



Categorical success of the general strike of the 19<sup>th</sup> June that ELA called in the Basque Country

# We did it!

**T**he general strike call of the 19th June had a majority answer that allows to talk about a total general strike in the Basque Country. The workers have therefore clearly shown their deep rejection of the Partido Popular Government's new labour reform that will worsen the situation of the working class even further.

In the industrial sector the stoppage was more than 85%, being the total strike 64,90 % and the partial strike 21,06%.

Also high impact in the private services: The big majority of the shopping centers and rail chains joined the strike, as well as central and supply markets. In the financial sector and

insurance offices the main offices closed in the capitals.

Concerning public services, very important stoppage in the administration, town halls and in the hospitals, who worked in minimum services. The two main ports and the toll roads were stoped and the big majority of the press -written, radio and TV- that work exclusively in the Basque Country joined the general strike.

Thousands of people took part in the demonstrations held simultaneously in the streets of the four main cities of the Basque Country at midday on the 19<sup>th</sup>.



*(Above) General secretary of ELA speaking to the demonstrators who made a big sit-in.  
(Left) Almost total inactivity in the industrial sector.  
(Right) Image of the demonstration in Bilbao.*



# The Reasons for the Strike

## Measures envisaged in the Decree

The labour reform imposed by decree-law includes restrictive measures and serious economic cut backs in the unemployment benefit system that has been in force up to now and which affects sectors such as:

- \* Workers who are coming up to retirement, as the concept of incomes that are incompatible with the benefit has been widened, which makes any possible early retirement much more expensive.
- \* Workers who are sacked, as the interim salaries have been stopped. This implies that it will even be cheaper to sack workers and the benefit period will be reduced.
- \* The unemployed, who will be forced to accept any job offer that the Spanish Employment Institute deems to be "suitable".
- \* Workers with discontinuous indefinite jobs. The law will consider that the discontinuous indefinite



Moment of the speech celebrated after the demonstration in San Sebastian.

jobs with a fixed incorporation date as part-time jobs and therefore these workers will not be entitled to unemployment benefit.

Bearing in mind that 2 out of every 3 unemployed workers are women, these measures will in particular affect women. This is not insignificant, bearing in mind that this is the collective who face the worse wor-

king conditions, who have the poorest pensions and whose situation will worsen with the current reform.

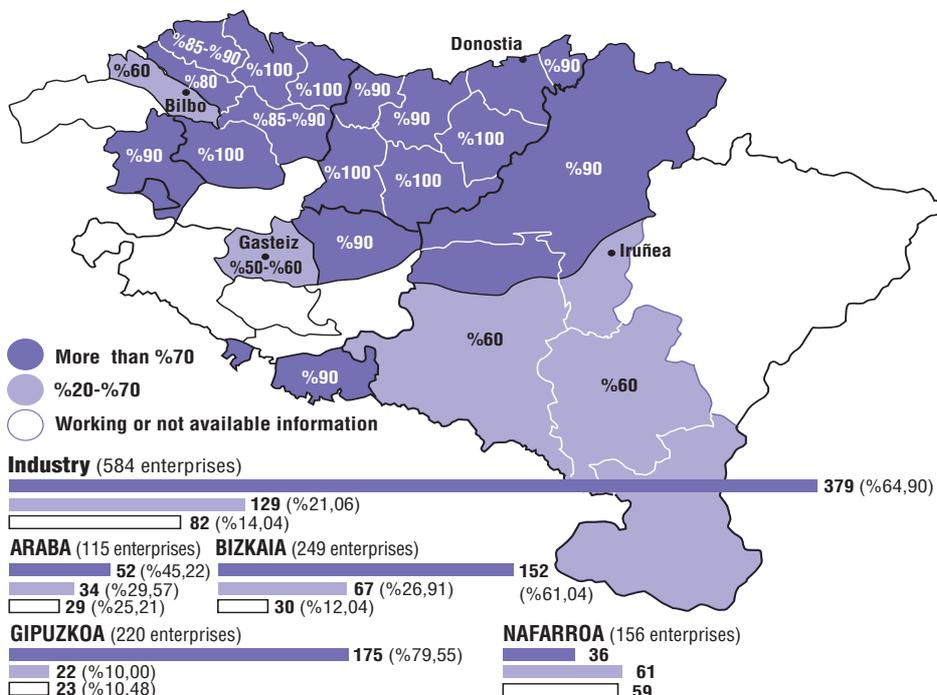
## A new cut back

Over recent years, the trend has been towards *social harmony* (*concertación*) a strategy in which the Spanish trade unionism, the CEOE (Spanish Confederation of Business Organisations) and the Spanish Government have taken part. The consequences of the *concertación*

have been less social protection, the reduction of the cost of sacking a worker and a more flexible job market. Aznar's Government has now imposed the reform by Decree-Law, thus highlighting its authoritarian profile and making it clear that the social dialogues entered into up to now were just a mere image campaign.

