

ELA has carried out a campaign against the antisocial policies in the Basque Country

Against neo-liberalism



ELA has carried out a campaign to denounce the neo-liberal policies of the Basque Country administrations from January 7th to February 15th. The aim was to socialise the need for a change of direction in the areas of health, housing, social services and fiscal policy among others.

Events to denounce the situation have been held in all the regions over a six-week period, as well as assemblies at many workplaces in which thousands of workers have participated. In addition 500,000 informative leaflets have been produced.

The secretary general, Jose Elorrieta, believes that the campaign has helped to analyse the direction of the fiscal policy and the low expenditure on social matters and its consequences. "Investment in healthcare is extremely low, with the resulting deterioration in services. As

regards housing, those in power tolerate speculation, and the budgets are ridiculously low. The deterioration of the education system and the lack of places at nursery schools are alarming. There are no places available in state homes for the elderly and the prices at private homes are prohibitive. The lack of public initiative encourages the private sector to take advantage and make money. It is the citizens who lose out, particularly those with a lower purchasing power".

The aim of the campaign has been to raise awareness and so bring about a public policy more oriented at social issues. "Reducing company and income tax increases social deficit and moreover may mean that the budgets are closed with a huge surplus. It is difficult to find policies in the European Union that are more ultra-liberal".

ELA condemns the murder of Isaias Carrasco

ELA condemns the murder of Isaias Carrasco, former councilor of the PSOE and member of the trade union UGT. ELA expresses its sincere condolences to the family of Isaias, to those people closest to him and also to the Socialist Party and the UGT. In order to denounce this murder, members of ELA gathered together on the 10th March in Arrasate, where Isaias Carrasco lived. ELA urges ETA to definitively renounce their strategy of armed struggle.



BUSINESS OPENING HOURS

■ Against the illegalisation of ANV and PCTV parties

Several hundred people took part in the demonstration on February 22nd organised by ELA to denounce the illegalisation of ANV and PCTV political parties. ELA is opposed to the law on political parties, a law which curtails the right to political participation. ELA demands the abolition of a law which is rejected by the political and social majority. To eliminate politically the electoral expression of citizens with rights is unacceptable in a democracy. ELA believes that it is evident that a solution to the political conflict can only be found via civil and democratic means.



COLLECTIVE BARGAINING POLICY

■ Satisfaction with Eroski's decision not to open on Sundays and public holidays in 2008

The Eroski group (a hypermarket chain) has changed its mind and decided not to open its stores on Sundays and public holidays in 2008. This is a great victory for those who work in the sector.

Eroski has once more tried to open its stores on Sundays and public holidays at the cost of the workers. ELA's mobilisations have had renewed success, with very high participation, and have forced Eroski to change its stance.

ELA believes that the mobilisation is the way to continue working for responsible consumption which respects the rights of those who work in the sector.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

■ Five years without Euskaldunon Egunkaria

On February 20th it was the fifth anniversary of the closure of Euskaldunon Egunkaria by order of the Spanish National Court. To denounce this event and express solidarity with those imputed a demonstration was held in the Martin Ugalde Park, where the headquarters of the only newspaper published wholly in Basque is located. A full ELA delegation attended, led by the secretary general Jose Elorrieta.

ANTI-GLOBALISATION

■ Another world is possible

Several thousands of people marched the streets of Bilbao in a demonstration organised by The World Social Forum on January 26th to protest against neo-liberalism and claim that another world is possible. A big delegation of ELA attended the march. In addition ELA organised various mobilisations during the week to call for a fairer society.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

■ The Telemarketing mobilisations continue

The immense majority of Telemarketing's workers are taking part in the various one-day strikes called in the sector. The objective of such action is to get the employers to sit down and negotiate an agreement for the Basque Country, due to the poor wage and labour conditions in this sector.

This sector employs more than 3,000 people in the Basque Country, around 95% of whom are women. Wages are little over 800 euros per month and the working week is 39 hours a week, including weekends and public holidays. The turnover of workers is fairly high, which is typical of the more precarious sectors, and many young people work in this sector.

The Spanish labour agreement is applied in the case of female employees in the Basque Country, and this agreement makes it impossible to obtain decent working conditions for them.

SOCIAL POLICY

■ Thousands of people for a fairer society

The information and denunciation campaigns on the anti-social nature of public policy ended on February 15th in Bilbao. Firstly a meeting was held at the La Casilla pavilion in which 6,000 ELA militants called for a radical change in the neo-liberal orientation of public policy of the administrations in the Basque Country. Afterwards a noisy, colourful, slogan-filled demonstration which criticised both employers and the administrations marched through the main streets in Bilbao. This was a good way to close a campaign, in which ELA has put all its efforts.



Deiane Arrieta, in charge of gender policy

"A change of mentality is needed"



The demands of ELA on March 8th, International Women's Day, will concentrate on the need to combine work, family and a personal life. It is a problem that affects thousands of women that suffer from both job insecurity and a lack of basic social services.

-Why has the topic of combining of work, family and personal life been chosen?

-It is a subject of great importance and affects many in society. For example, many plans have been passed in recent months relating to this subject. Although ELA believes these plans to be insufficient, it is indicative of the importance of this subject. More and more people are beginning to realise that it is women who have to take on almost everything related to combining these three areas.

