



Workers on strike at Pferd, the German multinational

Successful outcome after 745 days on strike

It took a two year strike for Caballito management to sit down and negotiate with the strikers. 745 days to reach an agreement that meant that the sacked workers would be reinstated and all the workers could return to the factory. This marked the end of a period when the management were unilaterally and arbitrarily administering everything related to the make up of the workforce.

The decision to call off the strike was adopted by the vast majority of

the strikers who, in a secret ballot, endorsed the agreement reached by the trade union representatives. According to the committee, the agreement "was favourably in line with the claims made by the strikers".

This marked the end of a period when the company's directors were unilaterally and arbitrarily administering the make up of the workforce

They were two years of mobilisations and struggles which have been marked by the solidarity of those closest to the strikers and the people of Vitoria, who clearly showed their support of the 116 striking Caballito workers.

Congresses of the Metal and Private Service Federations

ELA's Metal Federation will hold its 7th Congress in Pamplona on November 25th. It is being held at a complicated time for industrial relations and collective bargaining due to the inro-

ad of neo-liberal policies and the employers' demands for greater flexibility and competitiveness. This has raised job insecurity rates and worsened working conditions. The slogan will be "Fighting against Job Insecurity, Company by Company".

ELA-Zerbitzuak (private services) will hold its Congress

in San Sebastian on December 15th. Zerbitzuak is positive about the 40.08% increase in members since the last congress. It believes that the model calling for greater demands is bringing the trade union closer to the workers. It also considers that the fact that 53% of its workers are women to be positive.

HEALTH

■ The Basque Country at the tail end of public health spending

ELA has published a report on Basque public health, which describes the current situation and puts forward a series of proposals to improve the quality of the public health service. Health is one of the aspects that define the development of the welfare state. It must be a universal right, guaranteed by public institutions. However, the situation of the Basque health system is far from being first rate. Furthermore, a series of management and budgetary policies are being applied which are leading to a negative evolution of the system.

Significant economic interests affect the health system. What should be an area outside the money-making interests has become a business environment, involving many companies whose only goal is to maximize their profits. And this often occurs with the approval of the authorities. We are not only referring to the policies of the WTO (which is trying into convert social rights into merchandise), the World Bank or the IMF (whose structural adjustment policies require social spending to be reduced) or to the service directives which seek approval in the European Union (which continues to apply free market criteria to all sectors).

Basque institutions favour privatisations, outsourcing and they are fostering private health as they do not guarantee or improve the quality of public health care. The outcome of this policy is that public health spending as a share of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) places the Basque Country at the tail end of the Europe

GASTO PÚBLICO EN SANIDAD (% PIB), UE-15, 2002



2006 COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

■ ELA outlines its key issues for collective bargaining

Last October, the ELA National Committee outlined the key issues that it will stress in the forthcoming collective bargaining process. They will be two priority areas: on the one hand, the main target will be to fight against job insecurity in the collective bargaining process. On the other hand, ELA will offer the alternative of negotiating based on demands over the so-called "social dialogue".

As ELA's Secretary General, José Elorrieta, and the head of collective bargaining, Adolfo Muñoz stressed, "it is essential to fight against job insecurity. 45% of Basque workers are in submerged in inappropriate and discriminatory working conditions, with no job security and threatened by the employers".

Even though the economic figures continue to indicate economic prosperity, Adolfo Muñoz warns of the difficulties to reach wage agreements. "The main problem is the position of management. They do not accept real negotiating, despite the fact they have achieved greater economic benefits over the last eleven years".

Given management's position, ELA will consider various measures: wage increase over the RPI; reducing job insecurity, discrimination and outsourcing; progress towards the 35 hour working week and fighting against accidents in the workplace.

José Elorrieta make it quite clear that while management does not change its extremely hard position, ELA will stress making demands over what some call "social dialogue" in the collective bargaining process. "It is up to us, if we really want to tackle job insecurity. We have to methodically work on collective bargaining".

of the 15. Moreover, there has a downward trend over recent years.

ELA's proposals are based on various measures: increasing public health spending, strengthening the public network, drastically slashing waiting lists, greater care for women and immigrants and a suitable staff policy.

HOTEL AND CATERING SECTOR

■ Strike in the Hotel and Catering Sector

On September 23rd, the workers of the Hotel and Catering Sector in Guipuzkoa were called to down tools for a day to defend the collective

bargaining agreement. The walk out, organised by the ELA, LAB, CCOO and UGT trade unions, was preceded by various mobilisations. Their demands include a wage increase equivalent to the RPI+1.5%, their working week cut by 10 hours, 2 days off a week and a guarantee that their working conditions will be subrogated if the company is sold.

A strike was also held in the hotel and catering sector in Bizkaia on November 4th. ELA stressed the widespread support for both strikes by the sector's workers.

INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN

■ ELA joins the "Fatigue Kills" campaign

ELA joined the "Fatigue Kills" campaign organised by the International Transport Federation. On October 11th, ELA delegates took part in a demonstration in Biriattou to protest against the long working days in the road transport sector, as part of the campaign organised by the International Transport Federation under the slogan "Fatigue Kills".

This campaign that took place from 10th to 16th October, aimed to make the governments and employers aware of the risk involved of 10 and even 12 hours behind the wheel, the need to recognise occupational diseases, an earlier retirement age and the introduction of the professional driving licence.

