

35.98% representation in Hego Euskal Herria

ELA repeats its large majority



December 31st marked the end of the intense period to elect the new trade union representatives in most companies. The outcome has been highly positive: ELA has consolidated its majority and is leaps ahead of the others.

In the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, the most populated area of the Basque Country, ELA representation (40.70%) is twice that of the

following trade union and easily surpassed the joint total of the CCOO and UGT trade unions.

In Navarra, where the elections are held at a later date, ELA currently holds 21.48% and continues to consolidate its upward trend.

In the opinion of the secretary general, Jose Elorrieta, these results strengthen ELA's lists of claims and bargaining

proposals, and endorse the trade union leadership renewal process in the companies.

The results endorse our decision to opt to fight

	A. C. Basque Country		Navarra		TOTAL	
	Shop stewards	%	Shop stewards	%	Shop stewards	%
ELA	7.854	40,70	1.347	21,48	9.201	35,98
LAB	3.232	16,75	770	12,28	4.002	15,65
CCOO	3.839	19,89	1.532	24,43	5.371	21,01
UGT	2.510	13,00	1.933	30,82	4.443	17,38
OTHERS	1.864	9,66	689	10,99	2.553	9,98
TOTAL	19.299	100	6.271	100	25.570	100

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

■ Insufficient REACH

The toxic substance standard approved by the European Parliament has been classified by ELA as insufficient. It is true that the setting up of the Chemical Product Control Agency is a step forward, but 60% of the substances are exempt from the obligation to provide data about the environment and health impact, it does not impose the "substitution principle" and substances classified as "extremely concerning" will be on the market as long as the manufacturers ensure that exposure to them may be suitably controlled.

One example of the consequences of exposure to chemical substances is the example of Ductilor S.A. in Durango, where various cases of people suffering from asbestosis, resulting from contact with asbestos, have been detected.

DELOCALISATION

■ Reckitt-Benckiser, an unjustified closure

ELA was at the European Coordination Meeting for the World March of Women, which met for the first time in the Basque Country. During the three-day meeting, the various problems facing women were discussed. The main issues were violence against women, poverty and job insecurity. The future of the European Coordination Entity was also discussed and the European representatives for the International Committee were also elected.

WOMEN

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SOCIALPOLITIC

Rich institutions, poor citizens

One of the exponents of the neo-liberal policy of Basque institutions is to end the year with a surplus, despite having the lowest levels of social spending in the European Union. In other words, instead of covering the important existing social needs (housing, health, education, social services), they prefer to spend less than they collect in revenues.

Thus, the Basque Government ended 2005, the most recent year for which information is available, with a surplus of 545 million euros, in other words, 0.95% of the GDP. Since the year 2000, the Basque Government has ended every year with a surplus and the accumulated surplus over these six years comes to 1917 million euros. In the case of Navarra, 2006 is forecast to end with a surplus of 120 million euros, equivalent to 0.7% of the GDP. Since 1995, the Navarra Government has ended 8 years with a surplus and 3 with a deficit. Meanwhile, the European Union has ended the years with deficits. In 2005, it was 2.3% of the GDP. People usually wonder what the institutions do with that excess money.

The answer is that the surplus is used to reduce the public debt. Thus, the latter is having a significantly lower impact on the economy. The Basque Government foresees that its debt for 2006 will come to 556 million euros, 0.9% of the GDP. This is 4.8 points of GDP less than in 1998.

During this period, the total debt stock of the Basque Government dropped from 2037.4 million euros to the point that it has practically disappeared. The total debt stock for 2006 came to 267 euros per person, an insignificant amount if we compare it to the debt acquired by those people that opt to buy a house. In fact, the average mortgage in September 2006 came to 168,000 euros.

This is a clear example of how the Hego Euskal Herria authorities have relinquished their duties and opted for an increasingly lower debt, and have left it up to society to take on this task to an increasingly greater extent.

Mikel Noval and Julene Gabiola, Heads of the Studies Office

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COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

■ Successful outcome of the strike by the carers for the elderly

After six months on strike, the workers at the San Juan Bautista Home for the Elderly, in Andoain (Gipuzkoa) have overcome the resistance of the Town Council and have reached an agreement that envisages salary increases of between 11.43 to 12.22%. The strikers are very positive about the agreement. There are currently other homes for the elderly where the workers continue to fight for decent working conditions, against public institutions that continue to privatize services and create even greater job insecurity.

WORLD SOCIAL FORUM

■ ELA at the VII World Social Forum

An ELA delegation took part at the VII World Social Forum at Nairobi. Sixty thousand people gathered at the Forum to discuss this year's theme "people's struggles, people's alternatives". Despite the logistic and organisation difficulties, linked to the difficult situation in Africa, the dynamics of the movement have been brought to the African continent, which has been notable by its absence at previous forums and thus, establish relations with other movements and networks.



