

Call to strike by the trade unions making up the trade union majority of the Basque Country

21 May General Strike

ELA, along with the Basque trade union majority, has called a general strike for 21 May. There are many well-founded reasons for this general strike. We are going to challenge management's plundering and black-mailing and the widespread job losses. We will support the workers that are already fighting – many of whom are on strike - for employment and for their working conditions. We also need to force a radical change in public policies which aggravate rather than correct the plundering of the working class. And we plan to show our rejection of the social harmony model, that is devoid of any contents, that they plan to impose.

The working class has more than enough reason to support the general strike and industrial action



At the tail end of Europe

This call to strike is set against the background of the wide-scale job losses in our country. Despite registering rates of growth higher than the European average, the unemployment rate for the Basque Country now stands at 10.33%, compared to 7.5% for the European Union. This is indicative of the great job insecurity caused by the Spanish labour model. On the other hand, effective public policies are not applied to deal with the crisis. We are at the tail end of the Europe both in terms of tax pressure (33% and 18.5%) and social spending (39.9 and 27.1%).



For a fairer distribution of wealth



ELA's XII Congress, held in November 2008,

approved a resolution entitled For a Fairer Distribution of Wealth: better salaries, more social spending and fairer taxes, which urged the trade union to start a campaign to change public policies. As the months go by, the economic situation is worsening, and the reasons that justified that resolution are even stronger. The high participation in industrial action shows that the working class is prepared to take to the streets and say enough is

enough to the policies that have brought us to this situation.

The campaign began with a widely-attended event held in Gasteiz on 13 February and will end with the main event to be held in Bilbao on 12 June.

Over recent months, ELA has organised many activities to demand a fairer distribution of wealth. A large number of publications have also been produced and will be distributed throughout the Basque Country.

The importance of training

Training and raising awareness among the working class is one of the core areas of the campaign. During the first weeks of the campaign ELA has therefore organised over 150 training courses, in which over 2,500 delegates have taken part.

The courses have included an overall analysis of the social and economic situation: unemployment, public policies, taxation... The working class must not pay for a crisis for which it is not responsible. People have to be aware of that fundamental idea and training is therefore essential.

May Day: Preparing the general strike

Thousands of people took part in the May Day activities organised by ELA in Bilbao. The event was part of the campaign that the trade union has been conducting over recent months to achieve a fairer distribution of wealth. May Day was mainly spent preparing the general strike that ELA has called for 21 May.



"Women have been in crisis for years"

Women on strike were in the spotlight during the event that ELA held to mark International Women's Day. The main event was held in Bilbao on 6 March. Representing thousands of women, six women who were on strike at the time appeared before hundreds of delegates. Based on each of their own experiences, the six strikers reached a conclusion: the face of job insecurity is female. And there is only one way to take on job insecurity: by fighting.

Along with the striking women workers, Adolfo Muñoz, the secretary general, and Alazne Alonso, Gender Policy Leader, also took part in the event. Alonso analysed in detail the situation of women on the labour market in the Basque Country. "The highest unemploy-

ment rate is among women, at 11%, compared to the 9.8% unemployment among men. By sectors, 85.3% of women workers are in the service sector, socio-health sector, shops... Sectors that are noted for great job insecurity. Sectors where the working weeks are longer, more deregulated, salaries lower, temporary contracts the general norm and part-time work is not an option.

Furthermore, the salary difference between men and women stands at 21%. Just to give an idea: a women working in a shop earns an average of 750 euros if the State wage agreement is applied and if the provincial one is used, her wage-packet does not come to 1,000 euros. These amounts are gross, i.e. without discounts. For

many women, it is a dream to earn one thousand euros a month.

All these figures provide a snapshot of the profile of a working woman in the Basque Country and ratify at least two things: Women have been in crisis for many years and our crisis is structural. The face of job insecurity is female, in short, it primarily affects women workers.



Some of the women who are on strike with Adolfo Muñoz, secretary general

Occupational health

103 deaths in occupational accidents last year

On 27 and 28 April, ELA organised different events to mark the World Day for Health and Safety at Work. The events sought to highlight how Authorities and management ignore occupational risks.

The figures are revealing. In 2008, and according to official figures, there was a total of 62,177 occupational accidents, which meant that 5 out of every workers had an accident at work last year. 103 of the total accidents were fatal. The figures were very similar in previous years. This yet again confirms that the accident rate is structural and that neither management or governments do anything to avoid it.



Another world

“Join in the fight against capitalism”

Susan George, one of the key figures of the Alter-Globalisation Movement, took part in a seminar organised by ELA on 24 March. Susan George advocated another model of human and economic relations, while denouncing the role of the policies backed by the International Monetary Fund. She also stressed the need for social movements and trade unions to join forces to face the global crisis of the capitalist system.

Industrial action

Euro demonstration in Madrid, organised by the ETUC

In March, the European Trade Union Confederation launched a European campaign to fight against the crisis. The working class is paying too high a price for the recklessness and greed of the business world: job insecurity, unemployment and poverty have increased, purchasing power has fallen and government aid does not reach the lowest levels of society.

Thus, the ETUC has convened four Euro demonstrations, as part of its campaign, in Berlin, Prague, Brussels and Madrid between 14 and 16 May.

ELA is supporting this call by the ETUC and will be in Madrid on 14 May.

