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EUSKAL HERRIA • ERABAKIA • ADOSTASUNA

Therefore, it is essential for society to be involved. Just a few days before the ceasefire announcement, various social and political force had convened a demonstrations for next Saturday, April 1st, in Bilbao, under the slogan "It's Time for Solutions".

JOY, SATISFACTION AND HOPE FOLLOWING THE NEWS

ETA announces a permanent ceasefire

In a statement released on March 22nd, ETA announced its decision to declare a permanent ceasefire from March 24th.

In its message, ETA explained that it had taken this decision "to promote a democratic process in the Basque Country and to build a new framework in which our rights as a people will be recognised, and guarantee the opportunity to develop all political options in the future".

ELA considers this initiative to be very positive and has demanded that the Spanish State and, in particular, Rodriguez Zapatero's government, takes a firm stand and assumes undertakings in favour of peace and political mainstreaming, to ensure that this process becomes irreversible.

(Interview on this theme on the last page).

March 8th, International Woman's day: "THE ROLE OF CARERS IS UP TO ALL OF US"

March 8th, International Woman's Day, ELA focused its message on the problems arising from caring for dependent persons: Being a carer is not just a woman's job, but is also a political and social responsibility.

As Itziar Gabikagogeaskoa, the trade union's Gender Policy Leader, pointed out, over 80% of the care of dependent persons falls on women, who suffer the negative consequences of that situation at a personal, professional and economic level.

Gabikagogeaskoa puts forward two types of strategies: one, social appreciation of the care and men assuming their responsibility as regards this. The other strategy, that is more in the background, involves the care of dependent persons being assumed as a collective responsibility that public institutions have to meet. This explains the central role given on March 8th to the lack of coverage of these requirements and the claim for the protection of dependent persons as a universal right.



COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

■ Tudela gardeners achieve wage equality

After being on strike for nearly three months, the Tudela gardeners (Navarra), belonging to an outsourcer, reached an agreement that included most of their claims and brought them in line with the workers directly employed by the council that did the same work.

The agreement, which will be in force for 4 years, includes a salary increase of 28%, a 35-hour working week, which is set at 1521 hours a year, 100% I.T. and a further series of social improvements, including the equality of common law couples, irrespective of their sexuality.

According to the ELA leader in the zone, "going on strike has once again been shown to be the only way to get the different authorities to assume that they have a responsibility towards sub-contracted workers, and their policy of privatising services cannot be an excuse for job insecurity in the labour chain".

Strike in the Irun cleaning services. The cleaners in the public centres run by Irun City Council have now been on strike for two months without the



■ EUSKADI, AGAINST THE BOLKESTEIN DIRECTIVE

To mark the first reading of the draft "directive concerning services in the internal market" (Bolkestein Directive) in the European Parliament on February 15th, ELA took part in the demonstration organised by the ETUC in front of the European Parliament, in Strasbourg, and in the capitals of the Basque Country under the slogan "Stop Bolkestein". The demonstration was aimed at denouncing the dangers of this bill for the working class and European citizens as a whole and to demand that the law be withdrawn for once and for all. ELA believes that although the compromise reached has removed the most ultraliberal aspects of the text, the bill continues to affect part of public services and is highly unclear about the legislation to be applied. We therefore believe that further demonstrations are necessary.



company or the politicians showing the least intention of going to the negotiating table. After two months demanding that the discrimination in the sector be ended (they earn 35% less than the people on the council payroll), Irun City Council has stated that it plans to announce a public recruitment process. Far from fostering a climate of dialogue, this is an attempt at increasing the tension and terrifying the strikers with the threat of a general layoff.

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three times that violate the right to strike.

■ Strike in the Irun cleaning services

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■ Prosegur on strike for over three months

The security guards at the largest Basque Police station (Ertzaintza) in

■ RIGHT TO THE SUBROGATION IN PRIVATE SERVICES

On May 9th, the collective wage agreement for the Basque local authorities staff was signed. According to Patxi Agirrezabala, ELA-Gizalan's general secretary (federation of public employees), it is a good agreement: "this year, salaries increase by 4.6%, the working year is reduced by two working days and the minimum municipal salary is guaranteed for insertion contracts. The contingency rate is limited to 6% in public employment". On the other hand, Agirrezabala stressed that a fundamental aspect of the new agreement is the recognition of the right to subrogation in employment for the contracted and sub-contracted workforce. It is a conquest for local authority workers to the benefit of the employees in the services that are being privatised.

the whole of the Basque Country, in Erandio, have been on strike for three months and are demanding wage equality, that the cleaning and maintenance staff have already achieved. The salary of a private security guard is 13,500 euros a year, with a monthly salary of 925 euros, including the basic salary, uniform supplement, transport, shifts, etc. Their work schedule is between 8 and 12 hours a day, with morning, afternoon and night shifts, 7 days a week, including bank holidays. The Basque Government's Department of the Interior currently refuses to negotiate and has invalidated the right to strike by putting its own police officers in the posts of the strikers.

DISPLACEMENT

■ April 7th, Bizkaia shop workers on strike

ELA, LAB, UGT and USO, who called for the January strike among Bizkaia shop workers, have called for another day's strike on April 7th. After nearly 13 months, the sector continues to be without a wage agreement and management is only drawing out the negotiations. "They refuse to accept any shorter working day and better contracting conditions".



■ For jobs for a whole region

On March 4th, thousands of people demonstrated in Bilbao to defend jobs in the Las Encartaciones region and against the closure the Virtisu and Pastguren paper mills.