Workers Strike Fund

ELA has improved the cover offered by the Workers Strike Fund for 2007. ELA believes that striking is essential given the serious job insecurity problems facing the workers in the job market. The workers strike fund for 2007 is as follows:

- Basic Compensation: 708 euros/month.
- Topped-up Compensation: 814 euros/month (when at least 35% of the people called to strike are members).
- Extraordinary Compensation: 5% of the net salary up to a maximum of 1,417 euros/month.

An automatic annual increase will be applied which will guarantee that the Basic Compensation is at least 105% of the Minimum inter-professional wage.



OPINION

"Flexi-security" or "Flexi-insecurity"

The current buzz word in the European social and trade union debate is "flexi-security". "Modernity" or "adaptability" were others in the past that were applied to the job market and all with "positive" connotations, who does not want to be modern, adaptable or flexible or not rigid, or of course, who does not prefer security to insecurity. However, we know by experience that they are very dangerous terms that help to de-ideologise the real debate.

Talking about flexi-security is rather ironic in a job market like ours. In the Basque Country, we have an overdose of flexibility: our rate of temporary jobs is over 30% and is twice the European average. We are a long way from security, as there is clearly insufficient social cover in addition to job insecurity.

It is obviously a very different panorama to the Danish situation or to other countries with a highly developed welfare state. In Denmark, a textbook example of "flexi-security", the tax pressure is much higher, which means that the level of social cover is much more extensive than ours, the average salaries are much higher, generalised unemployment benefits (not like here, where it is normal not to be receiving benefits) are much higher than those of Basque salaries, a much lower rate of temporary jobs (11%), a much shorter legal working week (37 hours compared to 40). There are also advisory and participation bodies so that the entities that they defend the workers' interests may express their opinion, which is not the case here.

Meanwhile our welfare state is at the tail end of Europe and the Danish one at the fore. Too many differences in order to pretend to apply the same recipe. "Flexi-security" here is "flexi-insecurity".

Adolfo Muñoz, head of collective bargaining

ELA newsletter

Solidarity of Basque Workers

Laura Gonzalez de Txabarri, Head of the International Department

“There will be no end to the troubles without dialogue”



Over 10 months have passed since ETA announced their ceasefire. During that period, there were various contacts between that organisation with the Government, and also between the political parties, although, obviously, without results. The terror attack at Madrid Airport has shattered this process, even though ETA wanted to play down its effects and has claimed that the ceasefire is still in force. We spoke to Laura Gonzalez de Txabarri to get her perspective on the troubles and we began by asking her for her assessment of the Madrid terror attack.

-It is an atrocity from any point of view. It killed two immigrant workers, caused widespread damage and placed a deep burden on the very dialogue process. Very few people, including among the sectors ideologically closest to ETA, have understood the attack.

-Can the peace process be considered to be over?

-I do not like to be so categorical. Rodriguez Zapatero himself has preferred to be prudent and not close all the doors, and, from the other side, they are insisting that they continue to be in favour of the process. In any case, I believe that the dialogue should not break down, however difficult the circumstances are, because there will be no end to the troubles without dialogue.

-Batasuna has just published a political proposal which envisaged the democratic transition to a different political framework, based on the current legal framework.

-I believe that the proposal, as such, is positive: it includes aspects of political realism and it assumes that each of the steps will only be taken if it has the majority backing of the citizens involved. Now, I see two problems: the first is that when things are really serious, this type of proposals are discussed around the negotiating tables and not in the media. The second, the more serious, is that it will not get anywhere if the non-acceptance of the proposal is going to result in more bombs.

-The Times has recently published an interview with Iñaki De

The Spanish justice system has relinquished its position as an autonomous power.

Juana, who is in prison, and a shocking image which shows the effects of his hunger strike.

-Iñaki De Juana has become the symbol of the disaster that Spanish justice has become. According to the law, De Juana should have been released over more than two years ago, but the government and the tribunals have manoeuvred to prevent it, first, by extending the prison sentence and, then, sentencing him to 13 years in jail for having written two opinion articles. One thing is not sharing the past of this person, and another that, from the power of the state, the most basic rights are denied.

-Much is spoken about the politicisation of the justice system.

-I believe that the Spanish justice system has relinquished being an independent power, that applies the law and looks after all citizens, in order to become an instrument of the “fight against terrorism”. Today, the courts can put anybody considered to be in a specific political sector of the Basque spectrum in jail without the need of proving that a punishable fact has occurred, as all means have to be used to fight against that sector.

And then there is the partisan alignment of the judges. Regarding any political important decision, the judges are aligned with the government or with the Partido Popular. We have moved from the division of powers to the division of judges into two sectors: some, the majority, with the right-wing opposition, and the others, with the government.