



An ELA delegation took part in the II European Social Forum, held in Paris from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> November

## FOR A MORE DEMOCRATIC AND SOCIAL EUROPE

**A** total of 25 ELA leaders and members took part in the II European Social Forum, as well in the Trade Union Forum, the Assembly for Women's Rights and the Social Movements Assembly, which were held to coincide with the Forum.

This opportunity to meet and reflect, that brought together 60,000 people from social movements, trade unions, NGOs, etc, from different cultures, spheres and backgrounds, facilitated the exchange of experiences, knowledge and analysis, and has also helped to set up network and alliances.

The European construction process in general, and specifically the model that is outlined in the European constitution project were the main areas that were discussed and considered during this forum, where the concern of the various social agents regarding the European model that is being designed and constructed was made clear.

Another key issue was the future of alterglobalism: how to put into practice the theoretical discourse that has emerged from the successive forums. To work jointly in diverse subjects (against the war, the model of society, etc.) it is the route that stands out more.

### ELA's participation

Jose Elorrieta, secretary general, was one of the speakers in a plenary session, when environmental, cultural, social, economic and labour rights were discussed, together with other trade union leaders.

Laura Gonzalez de Txabarri, head of the Gender and International Department, and Mikel Noval, in charge of social policy, also took part in seminars on trade union strategies for equality between men and women, the question of social struggles and the relationship with the social movements.

Nere Urrestarazu, in charge of gender and youth policy, took part in one of the Assembly's workshops on women's rights.

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*ELA is a trade union that is closely linked to its roots, but at the same time with an internationalist vocation.*

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## JOSE ELORRIETA

### Counterpower as an alternative to neoliberalism

The neoliberal aspect can be seen in the trade union sphere in three dimensions: reduction of fiscal revenue and its progressivity, the outcome of which is cuts to social spending; privatisation of public services, which means less services and fewer jobs, and of poorer quality; and the permanent legislative review of the conditions of the working class, leading to even greater job insecurity.

Given this situation and the dilemma facing the trade union movement that has to opt between two opposite models of social and political intervention, Basque trade unionism has opted for trade unionism as a Counterpower. A trade unionism that has new responsibilities and new opportunities, with greater capacity to put forward proposals, for better organisation and to fight. Fighting against discrimination by means of making collective bargaining more dynamic has to become a central element of trade union commitment. In order to be able to move forward in this direction, trade unionism has to be promoted in companies, by encouraging the delegates to be more active and increasing the participation of the members"



## LAURA G. DE TXABARRI

### Trade unionism against discrimination

Women, together with young people, are the collective that suffer the worst working conditions in the job market. Their situation, with respect to the Basque Country, is basically characterised by the high unemployment rate, 10.73% (compared to 5.7% in the



case of men), the extremely high rate of job insecurity (37.1% with temporary contracts, compared to 27.25% in the case of men, while 83.8% of part-time contracts involve women), wage discrimination (women earn an average of 32.5% less than men and 15% less doing the same job), segregation (large number of women in sectors with low salaries), few of them holding positions of responsibility, as well as their not being sufficiently involved in the collective bargaining process, etc...

Given this situation, trade unionism has to consider the fight against discrimination as one of the major issues of its work, and this demand should not just be one more claim, but rather the central issue of the trade union struggle.

✓ By means of collective bargaining: by means of including new issues in order to overcome the discrimination suffered by women and also to encourage women to be involved in the negotiating process.

✓ Opting for a model of society without discrimination, where the work (paid and unpaid) and wealth is distributed.

## MIKEL NOVAL

### Movements against neoliberalism

Conditions needed so that all the movements can work together:

✓ Struggle for change: the people and entities trying to change society have

to work together from a progressive point of view.

✓ Convergence based on mutual recognition between the different agents.

✓ Respecting each organisation's way of working (of course, as long as they are not violent methods).

Concerning the social forums, as trade union members, we are facing a new, yet interesting experience.

✓ We see them as open meeting spaces.

✓ Ideologically enriching: they are ideological sources that combine thought with practice.

✓ Opportunity to set up networks, contacts... with other organisations in different spheres.

✓ Combining seminars, workshops.... with mobilisation.







We believe that the direct relationship between movements and political parties creates a real problem of dependency that limits the necessary autonomy. This does not mean that we cannot take a political stance, as our role is in the political sphere.

In short, the fight against neoliberal globalisation requires a social and trade union movement that is strong and demanding, working at a grassroots levels, with a plural ideological approach, that is going in the same direction.

## NERE URRESTARAZU

### ■ Fighting gets results

Nere Urrestarazu spoke about the situation in homes for the elderly, a relatively new sector, as the result of the growing privatisation of this service, and paradigm of the situation of women in the job market (95 % of the workers in this sector are women).

"The work conditions are highly precarious throughout this sector. In the specific case of three homes

for the elderly, the salary received by the workers in the private sector was 37% of what was established for an identical category in a public home, they worked 230 hours more and had an unstructured timetable that was "flexible" at the whim of the company.

