



Protest against legislation that allows shops to open on Sundays and bank holidays

For the right to rest

The Basque Government's law that allows large and medium-sized retail outlets to open 8 Sundays and bank holidays a year is being strongly disputed by the Basque trade union movement. The law has broken the existing de facto agreement not to open on Sundays and bank holidays and has opened the way for the large retail outlets to set two opening days for 2005.

The confrontation between the authorities and Basque trade unions was clear at the opening of the first IKEA shop in the Basque Country on March 1st, as while the authori-

ties were celebrating the multinational's arrival, the trade unions demonstrated against it. ELA believes that these new opening hours are only a trial run, as the goal of the large retail outlets is to get rid of any opening restrictions.

According to Unai Martínez, the secretary general of ELA-Zerbitzuak (the professional federation of the service sector), this has a highly negative impact on the citizens' quality of life, as they lose the traditional shops in the centre of towns and cities, and on the jobs and way of life of shop workers.

Women are not OUT

ELA's message to mark March 8th focused on discrimination in the work place. As Nere Urrestarazu, head of the equality department, pointed out, "as women, we find it harder to find a job, our working conditions are worse in terms of both salaries and stability, and our opportunities to progress in our career are much more limited".



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In brief

Good wage agreement in the cleaning sector

The cleaners of the Leioa municipal buildings (Bizkaia) have reached a wage agreement that is 9 points above the increases agreed in the wage agreement for the sector. The negotiations were part of the fight for wage equality by the workers of subcontracted companies to eliminate the discriminations that they suffer. ELA is very positive about the agreement as it is a step further along the path to overcome the discriminations and achieve equal conditions for the workers subcontracted by the Authorities.

ELA, in Porto Alegre

An ELA delegation attended the Porto Alegre Social Forum, where they took part with other social and trade union organisations in seminars about the situation of Palestine and Euskal Herria, the role of social policies in the sovereignty processes and the debate on trade union models.

Strikes in the health sector

ELA, together with other trade unions, is involved in a campaign of mobilisations and strikes in the Basque public health sector. The aim of this campaign is to denounce the deterioration that the cut backs have led to in the health services and the constant increased pressure on the service and health workers. The workers are demanding a wage agreement that includes their basic claims.

2005 World March of Women

Between May 24th and 27th, the 2005 World March of Women will cross the Basque Country on its way to Marseille, where on May 28th and 29th, and under the slogan 'Marching for a Feminist Europe', the largest mobilisation of the World March is to be held in Europe. In Marseille, as was the case last year in Vigo, different debating opportunities and forums will be organised and will end with a large demonstration.

Changes in the social forums

The dynamics of the social forums are going to benefit greatly if some targets are achieved. The first is to consolidate the networks around topics such as job insecurity or social exclusion, which need to be dealt with more pro-actively. Continental dynamics, adapted to their situations, also need to be developed, which will allow the continental forums to consider more standardised problems in depth and draw up a mobilisation plan. Obviously, this is not incompatible with the dynamics of the world Forums.

Finally, I believe that there should be longer spaces of time between the Forums, as the annual dynamics is very absorbing, in particular, if we have to combine them with continental meetings. The decision to hold the World Forum every two years is the right one and is in line with the direction being taken by the European Forum.

Mikel Noval, social policy secretary



Women are not OUT



On March 8th of this year, ELA wanted to highlight the outsourcing practices, which results in job insecurity and poorer living, social and job conditions for many women, who are not afforded a decent, independent and own social and life project.

Urrestarazu directly blamed the public authorities and their neo-liberal policies for this situation. On the one hand, the governments pass laws that encourage the private companies to outsource, and on the other hand, the governments themselves have become the champions of the privatisation and outsourcing of every type of public services.

Urrestarazu highlighted the struggle that many women's collective have been involved in over recent years in sectors where the majority of the workers are women, such as the services for the elderly, school canteens and nursery schools, canning companies and the cleaning services for public buildings.



Pferd-Rüggeberg, On strike for over 16 months

The strike at the Basque Country of the Germany company PFERD RÜGGERBERG, S.A., which belongs to the group August Rüggeberg GmbH, world leader in abrasives, has now lasted for over one year and four months. The demands of the 114 strikers are so basic that it is not easy to understand why a solution has not been reached. What are they asking for?