The CAPV (Autonomous Community of the Basque Country), where the total stoppage came to 64,90% and the partial stoppage to 21,06%, represents 80% of the working population of the whole of the Basque Country, with the remaining 20% being in Navarra.

## Response of the General Strike in the Basque Country



The general strike on the 19th was an action against the labour reform imposed by the PP government. It was therefore an outright reaction of the Basque workers' movement to join in the reaction of the workers' movement of the rest of Spain, who went on strike on the 20th.

The discrepancy in dates can be put down to two types of reasons: framework and trade union model.

On the one hand, our concept of joining efforts implies something more than merely backing a pre-established design, even more if we take into account that we are the majority union in our area, the Basque Country.

On the other hand, even though the rejection of the Decree-Law imposed by the Spanish Government was the reason for the strike called by all of the trade unions of the State, ELA does not want to return to a "concertación" model that it has considered to be disastrous. ELA therefore stood out from the objective stated by the leader of one of the main unions in Spain.

Finally one part of the labour reform - supported by the Spanish trade unions and rejected by ELA - implies the centralisation of the employment system, attacking the competences of Basque institutions.

ASKI DELAKO!

# 19

Greba

## ACTUALITY

### ○ "Not to Banning, every project, every idea, every body"

More than 100,000 people took part in the demonstration that was held in Bilbao on the 15th June against the "Parties Act" and against a possible process to ban the political party Batasuna, that the Partido Popular, with the backing of the PSOE, wishes to implement, with both parties using it to win votes.

The demonstration was called by a wide platform of members of different trade unions, political and social organisations

ELA's executive committee backed the calling of the demonstration and coincided with the other organisers in their demands for human rights and public freedoms, as well as the defence of political plurality. ELA also considers that the banning of a political group would make the normalisation of the coexistence in our society difficult.



### ○ "Notes for a Sovereignist Process"

ELA's national committee has prepared a document entitled "Notes for a Sovereignist Process", in which it sets out a work proposal for the whole of ELA, aimed at winning the recognition of the right to self-determination and to thus achieve sovereignty.

The proposal is based "on the principle that sovereignty lies in Basque citizens, which from their plurality and freedom have to always decide the form and contents of self-government". A practical result of this is the call to the citizens by means of popular consultation.

This sovereignist channel, "whose reference point, except for the circumstances, is Quebec, is solely and exclusively legitimised by a strict and scrupulously democratic social and political action". The national committee therefore considers it necessary that "any violent procedure as a political expression once and for all and unconditionally ends".

### ○ Witness in Palestine

Paul Nicholson, international representative of the EHNE farmers' trade union and member of the Vía Campesina, was invited by ELA's National Committee to describe his visit to Palestine and being besieged with the Palestine leader, Yaser Arafat, during the Israeli siege of Ramala. He stressed how important it is to show solidarity and internationalise the conflict: "Europe's support is fundamental, by the trade unions, social movements and by the citizens... This keeps up the morale". **Land, peace, state for Palestine.**



### ○ Show of solidarity to the UGT

Following the attack to the UGT headquarters in San Sebastián on the 20th June, ELA representatives went there to show their solidarity and support on behalf of the organisation. ELA issue a press release condemning the act and expressing its solidarity.

# ELA newsletter

## Solidarity of Basque Workers

**SEBAS ANDREU**, in charge of collective bargaining, analyses the agreements that are progressing

# They should not be signed just for the sake of being signed



### How is the collective bargaining progressing?

–This year, we have once again approached the sector agreements with the aim of achieving substantial improvements, working at the alliances with the other trade unions, but it has not been possible to find allies in order to get better sector agreements that not only touch on wages but look at improving employment, reducing working week, and so on.

This situation has forced us to look for alternative spheres where we can achieve better results.

–Are the majorities respected when signing the agreements?

– Not always. In some cases the rest of the trade unions do not even care about the level of representation and sign minority agreements.

The most blatant case was the agreement signed by CCOO, UGT and LAB with the employers of the Concrete and Quarry sector in Bizkaia -where they represent less 30% of the workers- against

the criteria of ELA, which represents over 70% of the workers. This situation was the reason behind the 7-week strike in the sector.

Minority agreements have also been signed in the Construction Sector in Gipuzkoa and in the General Civil Servants Sector.

Only employers benefit from minority agreements.

–Who has benefited from these agreements being signed?

–Obviously, the employers. As the results obtained are no way near sufficient and have even caused a strong reaction among the workers in question.

–How is the rest of the negotiations going?

–The company negotiations are going quite well, and we have made progress in one very important aspect: we are talking about employment as normal, above all with regarding to the conversion of temporary jobs into permanent ones.

### Mobilizations against outsourcing

–Another sector which has been prioritised this year was outsourcing and service companies. Has any progress been made in this area?

– We are finishing with a myth, according to which there are companies or sectors where there is no place for mobilization or an efficient struggle. They are increasingly more sectors, in many cases involving outsourcers working, who are achieving great steps forward thanks to the strike: It is the case of the Petronor outsourcers.