



LIGHTNING IN THE SCHOOLS

When the Constitutional Court ruled that abortion due to foetal lethal defects is not constitutional, women marched out in protests in the so called Women's Strike. Many students and pupils, also adolescent, joined these protests in the streets and on the internet, most frequently with the use of the symbol of the red lightning. The reaction of their teachers was not always positive.

Pupils express their support in many ways: by taking part in the protest actions, by wearing the symbols of Women's Strike or by internet avatars displaying these symbols. The signs of support extended beyond the private sphere and reached online classes, many times evoking opposition from conservative teachers. Letters from teaching authorities started to pour to headteachers requesting to ban the display of the symbols of Women's Strike by the students during online classes. Bad marks for unruly conduct were frequently entered in student's books for this reason.

Is this a punishable offense to use symbols which are not offensive, if they symbolise values different from other people's beliefs?

Human dignity, including child's dignity, is written in The Constitution as the superior value. The Constitution guarantees the citizens freedom of expressing their opinions (art 54 1) as well as freedom to disclose their world views, religious convictions and faith (art 53 § 7). We therefore have these rights, not as obligations. It is our choice whether we wish to share our views or keep them to ourselves. Human liberty, what is worth and necessary to remember, is subject to legal protection. Everyone is obliged to respect the liberties and rights of others. No one should be forced to do anything that is beyond one's legal obligation (art 31 of The Constitution). Constitutionally guaranteed liberty includes the right to have a choice of the profile picture or screen background as inspired by the pupil's conscience. As long as it is not offensive to others, the

teacher has no legal right to punish pupils for such choice of expressing their opinions.

Moreover, art 12, 13, 14 and 15 of The Convention of The Rights of the Child, declared by the UN General Assembly on the 20th November 1989 states as follows:

Article 12. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Article 13. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

Article 14. States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Article 15. States Parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.

Some people claim that the school is not an appropriate place to manifest one's political opinions. However, what are we, adults, doing by removing Lech Wałęsa from history school books or by including in the early education texts about John Paul II or Mother Theresa? If we are manifesting our views and have religious indoctrination, why do we admonish our young ones when they dare to have and express their own political views?

And you – schoolgirl, and you – schoolboy! You have the right to have views and to express them. As long as they do not violate human dignity, you have the right to express these views everywhere. Also at school. The school should be proud that you are not indifferent to what is happening around you and that the school prepared you to fulfil your citizen obligations based on solidarity, democracy, tolerance, justice and freedom.

Mother from Wrocław