



MAY 1st, THE SHOWCASE FOR OUR STRUGGLES

On May 1st, thousands of people gathered together in Bilbao for the noisy and colourful demonstration organised by ELA under the slogan "Irabazteko indarra/Strength to Win" ELA's general secretary, José Elorrieta, once again stressed that trade union action and struggles are the only way for the working class to take on management. Following the demonstration, ELA held a highly successful lunch for its members, followed by a party that was attended by over 4000 people.

Handing over the World Charter, in the Basque Country

The World March of Women crossed the Basque Country, on their way from Galicia to Marseille, between May 24th and 27th. Dozens of activities have been organized around this event and each day deals with one theme: the anti-war day; ecology, earth and women; anti-violence day, and the day against poverty and job insecurity.

One new aspect of this year's World March is the launch of the World Charter of Women for Humanity, whose goal is to create a world based on freedom, equality, solidarity, peace and justice.

Own charter

The World March of Basque Women platform, comprising women from feminist organisations, women's groups and individuals taking part, has now set itself the task of preparing its own charter

of rights and demands for March 8th 2006.

We should end by pointing out that an ELA delegation was part of the group representing the Basque Country in Marseille, where they took part in the event and demonstration that was held in that city.

"We are fighting for a world base on freedom, equality, solidarity, peace and justice towards women".



PFERD RÜEGGERBERG

■ Caballito: Over 18 months on strike

The workers at Caballito are involved in the longest strike to defend their jobs in the history of the Basque working class. They have already been on strike for one year and a half and they do not plan to return to work until management agree to negotiate. Their strength lies in their power to resist.

Management which is making its position clear without having to go any further, the Labour Court has ordered the management of PFERD RÜEGGERBERG (Caballito) to pay 6,000 euros as compensation to each of the 114 people on strike at the German multinational, as the Court considered that the threats to sack the workers in statements made by the directors to the media was a violation of the right to strike.

Meanwhile, on March 19th, thirty or so Caballito workers took part in the demonstration in Brussels called by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and various social organisations, many of whom expressed their solidarity with this magnificent struggle.

JOBS SECURITY

■ Jobs insecurity kills

On April 28th, the World Day for Health and Safety at Work, ELA denounced job insecurity as one of the main causes of accidents in the workplace. According to official data, 92 people died in 2004 as the result of occupational accidents and 639



FIGHTING AGAINST JOB INSECURITY

■ The multinational French-Ansola, accused of fraudulent temporary contracts

At the request of ELA, the Basque Government's Department of Labour has lodged an action against French-Ansola for fraudulent contracting of the temporary workers in the Etxebarri plant, which the trade union considers to be a huge step forward as it's a new means of fighting against job insecurity.

This company has a permanent pool of temporary workers which accounts for nearly half the workforce, which it rotates at its whim, and they earn between 180 and 250 euros less than the permanent workers for doing the same job.

It is the first time that the Basque authorities have turned to the Courts in such a case and ELA will continue to work to ensure that it is not the last. Not in vain, the fight against job insecurity in its different forms is the core issue of our trade union's collective bargaining in recent years, both in companies, by means of wage agreements that eliminate any type of discrimination, and in the street, as in this case, through the courts.

were seriously injured in the Basque Country. The real size of the problem is even bigger as many of the accidents are hidden and a large number of occupational illnesses are not recognised by legislation that is totally out of step with the situation.

Job insecurity is the main cause behind an accident rate that is twice the European average. Temporary workers suffer 2.5 times more accidents at work than the permanent workers. Young people, women and immigrants work in very insecure conditions and run a greater risk of having an accident or their health being affected.

TAXATION

■ Increased fraud

In the middle of the Income Tax Campaign, ELA is yet again denouncing the serious tax fraud by liberal professionals and the business community in the Basque Country. The average income declared by the people living off their salaries and wages is 17,000 euros, while liberal professionals and the business community declare only 10,300 euros per year, in other words, 6,700 euros less than the workers. This difference steadily grows every year, which shows that the Basque tax authorities are not fighting against tax fraud.



ELA has also come out against the fact that tax pressure in the Basque Country and Navarra is 7.5 points lower than the European average, which when added to the tax fraud means that social spending is under the European average and does not cover basic necessities, such as housing, social services, nursery education, aid for social emergencies.

REGULARIZATION

■ 2 out of every 3 immigrants will continue to be illegal

According to the latest data, 2 out of every 3 immigrants will continue to be illegal in the Basque Country after the latest measure to regularize immigration. The regularisation process only considered immigrants as a workforce and subjects them now and in the future to the whims of the business community and in many cases to blackmail, as the immigrants will again be "illegal" if they lose their jobs.

OLD AGE PEOPLES HOMES

■ For a dignified sector

The workers of Residencia Uribarri, in Durango, are on an indefinite strike in reaction to the threat to cut back their employment rights, following the contract to manage the Old Age People's Home being awarded to a

different company. ELA demands that the new company keeps on all the workers who are currently working at the Home and respects the working conditions that were agreed on in the past. The workers at the Residencia Santa Ana, in Zarautz, are also on strike to demand better salaries and employment conditions for the staff.

The policy to privatize and outsource the services to look after the elderly is causing the labour conditions to dramatically deteriorate and therefore great unrest in the sector, in addition to a loss of the quality of service. It is a sector that is characterised by the large number of women employed, job insecurity and low salaries. Until things improve, ELA shall continue to back the conflicts.

