



ELA's goal is an even stronger majority

2006 Trade Union Elections

We face the Consequences

During the last four months of 2006 and the first half of 2007, most Basque companies will elect their trade union representatives (shop steward). ELA's goal is to keep its leadership in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (CAPV) and become the second trade union in Navarra. ELA currently represents 40% of the workers in the CAPV and 21% in Navarra.

ELA is facing up these elections with great optimism. Joseba Villareal, the trade union leader for small and medium-sized companies, stressed that "the organisation has been getting

ready throughout 2006, working full out towards the trade union elections. Over the years, we have fought long and hard against job security, where ELA has been at the forefront of the struggles. It is now time for us

to reap the fruits of our labours and we are convinced it will be a good harvest.

Joseba Villareal wished to stress the importance of voting for ELA.

"Representation is fundamental for the collective bargaining processes. Being strong is the only way of guaranteeing

that we will be able to take on management".

The elections will reflect our work

The weight of salaries in the GDP falls by 6%

The report issued by the ELA Survey Office shows that the distribution of wealth is increasingly more unfair. The conclusions of the study are clear: while

wealth generated has increased by 146% since 1993 and investment income by 166.7%, salaries and wages have only increased by 118.7%. As Mikel Noval, the head of the Survey Office, pointed out, "wealth has grown sharply, but the part dedicated to earned

income has fallen significantly, by 6.1 points". In addition, we must not lose sight of the fact that while earned income accounted for 54.7% of the Gross Domestic Product in 1993, it had fallen to 48.6% in 2005."

INDUSTRY

■ Reckitt Benckiser plans to close its factory

The multinational Reckitt Benckiser has announced that it plans to close its Güeñes factory (Bizkaia), despite its being the group's second most productive plant in Europe. The factory's profits have also grown steadily. ELA believes that there is only one reason for this closure: the search for higher profits in a place with more attractive conditions. Even if it means laying off the whole workforce.

INTERNATIONAL

■ Solidarity with Giant Cement and Gebze

ELA has expressed its solidarity with the workers of Giant Cements in South Carolina (USA) and of Gebze in Turkey, who, for several weeks now, have both been protesting against the lay-offs and anti-trade union practices in both plants. The companies are affiliates of companies with their headquarters in the Basque Country. The first is an affiliate of Cementos Portland Valderribas, while the second belongs to the Fagor cooperative.

DEVELOPMENT

■ For a "Social Train"

The Network for the Social Train has launched an information campaign to demand a railway model useful for society and stress the need to stop the current High-Speed Train project (TAV).



■ SIX MONTH TRUCE

It has been six months since the ETA ceasefire was announced on March 22nd. We are living in hopeful yet confusing times.

The two main camps (Spanish Government and PSOE, on the one hand, and ETA and Batasuna, on the other hand) have very different opinions about what the outcome will be. The Government and PSOE believe that we are at the start of a peace process (end of ETA and solving the issues arising from the armed conflict: prisoners, exiles, victims...). According to the other party, the end of the armed conflict is undisputedly bound to solving the political conflict.

It should be pointed out that the Spanish State has not reacted to the ETA truce by relaxing the repression of Batasuna and, above all, of the Basque prisoners. They are still scattered in prisons far from the Basque Country, the very ill are still kept in prison and, as the last straw in this human and legal nonsense, new interpretation criteria have been thought up or new accusations invented to prevent ETA prisoners from being released after they have served their sentence. That is what has happened to Iñaki de Juana, just one of many, who should have been released two years ago, after serving over 18 years in prison. He continues to be deprived of his liberty following new accusations, as the government itself has admitted, than to stop this prisoner leaving prison. Iñaki de Juana has been on a hunger strike now for 45 days to protest his situation. The reappearance of the street violence may be in response to the government's tension strategy.

We are therefore very concerned about the risk of losing such a historical opportunity as the current one for our country to enter into a new phase in its history. Like many others, we believe that the armed conflict and the political conflict needs to be resolved, but that it is not right to condition the end of the first on resolving the second. As, in our opinion, the resolution of the political conflict must have its own strategy of accumulating social and political force. A strategy that will be much more viable and efficient if the armed conflict has been resolved.

German Kortabarría, ELA Deputy Secretary General

The leaders of the political, social and trade union groups that make up the platform will spend the coming weeks spreading the information campaign through the cities and many villages affected by the project. The campaign wants to make the citizens aware of the real situation of the TAV and, therefore, what is involved in this grassroots mobilisation.

The platform is committed to rail travel, but as a means of transport principally designed for movements of people and goods within the Basque Country and which would ensure fast and efficient connections with the rest of Europe. It is committed to a noticeable improvements and the public maintenance of a socially-useful railway. The TAV project obviously does not meet these objectives.

