

“Class Pride”, ELA’s slogan on Mayday.

CLASS PRIDE

That was the message that ELA wanted to pass on to the Basque working class on Mayday 2007. ELA thus stressed that we are proud of who we are and of the collective to which we belong.

The speech by the secretary general, Jose Elorrieta, marked the start of the Mayday ceremonies at midday in Bilbao. This was followed by a demonstration when thousands of people marched through the main streets of Bilbao.

During his speech, Jose Elorrieta wanted to

stress the idea of class pride. “There is one idea that ELA embodies and that is that the trade union movement has to be close to the worker, close to his or her problems and to his or her priorities. Now that it is so fashionable for neo-liberalism to strip all the terms and words of any contents, which is deideologising, we are clearly demanding to be a social class, and we are proudly defending our way of understanding life, our values, our desires to construct a fairer and more just world. Today, more than ever, we have to be proud of who we are and of the collective to which we belong.



AGAINST THE END OF THE CEASEFIRE

Over a thousand people took part in the demonstration organised by ELA in Bilbao to express its opposition to ETA’s decision to break the ceasefire. The slogan of the demonstration was “As we are Basque nationals and workers, we do not agree”. According to ELA, ETA’s decision to break the ceasefire is a very serious mistake, particularly as it breaks the fundamentals of coexistence to which we are all entitled and as the people, in whose name the decision to break the ceasefire was taken, rejects that decision and demands that violence end and that the political conflict be democratically resolved. The strategy of the armed struggle must end now for the good of everyone.



HIGH-SPEED TRAIN

■ A train for the people

On 19th April, ELA organized an event in Durango (Bizkaia) to demand that work on the High Speed Train be stopped, and that the institutions set up a social debate regarding the railway network needed by the population. The event, which was part of the trade union's campaign against the high speed train and in favour of a social train, was strongly supported: over a thousand ELA delegates were present at Durango.



COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

■ Between 15 and 17% salary increase in ITA

On 10th May, an agreement was reached at ITA, the affiliate of the ITP aircraft multinational which was threatening to delocate the company. The agreement reached includes salary increases between 15 and 17%, the first year, and at the RPI + 4 points, on average, the second year, along with the temporary workers being made permanent.

■ Agreement in Arkema after 36 days on strike

After 36 days on strike, the workers' committee of Arkema, the chemical company, reached an agreement with the French multinational, Arkema. The agreement guarantees the application of the work and salary conditions envisaged in the

CONSTRUCTION

■ AGREEMENT IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR IN GIPUZKOA

ELA called an indefinite strike in the construction sector in Gipuzkoa from 11th June. ELA thus wanted to force management to change its intransigent position in the collective bargaining process. The employers' organization Adeg management was demanding a longer working week and a series of measure that would have worsened working conditions in the sector.

The huge support for the call-to-strike forced management to reenter negotiations with ELA, which holds the absolute majority in the sector. The offer put on the table was welcomed by the assembly of construction delegates and the agreement was then signed. As Xabier Agirretxe, the leader of the construction sector in Gipuzkoa, stressed, "we have shown that there is a huge negotiating margin and action is needed to make management alter its stand".

current company agreement to the 11 workers who will be transferred to Kemira, the Finish company, as the result of part of the factory being sold off. The agreement also envisages that the 11 workers will have their jobs guaranteed until 2016, when they will be able to return to Arkema. This agreement has only been possible thanks to the solidarity that the rest of the 72-strong Arkema workforce has shown

towards the 11 affected by the Kemira purchase operation. Eighty-five per cent of the Arkema workforce belongs to ELA:

■ One hour strike in Telemarketing

On 14th May, the majority of the telemarketing sector joined the one hour strike called by the ELA and LAB trade unions. Under the slogan "We work here, we negotiate here", they demanded their own agreement be negotiated to improve the wages of 800 euros a month and a working year of 1764 hours.

■ IZASKUN GARIKANO, NEW SECRETARY OF ELA-GIZALAN



The Federal Committee elected Izaskun Garikano as the new Secretary General of ELA-Gizalan, the federation that deals with the social and public sector. Garikano replaces Patxi Agirrezabala, who will be put forward as the Responsible for Communications on the Executive Committee.

TAXATION

■ ELA demands taxation for social welfare

ELA has submitted the annual report on the evolution of taxes in the

Basque Country. The report prepared by the Studies Department criticizes the company owners for plundering labour income. As Mikel Noval, head of the Studies Department, stressed, "six out of every ten euros that the Authorities collect from earned income come from the workers. However, one out of every two companies file losses or zero basis for the Corporation Tax, so they do not have to pay taxes. The aim of this fiscal design is to improve the surplus, instead of funding social spending".



SOCIAL SERVICES

■ New attack on the public system

The Spanish Government has approved the draft regulatory framework of the social security reserve fund. According to ELA, "the bill is yet another step in the privatization of public funds and questions and weakens the public system nature of the Social Security". ELA went on to add that "it is paradoxical that, contrary to what the law states, the public institutions of the Greater Basque Country are denied the competence to manage the economic system of the Social Security system, while the administration of the reserve fund is entrusted to private companies".

