



STANDING UP FOR QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION WITH SUPPORT OF PEOPLE - How to achieve people's support for teachers

In the summer of 2006, the Hungarian government/Parliament modified the Act of Public Education. One of the most unacceptable elements of the modification said that the number of given lessons per week would be increased by September 2007.

After being informed by member organisations (PDSZ, SEH), ETUCE called on the Hungarian Prime Minister and the Minister of Education to rethink their position. This constituted an important support from ETUCE to our struggle.

The government remained silent about embarking on a real tripartite negotiation.

After calling the Unions to do so, PDSZ opened up, on its own, a strike-negotiation with the government in mid-summer in order for a few issues to be modified in that Act, mainly decreasing the number of given lessons.

The Government refused to participate in a strike negotiation at state level – arguing that this is an employer issue and that the formal employer is the headmaster in Hungary. So PDSZ went to Court. The judgment is on its way.

PDSZ organized a street demonstration in October 2006 which was supported by parents, teaching professionals, university students, associations from all over the country, by a Pan-European member union (KPSZ-KPT) and by two trade union confederations.

PDSZ called the teachers for a wake-up strike and more than 15,000 people participated. Many of our colleagues who are not members joined, as well as many persons who were not working during this 2-hour period. Thousands of parents showed their solidarity by deciding to keep their children at home during these two hours.

These two activities, the street demonstration and the wake-up strike, showed the increasing support from Hungarian citizens who are not teachers.

Since the government refused to negotiate formally concerning these issues, PDSZ opened up a Petition-campaign which aims at collecting signatures with law-determined controllable personal data.

The petition says that the signatories agree on calling the Parliament to modify the Act by withdrawing the increase of the number of given lessons as from September 2007.

We have collected around 90,000 signatures, which is twice the number of the minimum standard of signatures. The National Electoral Committee, which controlled the signatures, confirmed on 25h June that the minimum number of 50,000 signatures was reached. This forces the Hungarian Parliament to discuss the petition by law. All this was accomplished in two months.

By collecting these signatures, PDSZ achieved people's support both for teachers and for quality education. Therefore, from now on, no one in Hungary can claim, as it was done in the past, that Hungarian teachers are not supported by non-teachers.

Gabor Kerpen
PDSZ President