ECOLOGY

■ Far from Kyoto

ELA has been reiterating the need for the Basque Country to comply with the Kyoto Agreement. That ensures more quality jobs, it means emphasizing technological innovations, reducing our energy dependency and

moving towards sustainability. However, each year sees us further away from the set targets: 14 out of the 78 registered installations exceeded the allocated CO2 emissions in 2004 and the Basque Country exceeded by 40% the Greenhouse Gas Emissions with respect to the 1990 levels (Spain has set the limit for the Basque Country at 15% by 2010).

HOMES

■ Strike in Andoain; agreement in Bizkaia

The indefinite strike at the Andoain Municipal Home for the Elderly (Gipuzkoa) has now lasted four months. For over a year, the workforce has expressed its willingness to negotiate the work conditions, but the town council has refused to enter into any negotiations. One of the issues is the wage discrimination: a municipal worker of the same category earns 642.93 euros more a month.

In Bizkaia, the agreement covering the homes for the elderly has been signed and includes notably better work conditions.

ITZIAR GABIKAGOGASKOA, GENDER OFFICER

■ Women fighting for their rights

The desire for better working conditions in the fish canning sector has turned into a daily struggle for many of the women working in the Bizkaia canning factories. These workers have been on an indefinite strike for better working conditions since July 17th. This struggle spotlights the conditions in which many of these women have to work.

The canning sector always has and still does mainly employ women. A hard sector, involving exhausting physical work in, obviously, very poor working conditions. They earn a net salary of 720 euros a month and have to work in a very well-established hierarchy where the few men that work in the canning industry hold the higher posts and therefore earn higher salaries. This is a clear example of gender discrimination with all the connotations that it represents. The women are undeniably unfairly treated and do not receive the social, employment or wage recognition that they deserve.

A women's struggle, led by women with the sole goal of a decent and independent life. A great example of the struggle, organisation and dignity, and an example that the struggle is worthwhile.



OPINION

A great challenge

In early November, trade union organisations from all over the world will meet in Vienna to found the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). It will be the end of a long process over many years that Guy Ryder and Willy Thys have finally successfully turned into reality.

Over recent years, probably as the result of overcoming the initial ideological differences, speech and action have gradually moved together and will finally be turned into structures. However, this process goes far beyond the mere sum and optimisation of what already exists.

There are many issues to be answered by the ITUC and I believe that one of the not least important questions is whether the international trade union movement must be, preferably, a lobby, or must be as a counterpower to the institutional and economic establishment that is imposing on us a model that seriously harms our workers base. It is a central issue whose answer will condition the strategy of the trade unionism, both at the international and national level, and its policy of alliances with other forces or movements.

I believe that the desire for renewal that underlies this process, together with the incorporation of new organisations, must be used to establish a new ITUC in structure and, what is more important, in strategies and dynamics that will allow us to renew the design of international trade union work to better react to the adverse context.

It is a challenge that we are taking on with the firm intention of winning.

Laura Gonzalez de Txabarri, Head of the International Department



ELA newsletter

Solidarity of Basque Workers

JOSE ELORRIETA, ELA's Secretary General, analyses the Basque job situation

The economic situation is forcing us to state our demands



The official data about the Basque economy indicates economic prosperity. ELA's secretary general, José Elorrieta, put a dampener on the official optimism when he stressed that loss of the relative importance of earned income and poor quality of the jobs available.

-The President of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country has praised the economic situation.

-Like many others, his subconscious reveals what he is thinking: they are happy because the business community are doing well. They talk a great deal about economic growth in, with increased employment, the stake of

wages in income has fallen by six points. Earned income is less important. Not everyone is doing well.

-What is the reason for this?

-It is mainly due to the job insecurity of many job contracts. Before, the determining component of job insecurity was whether or not the contract was permanent.

Nowadays, seasonal work is a factor of job insecurity, but we must not forget the low salaries being forced on more and more people. When a contract of this type is offered with salaries under 1000 euros, they are creating insecure job and living conditions. And this particularly affects women, young people and, as an extreme case, immigrants.

-There has been little talk recently about decent salaries.

-Unfortunately, that is the case, but it is a benchmark that we must return to, as salaries under 1000 euros a month do not allow people

Talking about job insecurity is fundamentally talking about young people, women and immigrants.

to live with the minimum of autonomy. We just need to look at the tremendous problems that young people have move out of their parents' home and become independent. We have to return to talking about decent salaries and the redistribution of wealth by forcing the public authorities to act differently.

-It is therefore time to state our demands.

-Undoubtedly, and on two fronts. On the one hand, through collective bargaining, to achieve better salaries and working conditions (working week, security, stability and no discrimination...), as the companies have been making a great deal for many years now. And on the other hand, by focusing on the social salary.

-What do you mean when you refer to the social salary?

-I am referring to the redistribution of wealth by means of a progressive tax system and ambitious social policies, just the opposite of what is happening now. Taxes have been lowered on capital and corporate income, and the proportion of public funds devoted to social policies has been reduced, such as housing, health or care. All this affects us, as good social welfare is part of our salary as workers.