This business project started seven years ago and was supported by the workers and public authorities, who gave over 15 million euros in subsidies, as well as other facilities for purchasing land. After seven year, management, after having recorded earnings of thousands of millions of pesetas, plan to abandon the project, which would lead to the loss of nearly 600 jobs, approximately 10% of the employment in those towns.

PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM

■ "Waiting lists of over 18 months"

In March, ELA published a report about the alarming situation of the waiting lists in the Basque public health service. The ELA leader in the Basque Health Service, Izaskun Garikano, spoke to us about this issue.



-What can you tell us about the waiting lists?

-Despite the Department's propaganda, which claims that the waiting lists are under 60 days, the real waiting lists, or rather, the time from going to the GP, getting an appointment with the specialist and then undergoing surgery, ranges between 6 and 18 months, according to our data.

-What is the reason for this increase?

-It reflects the lack of staff and the poor management of the material and human resources. This all directly affects quality. Years ago, the health managers invented the auto-coordination formula, which means that the operations that cannot be performed in working hours, take place in the afternoon and the doctor gets paid per operation. This formula has proven to be useless, and perverse, as some professional now generate waiting lists so that they can operate in the afternoons.

-Given this failure, what have our public managers done?

-They have opted to privatise some operations. Many of the areas that have shorter waiting lists is because the patient receives a call offering him the possibility of being operated within 15 days, in a private centre, or in 6 months, in the public health system. They are operations that are outside the public health quality control. While the private or approved clinics receive public subsidies, the operating theatres of the Basque Health Service are closed in the afternoons and do not receive sufficient investments. There is no commitment to public health.

■ ZERO TOLERANCE OF RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA

-Is the anti-apartheid movement still alive?

-Obviously. Exploitation and robbery in the southern countries has increased as the outcome of neo-liberal policies. Political and administrative corruption likewise leads to dismemberment of societies, poverty, delinquency and internal strife. More people are emigrating to look for a better future and the host societies often do not know how to react to this phenomenon in a suitable way. Unfortunately, emigrants suffer racism and xenophobia also Euskal Herria every day.

-What do you think about the legislation in this area?

-The Immigration Act fosters job insecurity, temporary employment, without contracts. In short: exploitation and social exclusion. ELA denounces this act, which condemns immigrants to survive in inferior situations and fosters prejudices and stereotypes that result in isolation, separation, and the rejection of foreign cultures and values. Tolerance and intercultural education, together with social integration and guaranteed human rights, are fundamental aspects to progress in this ongoing struggle to eliminate discrimination in favour of democratic coexistence, in order to thus carve a society with dignified conditions for everyone.



ELA newsletter

Solidaridad de Trabajadores Vascos

GERMAN KORTABARRIA, ELA Deputy Secretary General

"Time for solutions"



We receive the news of the permanent ceasefire with great satisfaction". It is great news and our reaction is very positive, without any reserve".

-Was this announcement expected?

-We had been receiving hopeful messages from the major players, such as the Spanish Government or experienced members from the Batasuna political sector, for some time. However, the facts were not as positive: ETA remained active, but without any fatalities. The Spanish State was continuing along an extremely hard line in areas such as the policy of sending prisoners all over the state, the implementation of new legal criteria in order to prevent prisoners being released and extending the sentences of those coming to end of their time in prison, or putting leaders in jail for calling a strike or organising a political activity. The Basque

society was every worried about all that and it has received the ETA announcement with great joy.

-Is this the beginning of a new era?

-This is what has to be achieved and we can all do something to ensure that is the case. Yet now it is the State's turn to make the first move. We have to believe that the Spanish Government has an agenda that includes adopting measures regarding the prisoners, allowing the political participation of Batasuna, under that or another name, and giving the go-ahead to a political dialogue table. Rodríguez Zapatero has to take clear steps, that accredit, beyond words, his commitment to the peace process and political mainstreaming and his determination to make sure it is irreversible. There are no longer any excuses.

-Do you think it will be a long process?

-It will surely be a long and complicated process, due to the very difficulty of the issues to be discussed and the interest of some forces to see it fail. Therefore, it is essential for society to be involved. Just a few days before the ceasefire announcement, various social and political force had convened a demonstrations for next Saturday, April 1st, in

Bilbao, under the slogan "It's Time for Solutions".

-People are saying that the international community needs to get involved in the process.

-It is a conflict that directly affects the Spanish and French states, but also the international community, in particular the European Union, which we the men and women of Euskal Herria are citizens. Other states and the EU itself need to be involved to some extent in making sure that peace is achieved and the political conflict is solved using democratic criteria.

-When evaluating the ceasefire, ELA stressed that it opened up new collaboration prospects.

-Undoubtedly, as we already believed that the armed struggle was a factor that interfered in the social and political struggles and hindered the collaboration dynamics. We are today in a better situation to accumulate social and political force for the right of the Basque people to decide its future. In short, we are in a better situation to fight for the democratic solution of the Basque political conflict. We therefore believe that those of us who defend the right of our people to self-determination have to have a far reaching discussion about the fundamental strategic lines to achieve it and the minimum work to be achieved in common. As the recognition of this right is still going to require a great struggle, a great deal of socialisation work and many demands.

At ELA, at least, we are not sure that a political table is not going to recognise the right to self-determination overnight. We will have to fight for it.

"We believe that the very core of the political solution is the recognising the citizens' right to decide"