HOUSING

■ The Government of Navarra fails to comply with its state-subsidized housing plan

In 2001, the government of Navarra unveiled a Housing Plan with the goal of building 10,000 state-subsidized houses in four years. However, 72% of the planned state-subsidized houses were built in 2001, 59.1% in 2002, 35.4% in 2003 and 23.5% in 2004. And there is no solution on the horizon for serious housing problems that we are facing with not enough houses on the market and the prices at an all time high.

OPINIÓN

Concocting "Social Dialogue"



ELA has said that it is not going to participate what the State is calling "social dialogue" and a can of worms has been opened. We are being called irresponsible and other sarcastic comments. ELA is clear that we are not going to be part of ceremonies just to raise confusion, where the people moving things do not appear from behind the scenes and that only goal is for things to remain the way they are and for nothing to change.

Today's social dialogue is only aimed at giving insatiable employees a respite. It does not consider redistribution wealth, which is increasingly more unfair. The rules laid down by an unleashed economic system in this phase of neo-Liberal globalization are untouchable.

The invitation to social dialogue occurs where the strategy lines have already been fixed: companies have to be more competitive (in other words, they have to increase even further their profits to the detriment of wages and salaries); work contracts have to be more flexible (the power of the companies has to be increased and the guarantees for the workforce reduced); work conditions have to take the countries with the lowest ones as the point of reference; taxation on corporate income and capital has to be reduced; public services have to be privatized whenever possible; social spending and social protection have to be reduced, etc. etc.

The lines are already set on the playing field when the dialogue begins. The terms are set in such a way that workers will always lose out and we can only expect to be thrashed.

We could call it a dialogue trap, if it were not the case that the parties that accept to take part are fully in the know.

ADOLFO MUÑOZ,
National Secretary of
Collective Bargaining

■ Debate about how the "war against terror" is threatening democracy

Coinciding with the anniversaries of the outbreak of the war in Iraq and the attack against the Hotel Palestine, in Bagdad, the Manu Robles Aranguiz Foundation, together with the

International Journalists federation and its affiliate organisation in the Basque Country, ELA-Hainbat, organised a conference entitled "Journalism, War and Civil Rights" in Bilbao on April 2nd and 3rd.

There was also a homage to the journalists and reporters killed in conflicts and the relatives of José Couso, killed in Bagdad, and Juntxo Rodríguez, shot by American troops in Panama in 1989, received mementos to mark the occasion.

INTERNATIONAL
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ELA newsletter

Solidarity of Basque Workers

AINTZANE ORBEGOZO, in charge of the private service sector, about the freeing of shop hours

“Multinationals want life only to be about spending”



The Autonomous Community of the Basque Country is the only autonomous community in Spain where the shops do not open on one single Sunday or bank holiday. This year, for the first time, the Basque government has authorised the large retail outlets to open on 8 bank holidays, and has thus broken the tacit agreement to respect the rest days and has turned its back on social clamour. For some months now, ELA has been campaigning and organising demonstrations against these openings, which will end with a strike. Aintzane Orbegozo, in charge of the sector, explains the situation.

-We have organised for the shop workers to strike on June 14th. A lot is at stake on that day: the right to rest on bank holidays, which is very important for the leisure and family life of the people that work in shops. But we are also allowing a few compa-

nies that wish to monopolise the market to change the habits of the consumers.

-They are allowed to open on 8 bank holidays by law. So, how can we explain the agreement reached by large retail outlets, such as El Corte Inglés, Leroy Merlin, Decathlon, Carrefour, Sabeco, Ikea or Zara, to name just a few, to “only” open on 2 bank holidays?

-They want unlimited opening hours, but their strategy is to go step by step: two bank holidays this year to then open on more days. They are trying to break the “taboo” and change the habits.

And we should not forget that shops with less than 400 square metres can open whenever they want. These shops are often part of large groups and their opening on bank holidays can have a cascade effect on the whole sector, and what makes it even worse is that, as there is no regulations, the hours are totally flexible, which means the people are working under worse conditions.

Rampant job insecurity

-How does this affect the people in the sector?

-It is a disaster for the people. The jobs lost in small shops are not offset by the ones created in the large retail outlets. These jobs are mainly filled by women. There is also much greater job insecurity and in general they are only part-time posts. State agreements with salaries of around 600 euros are applied. It also has a negative effect on their way of life, as when most people are enjoying their bank holidays, the shop workers have to work.

-They say that opening on bank holidays is what consumers want.

-That is not true. People overwhelming against these openings and the consumer associations defend the current opening hours. Opening on bank holidays benefits the major chains who want to control the market and get rid of small shops.

-I buy therefore I exist?

-That is the philosophy being imposed by Carrefour, Ikea, el Corte Inglés, etc... to get people to equate leisure with shopping and go to the malls. They do not care about the social and family life of their workers or the fact that the centres of the towns and cities are deserted. We argue that life is not just about spending money.

“The debate about the model of society is underlying the debate about opening hours”.

***LATEST NEWS: At the end of this news bulletin, an agreement to continue to respect the rest days has been achieved for the territory of Bizkaia. For this territory the strike has been cancelled. The strike call continues for the rest of the territories.**

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