

# EDUCATION WORKERS' BULLETIN

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## Offensive against Houses of Culture

*Zary, you are not alone.*

Last fall, teachers from the Youth House of Culture (MDK) in Suwalki contacted us about their situation. The MDK was being liquidated and merged into the structure of the Regional Resort of Culture and Art. This did not have the status of an educational institution,

therefore it would not have the same subsidies. But, most importantly for the teachers, they would now be contracted with regular work contracts, instead of being covered by the Teachers' Card (Karta Nauczyciela), which means much less protection and worse working conditions, including having to work more than twice as many hours actually in lessons.

The teachers of Suwalki were not alone. But in fact, their campaign in defense of MPK, although supported by many local people, was isolated from similar campaigns which had taken place or were taking place in other places in Poland.

Protests about the liquidation of MDKs have taken place in many cities, including Jelena Gora, Radom, Nowy Targ, Krakow, Poznan, Konin, Zgierz, Swinoujscie; some of these protests brought some small success. But the problem is that all of these protests are isolated. And it is lack of collective action amongst teachers, even in the same category, that is making it easier for the government to do what it's doing.

It is very clear that all teachers need to be concerned about the fate of the MDKs, because what is actually happening is a concerted attack by the government on working conditions for teachers, especially coming from the Teachers' Card. The MDKs, are one of the weakest links, so it is among the first to be attacked. If teachers are not capable of effective organizing, the government will proceed with other categories of teachers.

The retreat of trade unions against the policies of the government is characterized by symbolic criticism but complete lack of action. Teachers have not even had

any big demonstrations in many years, not to mention strikes, at a time when schools are being liquidated all over the country and working conditions are coming under attack in many ways. In response to this, a different type of union needs to arise, which will really fight in defense of public education and its workforce, not just try to maintain well-paid union jobs for its



cadres.

The latest in the long list of MDKs to be liquidated is in Zary. In the Lubuskie region, the authorities want to liquidate as many as 27 different educational institutions.

It is clear here that all teachers and affected workers need to stand together. People must not think that the issue of MDKs is different than of a regular public school. More importantly, we are way behind in organizing our self-defense, thanks to the stance of the unions and the lack of educational workers self-organization. What is needed is coordination on the national level, resolute action and the engagement of the public.

If you agree, contact us and start to take action: [edukacja@zsp.net.pl](mailto:edukacja@zsp.net.pl)

### Why have an English version of this Bulletin?

There are many foreign education workers in Poland. This includes members of our union. They work in different conditions, some well-paid and with normal contracts, others in highly precarious situations. Some employers take advantage of foreigners, cheating them in the hope they won't know their rights or be around long enough to defend themselves. This bulletin will be distributed in schools where there are many foreigners and we encourage them to learn more about their rights and take action if they have been violated!

## Are you a teacher? Another example of precarious work traps.

The variety of precarious work for teachers is not limited to just the usual assortment of trash contracts. Various educational companies have been using a scheme which pose numerous traps for teachers.

A company wants to employ a teacher to give courses. Instead of hiring the teacher full-time, or even on a fixed-term contract, some unscrupulous employers conclude a contract with the teacher, claiming he or she is an "author". The reason for this scheme is the following:

- they claim that the subject of the contract is the sale of written work, a course, not the actual delivery of the course. In the contract they can then put the value of the sale of the course, not the actual amount of hours work. In this way you can be cheated, since you have no contract for your working time and there may be no evidence of it kept. Since the subject of payment is the written work, they may later claim that this work was not given in, ignoring the fact that the actual work performed was the delivery of the course. The school may also require you to provide material for them, which they would claim rights to.
- as the provider of "intellectual property" the company pays less tax on them than for work. Usually the teacher does not see this tax break, but the difference is kept by the company.

It is clear: signing such contracts is dangerous business and puts you at risk of being cheated.

What is more, we have information that this form of „employment“ is frequently used with foreigners teaching in courses. Some of the teachers signing this kind of contract hardly understand what they are signing, or the implications.

If you have such a contract, you have to be aware of the risks of staying in this relationship. There are ways to make being cheating more difficult: collect information which shows the amount of hours worked and which can evidence the fact that your work was based on teaching the course, not just writing it. Save mails, smses or anything which evidences that you are teaching, not just a writer.

In case of being cheated, you cannot stay silent. Let the world and, most importantly, the clients know about these practices.

Most importantly, try to contact with other teachers. In such conditions, teachers tend not to have such strong relations as in a normal workplace, but contact with others is essential if collective action needs to be used in the future.

Are you or anybody you know in this situation? Tired of one shady contract after another? Contact us!

### Attack on Teacher's Vacation Time

Local politicians want to organize camps for children in the summer and want teachers to work for free during vacation time.

Currently teachers are entitled to 54 days vacation during the summer time, 7 of which they must be available to work if called on. This time is necessary to regenerate strength for a job where energy is essential. However, politicians would like to cut this time by 2 weeks, by forcing teachers to work with children in the summer time, with no extra pay.

This is just another of a series of attacks on working conditions of teachers, forcing more working hours without any increase in pay.

No cuts for teachers, only cuts for politicians!

### More Teachers Working on Trash Contracts

Teachers warn that growing numbers of them are being forced onto trash contracts. More and more schools are hiring teachers on contracts for specific work from September until June. In the summer, they register as unemployed. This is especially true in private educational institutions, which are not obliged to hire teachers on permanent contracts, thus creating a permanent category of discriminated workers.

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### TEACH IN PRIVATE COURSES?

