

## **Euro-demonstration in BRUSSELS on 29 September**

# **AGAINST THE AUSTERITY MEASURES**

**A**n ELA delegation, led by its Secretary General, Adolfo Muñoz "Txiki", will take part in the Euro-demonstration convened by the ETUC in Brussels on 29 September.

Governments throughout Europe are implementing austerity measures, including slashing public spending, privatising, cutting wages and lowering pensions. This option leads to a deeper recession, higher unemployment and greater social vulnerability.

The ETUC has organised a European day of action to denounce these policies and demand a new approach. The European mobilisation is on top of the different actions that we have been organising in the Basque Country for over a year now.

Along with the Basque trade union majority, we convened 2 general strikes, the second of which was held on 29 June 2010 to protest against the labour reform rushed in by Zapatero's government. Countless demonstrations, awareness and information campaigns have also been organised, where we took action and put forward alternatives.



## **REGARDING THE ETA ANNOUNCEMENT**

On 5 September, ETA announced the end of hostilities. The ELA Executive Committee has come to the following conclusions:

- ELA wishes to state that it positively values ETA's decision not to carry out any further armed actions. It is a necessary and sought-after gesture of goodwill, as well as being in line with the repeated demands of our society.
- ELA asks ETA to take the necessary steps for the ceasefire to become permanent and to accept the terms proposed in the Brussels Declaration drafted by key individuals and entities on the international stage.
- ELA also understands that a decision of that nature should be received prudently and responsibly by the Spanish government, by reviewing their current policy and taking those decisions that can most contribute to consolidating the goodwill, peace and political mainstreaming.

# HUGE RESPONSE TO THE GENERAL STRIKE OF 29 JUNE



In keeping with the dynamics followed by many European trade union organisations against the governmental measures slashing the rights of workers, ELA, together with the trade union majority of the Basque Country (ELA, LAB,

ESK, STEE-EILAS, EHNE and HIRU), convened a general strike on 29 June. Continuity was thus given to the action taken one year earlier against the announcement that social rights were to be cut.

The strike sought to reject the labour reform imposed by Zapatero's Government and approved on 26 June. Despite the success of the strike in the Basque Country, the parliamentary process in August and September only worsened the contents of this reform, which was finally passed on 9 September.

The majority of Basque workers supported the general strike on 29 June called by the Basque trade union majority. Along with the large number of people that came out on strike, special mention should be made of the demonstrations held in the four Basque provincial capitals, as can be seen in the photo on this page. Tens of thousands of workers took part in the demonstrations that were held in Bilbao San Sebastián, Pamplona and Vitoria-Gasteiz.

## DETRIMENTAL REFORMS

The contents of the labour reform passed in June and worsened after the parliamentary proceedings in August and September is a major setback in terms of employment rights. The approved measures include:

■ **Making dismissal easier and cheaper-** The Government has changed the legislation so that dismissals that had previously been considered as unfair (and therefore required higher compensation) are now deemed fair, which means that the person in question receives much lower compensation.

■ **Attacking collective bargaining-** The government has introduced measures to make it easier for companies to break collective agreements unilaterally. It will no longer be mandatory for the companies to respect the agreed salary levels and it will be able to change the working conditions at their whim.

■ **Encouraging the use of the Temporary Work Agencies-** The Government has eliminated practically all the restrictions on the temporary work agencies, which will increase the number of temporary contracts and occupational risks. The only two sectors that had been excluded so far are now included: construction and the public sector.

This reform, and the announced reforms of collective bargaining and pensions, is yet another step in the ongoing reform process that has been eroding away the rights of the workers over recent years. The so-called "social dialogue" processes have only helped to endorse these policies. Given the failure of that model, and given the balance of power in the current situation, ELA considers that only trade union mobilisation and action can uphold or improve social and labour rights.



# FIGHTING TOGETHER FOR ANOTHER EUROPE

The mass demonstration that will cross Brussels on 29 September is yet another step in the reactions and actions organised in different European countries over recent months. Demands in common will thus be consolidated and a varied group of social and trade union organisations mobilised.

We are demanding other policies different from those being applied throughout Europe where the ones who caused the crisis are now dictating to the governments the measures to be adopted: austerity plans with public spending being slashed, privatisations, wage cuts, lower pensions, attacks on trade union rights and collective bargaining, etc... They are measures that European governments, whether of the right or self-appointed leftists, apply without a murmur, as they are under the thumb of the financial and economic power-that-be.

Governments, management, EU and IMF institutions all want the workers to pay the consequences of a crisis that we did not cause. The people demonstrating in Brussels on the 29 will be demanding that they fight the real causes of the crisis. They will protest against the policies that, in the name of public debt and the Stability Pact, are resulting in these drastic austerity plans. We will be in Brussels as these plans, apart from being tremendously unjust, are just deepening the economic crisis.