INTERNATIONAL

■ Intense international activity

A delegation from the Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) led by its chairman, Irakli Petrashvili, visited the Basque Country from 2nd to 5th May, invited by ELA, to study the Basque political, social and labour situation. The following week, a delegation from the metal section of CSC, the Belgian trade union, led by the secretary general, Paul Liaos and Karel Van Utte, met the leaders of the ELA metal federation.

INTERNACIONAL

■ COURSE "TRADE UNION POWER IN THE WORLD ECONOMY"

On 28th and 29th June, Christian Lévesque, Gregor Murray, Christian Dufour and Adelheid Hege will hold the course entitled "Trade Union Power in the World Economy". Christian Lévesque is a professor at HEC Montreal and co-director of the Interuniversity Research Centre on Globalization and Work (CRIMT); Gregor Murray is a professor at the School of Industrial Relations at the University of Montreal and director of the CRIMT; Christian Dufour is a sociologist, a specialist in professional relations, assistant director of the IRES, the French Institute of Economic and Social Research, where he is the scientific coordinator of the institute's journal; Adelheid Hege is a sociologist and researcher at the IRES, and in charge of the international section of its journal, and specialises in international professional comparative relations.



Christian Lévesque

Gregor Murray

OPINION

"ON THE OFFENSIVE"

That is the tone set in the strategic document approved for the next 4 years by the ETUC Congress held in Seville from 21st to 24th May. Strengthening trade union membership and going on the offensive for a labour market with quality jobs, for strong and organised collective bargaining, for a more social European Union. These are the main objectives for the next 4 years.



There are numerous challenges: strengthening the membership is key to improving the strength correlation of European trade unionism towards management and community institutions. Only from a strong position can we stand up and go on the offensive, in order to balance things fairly.

The debate on flexicurity will enter a new stage from June onwards, when the Commission submits its proposal. If something became clear in the Congress debates, it is the distrust, if not the rejection, that this concept generates among the trade unions. An offensive approach cannot be content with smoothing out the rough edges of an approach whose objective is none other than continuing to deregulate the labour market, in order to make it even more insecure, under the promise of greater security which does not exist in reality.

As far as the future of the European Constitutional Treaty is concerned, the focus seems to be on the proposals of the states, but never tackles what should be the in-depth issue of the debate: how to build a true social Europe. And this should be the main concern and occupation of the trade union movement, going on the offensive to seek and demand a European made for the working class and with its participation. More social and more democratic. Beyond the uncertain future of the text, it is up to us to "do all the donkey work" to build a Social Europe.

Laura Gonzalez de Txabarri, head of the International Department

ELA newsletter

Solidarity of Basque Workers

ADOLFO MUÑOZ, Head of Collective Bargaining

“Only ELA provides the resources to face up to management”



Adolfo Muñoz stresses the need to mobilise given the bargaining stalemate.

-The 2007 collective bargaining process is at its halfway point. How is it going overall?

-To a great extent, just as expected. ELA believes that the 2007 collective bargaining process is taking place against an economic background of growth and great profits. There is no justification for management's refusal to improve working conditions. As far as the quality of the jobs are concerned, we are still considering specific fights against job insecurity, in its different forms,

temporary employment, discrimination, outsourcing, etc...

On the other hand, management states that job insecurity is not open to negotiation and that they are not just satisfied with "freezing" the agreement, but they also take stances that seriously threaten the rights achieved over the years.

-Therefore, the coming months are complicated.

-That is how we see it. We have witnessed a long chain of mobilisations and strikes over recent weeks, both in sectors and in companies. For examples, strikes in the public teaching sector, companies from Metal, Gipuzkoa perfume industry, telemarketing, and in numerous companies... If nothing changes, there will soon be more. Special mention should also be made of the negotiating going on in the SMEs (companies with less than 50 employees). If there is trade union membership and action, the size of the company is rather secondary.

-Is mobilisation the only way out?

-Management has a tremendous margin and does not want to negotiate. The aim is

to discipline the trade union movement as a whole to negotiation parameters where they only discuss what management wants them to. Faced with this situation, there are only two possibilities: or work with them and approve their decision or fight on the side of the people, by organising them. What most upsets such arrogant management is that the trade union does not give in and works to gain respect. We want agreements with contents because that is what our people want and need.

-What is your opinion about the other trade unions' more or less rejection of the conflict that ELA proposes?

-This crisis situation of the collective bargaining process defines each of us. We believe there is a debate that cannot be postponed in protest trade unionism. If we want to face up to management, resources are needed; militant human resources to organise trade union action, and economic resources (Workers' Strike Fund), which allows the workers to respect and survive - where applicable - a conflict over time. And the other trade unions, unfortunately, do not have these resources.

We will continue focusing on protest dynamics. And, without doubt, in the spheres where we organise and unionize the workers and they decide to fight, we are going to continue being a useful instrument for that fight.

In short: there is no justification for management's refusal to improve working conditions