they did not know. As we understood that the executives in the branches did not give importance to this, you know what they call, sweeping under the carpet, that fit for us. For example, they put the text under the carpet, they forgot it. Therefore, Professor Serpil told in a seminar; we made sure to form horizontal relations. That is why we called the women in a certain branch before each meeting. That's how it was. Again, we held our first meeting, the training meeting with the women in the training hall of the Türk-İş. We even had our photos there. here, Fevziye was the coordinator; Meltem said that we give birth to a child, now one will be girl, the other one will be boy. Our word for the boy is one thing, our words with the girlchild is another thing. We start when we are pregnant, before we give birth. What should we do with the child. Let's do this, do that. Then, so many issues came up; I mean starting from before giving birth, that interference after the birth, when the person is growing up, from the preference for clothing to names, to the schools, to the courses that they attend. In fact, we had learned gender there.