



In Barcelona, over 1,500 ELA militants expressed the social discontent with the European construction process

Curbing the neo-Liberal Europe

On the 15th and 16th March, the summit of the heads of state and government from across the European Union was held in Barcelona. As on previous occasions, the European Trade Union Confederation organised a Euro-demonstration there calling for 'a social Europe based on solidarity'.

In response to this call and to that of the numerous groups and social movements against the current neo-Liberal globalisation, the capital of Catalonia filled with different people and voices demanding that greater attention be paid to the social needs of the majority, of the ordinary citizens, and not of those of share capital and the large companies.

Over 1,500 ELA militants travelled by coach for many hours to take part in the large Euro-

demonstration organised by the Trade Unions on the 14th. ELA's colourful and lively delegation marched through the streets of Barcelona, demanding a Europe of the workers and of the peoples, and highlighting the national and class problem that Basque society is suffering.

Once the demonstration was over, most of the delegation returned home, except for around a hundred delegates, mainly the younger ones, who stayed to take part in various meetings and conferences about the World Social Forum of Porto Alegre and about the cancellation of third world debt. and then took part in the massive, colourful demonstration called for the 16th.

And we can all achieve another Europe and therefore another World.



Above, ELA's delegation during the Euro-demonstration on the 14th.



■ Solidarity with the PSE

ELA's secretary general, José Elorrieta, condemned the murder of Juan Priede, the Socialist councillor for Orío, and accused ETA of murdering a worker and a democratic representative of the citizens. Elorrieta stressed the contradiction of those people who invoke the name of the Basque people, but who act against their desires and their representatives. He also expressed his solidarity with the PSE and the Socialist family, which ETA is attacking in a particularly

■ ELA with the Greens/ European Free Alliance

On the 4th April, Laura Gonzalez de Txabarri, ELA's international representative, took part in a meeting in Brussels with representatives of the European Free Alliance/Greens Parliamentary Group. During the meeting, which was attended by representatives of other European trade unions and NGOs, Gonzalez de Txabarri stressed that the European construction process has mainly focused on commercial and economic aspects, and the debate on social equality has been sidelined".

■ Large crowds in Bilbao on the 1st May

Thousands of workers took part in the 1st May demonstration in Bilbao under the slogan, "This can change. The trade union, an instrument of change".

Equal opportunities for women, non-discrimination against young people and accidents in the workplace were other issues underlying the May Day messages. After the demands came the party. Over 6,000 people enjoyed the traditional brotherhood lunch. It was undoubtedly a day of demands, but also of solidarity, fraternity and partying.

■ ELA is demanding 20,000 subsidised flats a year

A housing study prepared by ELA's research department describes the situation as a real social scandal and demands that the Basque institutions come up with a housing policy that ends land speculation and increases subsidised housing to 20,000 a year.

According to the same study, housing prices rose by between 25 and 70% between 1996 and 2000. Therefore, Basque citizens who are buying a house for the first time spend over half their salary on paying the mortgage.



■ Against accidents in the workplace

To mark the International Occupational Health and Safety Day, various demonstrations were held on the 25th and 26th April, as well as an hour's stoppage so that meeting could be held to analyse occupational health and safety in general and that of each company in particular. According to data from ELA's Occupational Health Department, increased job insecurity is linked to a notable rise in accidents.



Amaia Aierbe

■ Amaia Aierbe, elected secretary general of the Teachers' Federation

Amaia Aierbe has been elected secretary general of the Teachers' Federation during the V Congress held in Pamplona on the 1st March under the slogan of "The workers have the say in teaching".

The congress stressed the difficult situation that the sector is facing, with a neo-Liberal policy where educational services are being treated more like goods than a public service. It also placed great emphasis on the need to face up to the attacks of the Spanish

government against the Basque educational system.

As far as jobs are concerned, the main goals are to recover the purchasing power, bringing the workers in the private sector in line with those in the public, reducing the teaching day, and getting rid of job insecurity and sub-contracting.

■ The government is hounding the unemployed

ELA has criticised the project to reform unemployment benefit being prepared by the PP government. This reform involves cutting the benefits, tightening the terms for being entitled to them and hounding the unemployed in order for them to accept any job and under any terms.

ELA is sure that they are no economic reasons for this savings policy, as Spanish unemployment benefits are at the bottom end of Europe as far as coverage is concerned, while it has a notable economic surplus.

■ The greater the pressure, the better the agreements

ELA's Secretary in charge of bargaining, Sebas Andreu, has said that

there is a direct relationship between using pressure (strikes) and good collective agreements being achieved. Andreu thus explained that the salaries increased by 4.61% last year, while the rise was 5.21% in the companies where ELA has an absolute majority and salaries rose by an average of 6.31% in the companies where they had been a conflict. The working week had been reduced by 17.43 hours in the companies where ELA holds an absolute majority, which was much higher than the figure agreed in the sector agreements, and lower than the ones in companies where strikes had taken place, where the number was 20.90 hours.

On the other hand, Andreu complained that the practice of the CCOO, UGT and LAB to sign low content agreements in sectors where they are in a minority is becoming more widespread. The most scandalous case is that of the Concrete Companies and Quarries of Bizkaia (Hormigones y Canteras de Bizkaia), where the three trade unions together only account for 22%, while ELA represents 78% of the workers. Luckily, the workers have rejected an agreement that does not

represent their interests and the sector has gone on strike.