CLEANING AGREEMENT

■ The Gipuzkoa cleaning collective bargaining agreement signed

The Gipuzkoa cleaning collective bargaining agreement was signed on November 10th. The agreement involves a wage increase of the RPI +0.8% for this year and the RPI+1.2% for the following year. The transport bonus has also been accepted. Each worker will therefore be paid 1.55 euros for each day worked for this concept. ELA is highly positive about this agreement and stresses that it will be even more committed to continue working for better and more dignified work conditions in the cleaning sector.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE SAHARA

■ Solidarity with the people of the Western Sahara

November 6th marked the 30th anniversary of when 350,000 men and women set off on a civil march from Morocco towards the Western Sahara in order to seize it, on what was known as the Green March. Some days later, on November 14th 1957, the Madrid Tripartite Agreements were signed, where Spain handed over the territory of the Western Sahara to Morocco and Mauritania, against the UN resolutions. This led to the exile of the great majority of the Saharan population to the Algerian zone of Tindouf, where the refugee camps were set up.

Following 16 years of war, the first UN peace plan was signed by Morocco and the Frente Polisario in 1991. The plan envisaged holding a self-determination referendum of the Saharai people within one year. In 2003, the UN proposed another peace plan, known as the Baker Plan. Yet 14 years on, the people of the Saharai people are still waiting for the UN to comply with its resolutions and meanwhile 200,000 Saharans are still living in refugee camps and those living in the territory occupied by Morocco have no freedoms and are repressed, imprisoned and disappear.

Yet again, the anniversary has been used to demand the rights of the Saharai people and numerous mobilisations to protest, in which ELA took part, were organised.



TRADE UNION DAY FOR BASQUE PRISONERS

Under the slogan "Eskubideak bermatzeko, konponbidea sustatzeko, EUSKAL PRESOAK EUSKAL HERRIRA" ("To guarantee the rights, to find a solution, TO BRING THE PRISONERS NEARER"), the largest Basque trade union organised a day to support Basque prisoners on September 30th.

The aim was to denounce the current Spanish Government's faithfully following the line of its predecessor with respect to sentencing and prisons: increasing the sentences, with the prisoners scattered through the country, imposing isolation, restricting communication, violating the rights of the ill prisoners, hindering the exercising of the right to education and the use of the Basque language, eliminating the option to reduce the prison time and the application of the legally-recognised benefits. Redemption that had been previously applied was even reviewed and new procedures were started for the sole purpose of avoiding the release from prisons.

They are measures aimed at taking a tougher line towards the living conditions on the one hand and extending the maximum jail time of the prisoners on the other hand. Given the reaction of the Government in certain cases, it could even be claimed that we are witnessing the de facto reinstatement of life imprisonment.

The vast majority of these Basque prisoners (98.5%) are being held in prisons outside Euskal Herria. It is a decision that violates the most fundamental rights and goes against Spanish legislations.

The dispersion makes the imprisonment harder for the prisoners and extends the punishment to their friends and relatives, for whom spending a short period of time with the prisoner involves a huge personal effort, in terms of time, the risks involved in the long journeys to the prisons and, not forgetting, the financial cost. For example, the families spend an average of 13,812 euros per year on visits to the prison.

ELA newsletter

Solidarity of Basque Workers

EUSTAKIO URANGA, head of the Occupational Health Sector speaks about the tenth anniversary of the Occupational Risks Act

“Ten Years of Failure”



108 workers have died at work in Euskal Herria so far this year. According to Eustakio Uranga, these figures are proof that the Occupational Risks Act has failed.

-The Occupational Risks Act became law ten years ago. Is it a good instrument? Has it been effective?

-It obviously has not as the number of occupational accidents has increased, as have the resulting deaths. We are facing a very serious problem. 108 people have already died as the result of occupational accidents in the Basque Country. The statistics show that the accident rate is three times higher than in Europe.

-Does the law need to be changed? And in which direction?

-More than be changed, I would say that the law has to be respected. Occupational health and safety regulations

are currently widely breached. And there are very few cases of this resulting in a fine and, on the other hand, when that does happen, the fine is usually too low.

-What are the reasons for the high accident rate?

-The companies put economic profits before the occupational health and safety of the workers. The temporary employment contracts increase the risk. Last year, 58% of people involved in serious accidents and 65% of the people who died were working for subcontractors.

-The companies do not comply with the law. They do not take the necessary safety measures and then the inevitable happens. The work rates set are also sadly lacking.

-And the authorities do not react to this situation as they should. First of all, they are guilty of the high job insecurity, apart from the fact that they hold the instruments to ensure the law is respected and they do not use them. The number of inspectors for each 1000 workers is three times lower than in the rest of Europe. It is a political decision

taken against the workers and in favour of the companies.

-What measures does ELA propose to deal with this situation?

-The number of accidents will continue to rise as the number of temporary contracts, outsourcing and privatisations continue to increase.

More inspectors are needed to visit companies and fine them when they break the law. This is essential in the small companies. The risks have to be analysed and a prevention plan included in the budget.

The trade unions also have our part to play. We have to take this issue into account in the trade union actions such as collective bargaining: we have to demand safety.

-Would it be helpful if the Basque Government controlled the Labour Inspectorate? What do you think about the Osalan situation?

-We have frequently asked for the Basque Government to control the labour inspectorate. The inspectorate does not currently comply with the law and is clear proof of the State's political policy.

I should also point out that the Basque Government has not been successful in this area. Osalan (Basque Occupational Health and Safety Institute) is a bureaucratic instrument to a great extent. Political willpower and willingness is needed to tackle the companies and they would therefore need human resources that they do not want to provide

Companies put economic profits before occupational safety