



Categorical success of the general strike of the 19th June that ELA called in the Basque Country

We did it!

The general strike call of the 19th June had a majority answer that allows to talk about a total general strike in the Basque Country. The workers have therefore clearly shown their deep rejection of the Partido Popular Government's new labour reform that will worsen the situation of the working class even further.

In the industrial sector the total standstill was about 70%, being the partial strike more than 20%.

Also high impact in the private services: The big majority of the shopping centers and rail chains joined the strike, as well as central and supply markets. In the financial sector and

insurance offices the main offices closed in the capitals.

Concerning public services, very important standstill in the administration, town halls and in the hospitals, who worked in minimum services. The two main ports and the toll roads were stoped and the big majority of the press -written, radio and TV- that work exclusively in the Basque Country joined the general strike.

Thousands of people took part in the demonstrations held simultaneously in the streets of the 4 main cities of the Basque Country at midday on the 19th.



(Above) General secretary of ELA speaking to the demonstrators who made a big sit-in. (Left) Total inactivity in the industrial sector. (Right) Image of the demonstration in Bilbao.



The Reasons for the Strike

Measures envisaged in the Decree

The labour reform imposed by decree-law includes restrictive measures and serious economic cut backs in the unemployment benefit system that has been in force up to now and which affects sectors such as:

- * Workers who are coming up to retirement, as the concept of incomes that are incompatible with the benefit has been widened, which makes any possible early retirement much more expensive.
- * Workers who are sacked, as the interim salaries have been stopped. This implies that it will even be cheaper to sack workers and the benefit period will be reduced.
- * The unemployed, who will be forced to accept any job offer that the Spanish Employment Institute deems to be "suitable".
- * Workers with discontinuous indefinite jobs. The law will consider that the discontinuous indefinite jobs with a fixed incorporation date as part-time jobs and therefore these workers will not be entitled to unemployment benefit.

Bearing in mind that 2 out of every 3 unemployed workers are women, these measures will in particular affect women. This is not insignificant, bearing in mind that this is the



Moment of the speech celebrated after the demonstration in San Sebastian.

collective who face the worse working conditions, who have the poorest pensions and whose situation will worsen with the current reform.

That social dialogue has fallen on us

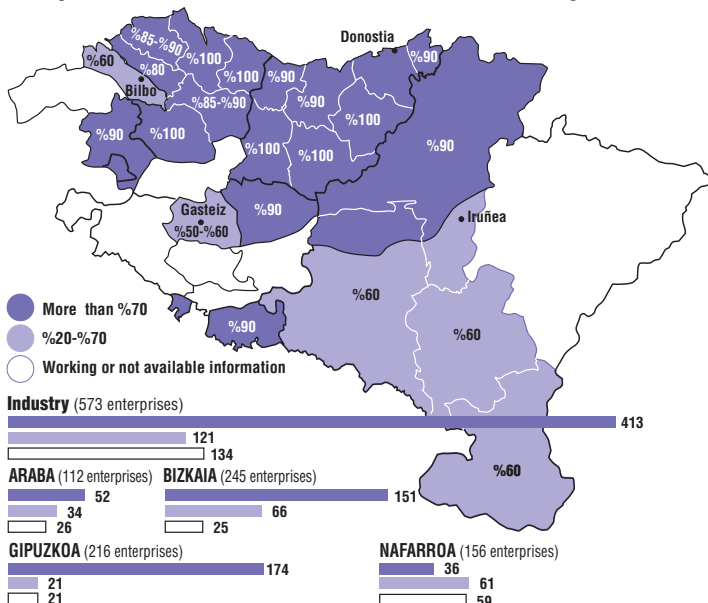
Yet this reform is not very different from the previous ones. Over recent years, the trend has been towards *social dialogue*, a strategy in which the CC OO, UGT, the CEOE (Spanish Confederation of Business Organisations) and the Spanish Government have taken part. The consequences of the *dialogue* have

been less social protection, the reduction of the cost of sacking a worker and a more flexible job market. We have set out some of the agreements and their signing parties below:

- * CCOO, UGT and the Government (1997): Reform of the pensions, which included a reduction in the amount of the new pensions, in particular for those people who had paid into the system over fewer years.
- * CCOO, UGT CEOE (1997): Labour reform that make it cheaper to sack workers and increased the causes for fair dismissal. Apart from this, there was another agreement to centralise collective bargaining.
- * CCOO, UGT and the Government (1998): Labour reform, that encouraged contracting workers on a part-time basis.
- * CCOO, CEOE and the Government (2001): New reform of the Social Security System, that cut the new pensions again.
- * CCOO, UGT and CEOE (2002): Agreement to moderate salaries in the collective bargaining.