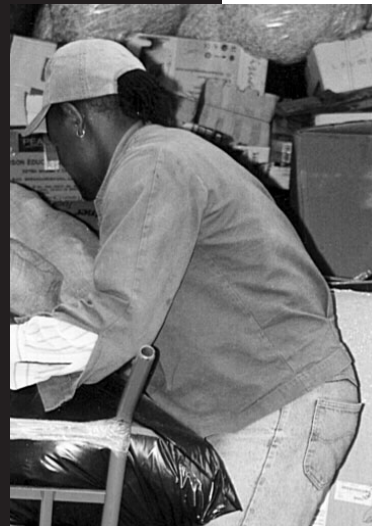
- ✓ That the restructuring of the workforce, if necessary, follows the legally established objective procedure and not by layoffs unilaterally decided by the company.
- ✓ That two women sacked unfairly while they were on leave (one on maternity leave and the other on sick leave) are reinstated.
- ✓ That the fines imposed as the result of the strike are lifted.

The workers have already accepted a change to the system which would mean working more hours for a lower salary. What room for negotiation do they have when they are just asking for the people who have been sacked to be reinstated and the guarantee that they are not going to be sacked arbitrarily?

The only way left to them is to resist. What a great lesson in worker dignity!

● FRUSTRATING IMMIGRANT REGULARISATION PROCESS

The head of the ELA's immigration department, Emérita Cuéllar, has denounced that, despite the great expectations generated, the process is only an evolution of the PP's Immigrant Act, and it continues not to give the thousands of people from outside the European Union any real rights. She pointed out that "the Spanish Authorities only see these people as a workforce". Cuéllar denounced that 42.5% of the immigrants do not have their papers in order and work far beyond the legal maximum hours in exchange for much lower salaries. This immigration policy is in line with the neo-liberal policies of the EU and with the European Constitutional Treaty, which confirms the deprivation of social and labour rights for people without European citizenship and the use of repressive anti-immigration policies.



● AGAINST INJUSTICE

On February 26th, ELA took part in the huge demonstration organised in Bilbao against a series of trials that have begun in the National Criminal Court against hundreds of people from various sectors (youth movements, political initiatives, the media, cultural and social movements) who are accused of terrorism. According to ELA, these legal processes extend the terrorism charges and people without any link to the exercising of violence are facing very heavy sentences. ELA denounces the breach of the people's rights and the lack of guarantees regarding judicial and police measure that puts punishing a social and political sector before the objective of establishing the truth and ensuring that justice is done.



ELA newsletter

Solidarity of Basque Workers

LAURA GONZALEZ DE TXABARRI, HEAD OF ELA INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT

“ELA is against the European Treaty and in favour of a more democratic and social Europe”



–The yes vote won the referendum on the EU Constitution. What do you think about that?

–There were more yes than no votes, but I do not believe that the people behind the referendum should be satisfied. In fact, the huge majority of the political spectrum supported the yes vote, an institutional campaign that was pure propaganda was run and monopolised by the political parties, which excluded the social forces and, in particular, any debate on the contents of the treaty and its consequences for the people.

Despite this, only 24.4% of the electorate backed the Treaty and the no vote accounted for

32.6% of the votes, which was practically double the average in Spain (17.29%).

An important social sector has shown itself to be critical of this model for European construction and that the true support for the treaty is very weak.

–What was the orientation of the no vote in the Basque Country?

–A progressive orientation: the mainstream parties, from the PSOE to the PP, without forgetting the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), defended the yes vote. The extreme right (within the PP) defended the yes vote. That is why I believe the no vote has been progressive.

–How does ELA express its critical position?

–We have evolved. During Franco's regime, Europe was the benchmark for social progress and democracy: the welfare state was the expression of this model. At the same as Spain joined the EU, the latter was reaching the peak of the neo-liberal broom that followed the failure and defeat of the true socialist systems. The European social model was the first target

of that offensive and the working class, the first victim. The perseverance of this approach is what has brought us an increasingly more critical position.

– How have you assessed the treaty from the point of view of a trade union of a stateless people?

–The Treaty could and should have included the right of the peoples to self-determination, which is included in the international conventions signed by EU member states. However, it did not want to do so and it has also established the principle that the claims of the stateless people are internal issues, that the states can deal with them according to their criteria and that the other states and European institutions undertake not to interfere. The EU is therefore set up as a club of states that are impervious to very important conflicts that affect part of their citizens.

–Are you not worried that you are seen as anti-Europe?

–It is because we are Europeans and pro-Europe that we are alerting people to what is happening. We are pro a Europe that has a democratic and social orientation and we are faced with a Treaty that reinforces the primacy of the market and backs the authoritarianism of the states with respect to national conflicts. I still believe that the no vote is the coherent pro-Europe answer.

The NO vote is the coherent answer to a Treaty that establishes market primacy

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