The trade union and social actions being carried out throughout Europe need to be backed up by international resistance and demands for an alternative economic and social model to the existing one, for a different Europe, based on solidarity and on social justice.

**Laura Gonzalez de Txabbarri,  
Head of the ELA International Department**



## EUROPEAN SOCIAL FORUM

An ELA delegation took part in the European Social Forum held in Istanbul (Turkey) from 1 to 4 July. The Forum, under the *Another Europe is necessary. Make them pay for their crisis* slogan, was attended by around 3,000 people who took part in over 200 seminars and assemblies. The majority of the debates sought to analyse the crisis and its dramatic consequences on the conditions and rights of the workers. ELA also organised a seminar along with trade unionists from other countries where the delegates analysed the trade union action against the measures that, with the excuse of dealing with the crisis, are being adopted throughout Europe.

## SOLIDARITY WITH TÜMTIS

ELA has allocated part of the salary withheld from its workers during the general strike on 29 June to help the UPS workers with their struggle in Turkey. ELA thus expressed its solidarity with the 160 UPS workers dismissed because they joined the TÜMTIS trade union (Turkey Motor Vehicles Workers Trade Union). The company began to dismiss the workers to try and stop the workers from becoming organised and, therefore, from exercising their right to collective bargaining, at the same time that it sought to intimidate other workers to prevent them from trying to join the other workers.

## PENSIONS UNDER ATTACK

The Spanish government has announced a new pension reform. There is no difference between European social-democracy and the parties on the Right. Zapatero is in favour of raising the retirement age from 65 to 67. Pension cuts are going even further. The proposal also includes measures aimed at reducing pensions for those coming into the system. It therefore plans to change the system used to calculate pensions, demand a longer period of contributions to be entitled to a state pension and prevent access to certain benefits. At the same time as slashing state pensions, it opts to develop the private pension system. We should point out that the average pension in the Spanish state is 772 euros a month and (and its contribution in terms of the GDP). The Basque trade union majority has already mobilised against the proposed reforms.

**Txema Laiseka, Trade Union Election Officer**

## “The workers must decide which trade union model they support”



**E**very four years, the posts of nearly 27,500 trade union delegates from companies and sectors throughout the

Basque Country come up for re-election. Over the coming months, elections will be held for the majority of those posts. On 1 September, the so-called concentrated period of trade union elections began. The posts of approximately 60% of the trade union representatives in the companies, around 16,500 delegates, will come up for re-election between now and 31 May. Txema Laiseka, the ELA Trade Union Election Officer, analyses the outlook for this electoral process.

### **-What is at stake in these trade union elections?**

-The elections will be held against a very difficult social and economic background where the choices made by each trade union shows the trade union model that each one defends with greater clarity

than ever. Thus, their reaction to the crisis situation or the position that they have adopted towards social dialogue clearly defines the commitment for an independent or counter-power model or, on the other hand, for a "cooperation" model dependant on the public coffers. The elections are going

to measure the degree of support that the workers grant to both options. Furthermore, the way that the real problems of the working class are being tackled is always reflected at the ballot box.

### **-Which are our aims?**

ELA holds a 35.73% share of the trade union votes in the Basque Country, a very high figure, taking into account that we are talking about a plural trade unionism with four confederations, along with countless professional trade unions that, despite their minority character, have a certain hold. We aim to consolidate this trade union representation at the end of the concentrated period to thus consolidate our majority in the Basque Country and for our backing a trade union militant model to be strengthened. Without playing the victim, it should be pointed out that ELA is the enemy to overcome in these elections: our militant model really upsets governments and management that have the undeniable support of the mainstream media. Their support for a trade union model based on "co-operation" has placed ELA in the sights of all the attacks.

### **-Is the outcome of the trade union elections so important?**

-Yes it is. It is extremely important as it legitimises us. The degree of our trade union representation grants us huge political and trade union legitimacy in Basque Society. There is no organisation in the Basque Country that has that social legitimacy. It is a legitimacy that the working class grants us directly and which only they can remove. And knowing that they cannot control us greatly upsets the political and economic authorities.

Elections are vital and are the basis of our system. However, experience shows us that when the outcome of the elections is not to the liking of the economic or political authorities, they have no democratic qualms about altering the result. That is what happened on the Basque Social and Economic Council and on the Council of Labour Relations for the Basque Country, where the places that ELA should hold due to its slice of the trade union vote were shared between the UGT and CCOO. This distorts the result of the trade union elections and breaks the democratic laws of the game.

### **-How do you see the process?**

We are confident that the working class will support our trade union model: a militant model, a model of counter-power, that fights and faces up to the powers-that-be thanks to its political and economic independency.

The working class is under severe attack. Given this situation, only from freedom of thought and strength to act can we resist and progress.