Faced with this situation, the 115 workers demanded decent working and salary conditions, and were forced to take action when no progress was made during the negotiations with the company. Action that lasted nearly 8 months, and which led to the current salaries being doubled over a 5-year period and a reduction of 110 hours, to name just some of the achievements. A key instrument for the success of this conflict was the strike fund which helped the workers to hold out.

I would like to end by stressing that as the conflict went on, and despite the pressure of the striking workers being laid off and their contracts not being renewed, ELA's representation and membership in the aforementioned centres steadily increased".

## ■ COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

### Key trade union sections

During the 2004 collective bargaining process, ELA will seek to improve employment conditions and fight against the discrimination that above all affects women and young people.

The importance of the trade union sections, the strategic role of the strike fund and the need to organise the members were the main points during the meeting of the ELA national committee to establish the strategic area for the 2004 collective bargaining sessions.

## ■ INTERNACIONAL RELATIONS

### Euskal Herria-Québec trade union meeting

The sovereignist process, its relationship with social policy and the situation of the stateless nations in the globalised economy were some of the issues discussed during the ELA-CSN de Québec meeting in San Sebastián on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> October. A trade union meeting which the CSC from Belgium and the CIG from Galicia were invited to attend.



## ■ HOTEL MARIA CRISTINA, SAN SEBASTIAN

### 76 days on strike for decent working conditions

The workers at the Hotel Maria Cristina in San Sebastián needed to strike for 76 days before the Westin group belonging to the multinational Starwood group would accept their demands for job stability for the temporary workers and decent wage increases.

The background to this conflict can be traced back to 2003, when CCOO and UGT in Guipuzkoa, representing only 18% of the workforce, signed the provincial sector agreement with management. The conditions were far below those sought by the majority trade union, ELA, representing the 50.8%, which decided to break this poor agreement and negotiate with the companies and taking action where possible, as was the case in the Maria Cristina.

This long strike was noted for its high profile among the general public, for the unity of the workers and for the presence of the trade union and its resources, in the form of pickets, demonstrations and financially helping the strikers thanks to the strike fund. Management took the stance that the conflict was an opportunity to challenge the specific collective bargaining model defended by ELA, which was why it lasted so long. In the end, the workers won the battle, which yet again shows that fighting gets results.



# ELA newsletter

## Solidarity of Basque Workers

GERMAN KORTABARRIA, ELA's spokesman

# "Democracy is allowing the Basques to decide"



**T**here is a great deal of controversy about the "Ibarretxe Plan", whose name comes from the surname of the current leader of the Basque Government. German Kortabarría, ELA's spokesman, talks to us about the proposal.

### -What is the "Ibarretxe Plan"?

-It is a bill to reform the Statute of Autonomy that the Basque Government submitted to the Basque Parliament. It involves a new status within Spain, with more political power and, above all, a relationship based on free will.

### -How will it progress?

-The bill will be debated in the Basque Parliament, where it will be voted on in a plenary session. If the bill has the backing of the absolute majority, it will be sent for consideration by the Spanish Parliament, which should mark the start of a period of negotiation between both powers. In

any case, according to the proposal, the citizens of the Basque Country will have the last word by means of a referendum.

### -What is the background to this bill?

- It is the answer to the failure of the relationship model between the Basque Country and Spain, that was introduced after the dictatorship, according to which the State recognising the authorities of the Basque institutions, yet reserved the right to revise, change and interpret them. This process to review, change and interpret the Basque Statute started some time ago and has speeded up under the PP governments. The result is that it is now not the radical sovereignists, but the moderate sovereignists, such as Ibarretxe, and the federalists, such as Izquierda Unida, that have seen that the political-legal framework needs to be revised.

### -What does ELA think about the Plan?

-As a great step forward, even though we have some reservations regarding its contents and, above all, we think that it lacks a greater definition of its social and political alliance policy. In any case, we agree with what we believe is the central point of the proposal: to leave the last decision up to the citizens of the Basque Country.

*We seek political dialogue and respect of the will of the majority*

### -How has the Spanish government reacted?

-By raising the ghost of the country being split up (which has a greater impact from the electoral point of view in Spain) and setting up a whole series of authoritarian and repressive measures (political, legislative, legal, economic, media campaigns, etc.). The latest thing is to reform the criminal code so that Ibarretxe would be facing jail if he called a referendum.

### -Aznar has put Ibarretxe's plan on the same level as terrorism.

-Nowadays, "anti-terrorism" is a good alibi for an authoritarian government. What is true that all the parties making up the Basque Government are clearly against ETA and Ibarretxe himself has promised not to hold the referendum while there is violence.

### -You accuse the Aznar Government of being authoritarian...

- They have no democratic tradition. Just think, when the democratic city and town councils were set up after Franco's regime, Gernika's decided to remove the town medal that had been granted to Franco, who had bombed and destroyed the town! Well, the current Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar, expressed his disgust in an article regarding this decision and backed the figure of the disappeared dictator. This is the type of person who is now governing Spain.

They will do anything before turning to institutional and political dialogue and respecting the will of the people in conflicts that are clearly political, such as the ones in the Basque Country or in Catalonia.



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