■ A debate about the role of the media

Invited by ELA, Aidan White, secretary general of the International Federation of Journalists, went to Bilbao to meet with Basque journalists and discuss their points of view about the role of the media, after the 11th September. He also delivered a paper, entitled "Fighting Terrorism?. Defending civil rights? Where the media stands", at the University of the Basque Country.

White pointed out that "reporters live and work in the most productive communications environment ever know". In White's opinion "people in journalism are facing a profound crisis. That crisis is seen on the pressures currently being applied on reporters and editors from inside media and from the political world outside. It is a corrosive process that calls into question the traditional role of journalism to provide high quality news about the world in which we live with a rich pluralist mix of information".cruel way.

■ Israeli aggression must stop LAND, PEACE, STATE FOR PALESTINE

ELA, together with the CC.OO., LAB, UGT and other social and trade union organisations, have stated their solidarity with the Palestinian people regarding the serious upsurge in violence by the Israeli Government and have called for a cease-fire and the immediate withdrawal by the army from the occupied Palestinian territories, the proclamation of an independent, sovereign Palestinian State, within safe and recognised frontiers, the recognition of the Palestinian National Authority as the only and legitimate representative of the Palestinian family, and the immediate renewal of the negotiations for peace and safety in the area.

The secretary general of ELA, CC.OO., LAB and UGT during the presentation of the joint manifesto in favour of Palestine.



ACTUALITY



Unai Romano, before and after being "interrogated" by the Civil Guard.

SPAIN TORTURES

It is a well-known secret that people held under anti-terrorist legislation are often maltreated and tortured. Yet, this situation, which is corroborated by international organisations such as Amnesty International, is systematically silenced by all the government authorities and the main members of the media.

However, sometimes the ring of silence fails, as has been the case when some members of the media published the photo that showed the pitiful state in which Unai Romano (24) was taken to the prison hospital on the night of the 7th September 2001, after having been in the hands of the Civil Guard. Today, this Mercedes worker, arrested for an alleged relationship with ETA, is now free.

The most serious aspect is that such events are not accidental, but the result of an anti-terrorist law that allows the person arrested to be held for a long period with no contact with the outside world, and this can be for as long as necessary for the proof of any possible torture to have disappeared. It is significant that not only has Aznar's government maintained this law against the opinion of numerous human rights organisations, but has also pardoned the police that are sentenced for torture.

Neither is the behaviour of the judges at the National Court, the special anti-terrorist court, beyond reproach. It is therefore incredible that the name of one of them, Baltasar Garzón, is being put forward for the Nobel Peace Prize. Even though the way he has pursued the state crimes in Latin America is undoubtedly worthy, he has not shown the same zeal regarding the occasional violation of the rights of the people that this court orders to be arrested.

ELA newsletter

Solidarity of Basque Workers

MIKEL NOVAL, head of social policy

Porto Alegre and Barcelona, the same fight



-What does ELA think about the Barcelona summit?

-The outcome of the summit confirms that the current European construction process is benefiting large companies and capital. It is not working towards constructing a solidarity or social Europe, where the rights of the person and the peoples are respected.

We are facing a clearly neo-Liberal process. We can therefore say that the European model that they want to apply is perfectly coherent with current neo-Liberal globalisation, which was recently denounced at the II World Social Forum at Porto Alegre, which laid down a starting point and its own specific features.

-The measures adopted are a step closer towards total social deregulation.

-That is true. Contrary to what has been publicly acknowledged,

no specific undertaking has been reached regarding increased aid to development. However, there has been in budgetary policy. They will continue along the same restrictive line: maximum levels of public deficit or public debt, interest rates, inflations rates, which are to the detriment of social rights. Central issues, such as rate of employment, job insecurity or level of social protection, have been left to one side.

As far as employment is concerned, they considered how the collective bargaining is to take place, wage restraint, improving production, on-going training and flexible work organisation. With regard

to social protection, the terms of what was agreed in Barcelona are very clear and demand that unemployment benefits and pensions are cut in the Union.

Finally, steps were taken in deregulating sectors that are fundamental for the people who are living in the EU, such as energy, transport and communications. Privatisations are part of an on-going process.

The trade union
has to be an
instrument of
social change
today more than
ever.

The Europe that is possible

-Faced with all this, ELA, in Barcelona, as it had already done in Porto Alegre, said that another world, another Europe is possible.

-Another Europe is needed and is possible. And the trade union movement has to play a decisive role in this struggle. For example, it is not coincidental that one of ELA's fundamental messages on the 1st May was to stress the role of the trade union as a instrument for social change.

But we are aware that we cannot do it by ourselves, that we need the social movements and trade unions to come together: we are all involved in the same struggle. The application of neo-Liberal policies affects all of us in the different spheres of our lives: as citizens and as workers. The adversary that we have to face is very powerful and we give great importance to the alliance between all of us who are fighting for a fairer society, based on solidarity.

-So, neither as workers or as a people do we approve of this Europe that is being built?

-It has still not been defined how the presence of nations, regions and not only states are going to be regulated in the EU. This debate is not going to solve our approach to self-determination, the specific problem of the Basque Country, but it is an issue that has to be tackled, despite some people's attempt to remain silent or get nervous when the role of the communities and nations in Europe is raised.