-ELA is critical of the assistance plans that have been passed. Why?

-The assistance is almost exclusively in the form of finan-

cial help, for example, social security benefits, help for having children etc. However this financial help is very limited. What good is 400 euros if you cannot find a state nursery school near where you live? Money does not solve the problem.

-What does ELA propose?

-We are calling for real help; quality public services which are free. In addition a change of mentality is needed. We are in 2008 but still the woman does 80% of the housework. Women are still discriminated against and suffer job insecurity to a much greater extent than men. In most cases it is women who have worse working conditions, and who have to fit their professional career around looking after dependents.

-The demands are very closely related to the campaign on social model.

-We criticise the fact that all the programmes on this aspect are no more than a small financial help. It is essential to highlight the importance of fighting for a different type of society, one which provides free, quality public services.

Life expectancy increases and there are more people who, logically, need looking after. The little help that exists is based on having the dependents at home. There are neither homes for the elderly nor day centres. Those that do exist are few and far between and moreover they are private, so most people cannot afford them. Again we ask ourselves the obvious question: Who is it that looks after the dependents? Well, in most cases it is the woman.

OPINION

"THE LISBON TREATY: THIS IS NOT THE RIGHT ROAD"

After the signing last October in Lisbon of the so-called Reform Treaty which replaces the failed European Constitution Treaty, the national processes of ratification have already begun. The majority of these will be exclusively parliamentary processes.



With the exception of Ireland, which is obliged by law to put the matter to the people via referendum, no other government seems to want to risk a possible "No" win if they were to call a referendum.

By ignoring the reasons that led the French and Dutch to reject the constitutional Treaty, it has been decided that most of the content of the previously rejected text will be maintained, changing only its name and, of course, the method of ratification.

In fact avoiding new ratification referendums has been a key factor in the whole process which was reinitiated after the constitutional Treaty was rejected in France and the Netherlands. That is also why any reference to the European "constitution" is avoided so that it is no longer necessary to consult the people.

The Reform Treaty far from being a simplified Treaty, is a long and turgid text which maintains virtually all of the content of the previously rejected constitutional Treaty, and in fact is even worse. This means that although the format is different "the basis is largely the same", as Angela Merkel stated at the time, this is, the same neo-liberal content but without any pretensions of democratic legitimacy based on its ratification via referendum.

It is still a text that confirms a neo-liberal European Union, of a limited democratic profile, with a Charter of fundamental Rights which itself is limited in content and doubtful liability as it is now included in an annex. So, in short, we have a EU that is still being constructed behind the backs of the citizens and peoples.

How can you get the citizens to back a project if the political authors themselves flout the will of the people, as well as cheating them of the right to debate and so take a stance on the matter? This is not the road to go down if we want to build the social Europe that we need.

*Laura Gonzalez de Txabarri,
head of the international department*

Julene Gabiola, ELA studies office

“We do not like the social model that is being built”



Julene Gabiola, a member of the ELA Research Group explains the main elements of ELA’s campaign for a fairer society.

-¿What are the keys to ELA’s campaign?

-Firstly, I would like to highlight the internal aspect. We have been working hard to share with our members our conclusions on the social model that is being built in Hego Euskal Herria. The reflections, comparisons and debate have been very valuable and reaffirm our position. We have sensed great accord with our members. Secondly, we have strived to socialise our message so it reaches society. All this has also shown us that we must continue so that our messages reach a wider audience.

-In terms of content, what has been the aim of the campaign?

-We wanted to condemn the anti-social policies that the political

The conditions exist for a fairer social model.

heads of our administrations have been implementing. It is unacceptable that we are way behind the rest of the European Union in terms of fiscal pressure and social spending. Thus, the balance of the management of the instruments of self-government such as the Economic Agreements are very disappointing as they are not used for social policy or to cover the needs of the people.

-You do not like the social model that is being built, Why not?

-The various decisions that have been taken are only to benefit the employers and the wealthy, so ignoring social needs which are increasing. The tax policy is the first example of this clear neo-liberal leaning. They cut taxes for the higher income groups as well as for businesses. It is unacceptable that almost half the companies do not pay business tax claiming zero profits or losses. This illustrates the huge amount of tax fraud that exists and the total lack of interest in putting a stop to it. If to this we add the fact that budgets in recent years have closed with huge surpluses, the picture is dismal.

-Meanwhile social needs are increasing....

-That is right. In terms of the percentage of GDB spent on Health or Education for example, we are again way behind Europe. As far as social services for dependents are concerned co-payment and privatisation are increasingly common, and there is also a similar trend in Health and Education. Apart from these two vital areas, the lack of a housing policy, lack of control in terms of prevention and occupational health

and the lack of commitment in environmental policies are part and parcel of this neo-liberalism.

-There seem to be many reasons to condemn the policy.

-Of course there are. To close the campaign, the rally held on February 15th in Bilbao, which thousands of delegates attended clearly showed the people’s dissatisfaction and their desire to fight to change the situation. In addition to condemning the situation, we want to pressurise the administrations so that they change their policies. All the conditions exist to create a fairer social model and we are going to continue this fight.



Photo of the closing ceremony of the campaign against neo-liberal policies.