Aznar's Government has now imposed the reform by Decree-Law, thus highlighting its authoritarian profile and making it clear that the social dialogues entered into up to now were just a mere image campaign.

Response of the General Strike in the Basque Country



The discrepancy in dates is the result of the UGT and CCOO wanting to call the strike single-handedly, without taking the Basque majority trade unions into account, without seeking points in common and with the aim that the majority organisations in its spheres, such is the case of ELA, would just follow suit.

And it is also clear that not all of the objectives of the strike are shared by all the trade unions. Even though all the trade unions of the Spanish State has called a general strike to display their total rejection of the Decree Law, Spanish trade unionism has made it clear that its main objective is to return to the social dialogue model with the Government, a model that has led to the progressive reduction of the rights of the workers since 1997 and which ELA continues to consider a huge sell-out of all of the working class.

ASKI DELAKO!

19 Greba

ACTUALITY

“Not to Banning, every project, every idea, every body”

More than 100,000 people took part in the demonstration that was held in Bilbao on the 15th June against the “Parties Act” and against a possible process to ban the political party Batasuna, that the Partido Popular, with the backing of the PSOE, wishes to implement, with both parties using it to win votes.

The demonstration was called by a wide platform of members of different trade unions, political and social organisations

ELA’s executive committee backed the calling of the demonstration and coincided with the other organisers in their demands for human rights and public freedoms, as well as the defence of political plurality. ELA also considers that the banning of a political group would make the normalisation of the coexistence in our society difficult.



“Notes for a Sovereignist Process”

ELA’s national committee has prepared a document entitled “Notes for a Sovereignist Process”, in which it sets out a work proposal for the whole of ELA, aimed at winning the recognition of the right to self-determination and to thus achieve sovereignty.

The proposal is based “on the principle that sovereignty lies in Basque citizens, which from their plurality and freedom have to always decide the form and contents of self-government”. A practical result of this is the call to the citizens by means of popular consultation.

This sovereignist channel, “whose reference point, except for the circumstances, is Quebec, is solely and exclusively legitimised by a strict and scrupulously democratic social and political action”. The national committee therefore considers it necessary that “any violent procedure as a political expression once and for all and unconditionally ends”.

Witness in Palestine

Paul Nicholson, international representative of the EHNE farmers’ trade union and member of the Vía Campesina, was invited by ELA’s National Committee to describe his visit to Palestine and being besieged with the Palestine leader, Yaser Arafat, during the Israeli siege of Ramala. He stressed how important it is to show solidarity and internationalise the conflict: “Europe’s support is fundamental, by the trade unions, social movements and by the citizens... This keeps up the morale”.



LAND, PEACE, STATE FOR PALESTINE.

ELA newsletter

Solidarity of Basque Workers

SEBAS ANDREU, in charge of collective bargaining, analyses the agreements that are progressing

They should not be signed just for the sake of being signed



–It seems that the CC OO, UGT and LAB do not even care about the level of representation and have signed minority agreements. The most blatant case was the agreement signed with the Concrete and Quarry Workers in Bizkaia, where they represent less 30% of the workers,

but they signed an agreement with the employers, against the criteria of ELA, which represents over 70% of the workers in the sector. This situation was the reason behind the 7-week strike in the sector.

They have also signed the minority agreements with the Construction Sector in Gipuzkoa and with the General Civil Servants.

Only employers
benefit from
minority
agreements.

–Who has benefited from these agreements being signed?

–Obviously, the employers. As the results obtained are no way near sufficient and have even caused a strong reaction among the workers in question.

–How is the rest of the negotiations going?

–The company negotiations are going quite well, and we have made progress in one very important aspect: we are talking about employment as normal, above all with regarding to the conversion of temporary jobs into permanent ones.

Mobilizations against outsourcing

–Another sector which has been prioritised this year was outsourcing and service companies. Has any progress been made in this area?

– We are finishing with a myth, according to which there are companies or sectors where there is no place for mobilization or an efficient struggle. They are increasingly more sectors, in many cases involving outsourcers working, who are achieving great steps forward thanks to the strike: It is the case of the Petronor outsourcers.

How is the collective bargaining progressing?

–This year, we have once again approached the sector agreements with the aim of achieving substantial improvements, working at the alliances with the other trade unions, but it seems that UGT, CC OO and LAB want to continue maintaining poor sector agreements and only want to touch on wages, without looking at improving employment, reducing the working week, and so on. This attitude has forced us to look for alternative spheres where we can achieve better results.

–Are the majorities respected when signing the agreements?