Do you have problems with -

- \* never-ending trash contracts
- \* no paid holidays or sick days
- \* deductions from pay
- \* anti-social working hours
- \* total lack of employment security?

**You are not alone. Join us and organize.**

For better working conditions, stable employment and for decent jobs in all sectors of education.

**Contact: edukacja@zsp.net.pl**



*ZSP was active in protests against school closures in 2012.*

## **Mokotow Teachers Screwed by Bad Deal with Unions**

In the summer of 2012, union leaders representing teachers in Mokotow agreed with the city of Warsaw to cuts in motivational bonuses. Previously they had averaged around 600 zloties (150 euros) a month, but would go down to 450. However, in the fall, the city reneged on its deal and started to allocate an average of 200 zloties.

Members of ZSP Education Union joined the protest of teachers this fall in the City Council. But it is clear that, without a plan of action against the city and the government which is leading the attack on education, nothing will happen. What is more clear is that if the unions agree to cuts, bowing down to their logic, they are giving the green light to make even more reductions.

## **The Ideological Assault on Teachers**

A long speech justifying cuts to the bonuses was made by Vice-president Paszynski, a politician who should be attacked with the same strength as his attacks on our colleagues. Paszynski, incredibly, claimed that teachers earned quite a lot of money, much more than the national average. He also implied that if somebody was not good at controlling money or had more material needs, it is their problem, so they should get some extra work to make more money. The assault on teachers carried out by such politicians includes attempts to construct an image of teachers as some sort of privileged

category of worker (!), who are just protesting because somebody is "making them work". Related to this is the heavy promotion of ideas that smaller parts of the salary should be guaranteed and larger parts left to the discretion of others. Thus, motivational bonuses are promoted as a way of "guaranteeing the quality of education". But the reality is something different.

## **Motivational Bonuses: More work instead of decent pay**

In general, the idea of a motivational bonus is usually accompanied by ideas to lower basic guaranteed salaries. Thus, those who want a decent bonus, which might be essential to gaining a decent salary for the month, are encouraged to do something extra.

The problems with this are many. Workers in many industries report that bonuses may not be paid according to clear criteria, that some companies limit the percentage of workers who get bonuses, regardless of performance and that they may become harder and harder to get.

In the case of the teachers who have had their motivational bonuses cut, one wonders how demotivating that experience was for them. As it is, less and less money is allocated to education, schools are closing, more children are put in classes and there is pressure for teachers to spend more hours in the class and have less vacation. It looks as if the authorities are intent on making education into just one more shit job that people with other opportunities will quickly abandon.

## Solidarity with Teachers in Slovakia



*GLS continued to strike after the main union withdrew, organizing with other schools to continue action.*

At the end of November and December, teachers in Slovakia went on strike to demand a 10% wage increase for all workers in the sector and an increase in money spent on education. The government offered a 5% increase and after 2 days, the main teachers union decided to back down on the strike.

The next day, it turned out that there were still teachers that continued the strike. A meeting of 17 schools took place, independent of the main union. They decided to continue with a rolling strike. Many pupils also supported the strike with walkouts and demonstrations.

After holidays, teachers met with the leadership of the main union, which had backed down and declared it would not do anything. An independent union declared it would strike during testing times. Unfortunately, those who would still fight independent of the union are now in a minority. As of last reports in January, they were still discussing further strategy. There were also discussion about the need to form independent networks and unions.

At the beginning of December, members of ZSP Education Union did some informational and solidarity actions about the strike, visiting the Embassy in Warsaw, in response to the request of our sister organization in Slovakia, Priama akcia, which was active in this struggle. We support the fact that people took action and are encouraged that some part of the education workers kept organizing when the main union abandoned the fight.



We know that, given the lack of resolve and the sheepish following of moderate unionism, it is difficult

to win struggles, but we are absolutely sure that if a real campaign is to be launched and fought, it will be through initiatives like this, to build independent structures, directly controlled by the rank and file workers, which will not back down so easily. We salute this initiative and wish them luck!

Who knows - maybe education workers in Poland will also get the idea and start organizing!

**For better working conditions, more money for education and for workers self-organization!**

## What is ZSP?

ZSP stands for Związek Syndykalistów Polski. It is a grassroots, rank-and-file workers' organization, run by the members themselves, without union bosses, professional activists or leaders.

Anybody who wants to fight for better working conditions and agrees with our principles and way of operating can join. The main thing is that we take action, we try to achieve our goals through direct action, decided directly by the workers. We are different than the mainstream unions because we don't create a class of union activists who decide for us and negotiate in our name: we do things ourselves.

You can read more about our ideas and actions on the official website of ZSP: [www.zsp.net.pl](http://www.zsp.net.pl). There are also other articles about us to be found on the internet.

Contact us for more information at [edukacja@zsp.net.pl](mailto:edukacja@zsp.net.pl)

## What is the IWA?

ZSP is part of the International Workers' Association. The IWA is an international federation of organizations which work on similar principles. More information about the IWA can be found on its website: [www.iwa-ait.org](http://www.iwa-ait.org). A brochure explaining its principles is available in the downloads section of the page.

The IWA consists of many different categories of workers. There are many education workers in all countries where the IWA is present. In a number of countries in Europe, education workers have networks, branch or workplace unions. Some of the places where there currently are such initiatives include Great Britain, France, Germany, Slovakia, Serbia, Russia, Spain and Poland. In locations where there may not be enough people to form a specific union, or where people prefer to work in more general groups, education workers join a General Membership Branch or local union.