Opinion

TRADE UNION RESPONSE

The figures get worse every day and are casting an even darker shadow over the economic crisis in which we are immersed. Some figures are common to nearly all countries, but there are also some specific situations. In the Basque Country, the number of job losses is alarming and is the direct consequence of the great insecurity of the job market, with temporary rate work higher than in Europe, low salaries, discrimination, flexibility, workers who are falsely self-employed... This has been the employment created in 15 consecutive years of economic growth. This has been the miracle of the Spanish State. And the outcome is job insecurity and salaries in an even weaker position in the distribution of wealth. And now the workers are supposed to sacrifice their salaries and rights to overcome the crisis.

Management is using the situation to tighten the screws even further, demanding more labour reforms, more tax cuts and using blackmail during the collective bargaining process. But we are not going to pay for a crisis for which we are not responsible. This crisis was caused by the same people that are now receiving substantial public aid aimed at propping up the system that has brought us to this situation. This crisis is the consequence of specific policies decided by governments. There are people responsible for the crisis. And more will be needed to overcome it than just the mere cosmetic work agreed in the G-20.

Far-reaching changes are needed to the production system and to the structure of the job market that have driven us to this situation. And these changes will only occur if we are capable of provoking them through our organisational and collective action capacity. It is up to the trade union movement to lead the response to this situation. As well as taking part in the demonstrations organised by the ETUC in Madrid, a general strike will be held in the Basque Country on 21 May, when we will join the list of action being taken in Guadalupe, France, Greece, Italy, Hungary... and the social action that has occurred in Lithuania, Iceland, the Czech Republic, London (against the G-20), Strasbourg (against NATO)...

Laura Gonzalez de Txabarri, Head of the International Department

Publications

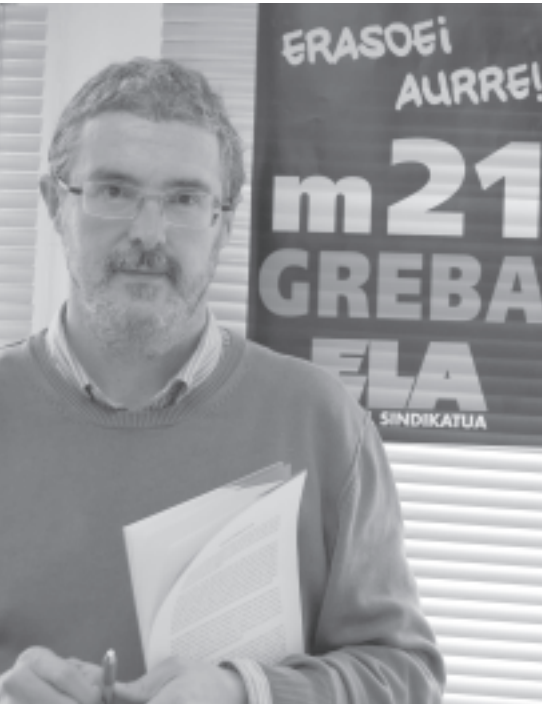
IRES publishes an article about ELA

The March issue (No 117) of *Cronique Internationale*, the journal published by the IRES (Institut de Recherches Économiques et Sociales), contains an article about ELA, by the researchers Christian Dufour and Adelheid Hege, entitled “XII ELA Congress, Basque Trade Union Confederation”. The article is available on line at:

<http://www.ires-fr.org/IMG/File/C117-3.pdf>

Adolfo Muñoz, Secretary General, analyses the call to the general strike

"A necessary strike"



Adolfo Muñoz, Txiki, Secretary General of ELA, stressed the need for the working class to take their struggle to the streets. To challenge management's plundering and threats and job destruction. To force a change in public policies. To demand that social and labour rights are decided here. To demand social control and participation in their policies. "It is time to change this unfair system. And, therefore, we have to take our struggle to the streets, take a stand. We are going to stand up to them. If we want to be respected, we have to fight".

We have decided to challenge management's blackmail

-ELA has been taking a stand and fighting for fairer distribution of wealth for some time now. It has now decided to take a significant leap in industrial action.

-Over the last fifteen years, the country's wealth has increased dramatically. Most of this wealth has fallen into the hands of a minority: the business and financial class. The workers are no better off. Quite the contrary.

We are now suffering the indescribable. Jobs are being destroyed, unjustified layoffs, the contracts of temporary workers are not being renewed... And they put it down to the crisis. They try to convince us that we are all in the same boat. But it is not true.

The current crisis is the result of the endless greed of the economic powers. And they have had the help of the Government and political institutions for years. And now the system is collapsing, they want to steal even more from us: plundering the public coffers, refusing to pay taxes, using blackmail when negotiating working conditions and demanding more sacrifices... At ELA, of course, we are sure that we are not going to allow it to happen.

-Why a general strike?

-If we do not show our strength, the adjustments in this crisis are going to end up with jobs being lost and worse working conditions, particularly salaries, and greater flexibility. This is what management and governments want. And we cannot forget the poor social protection for the unemployed.

The general strike is necessary and essential. We have to fight to ensure that public policies are fair, with progressive taxation that makes them possible; we have to fight for greater social spending that covers

the needs of the people; we have to recover public control of the economy and prevent capital from speculating; measures have to be taken in the financial system to ensure it complies with public interests; salaries and working conditions have to be defended against management blackmail; we have to demand public intervention policies, through budgets, and we have to fight against job losses...

For many years now, governments' policies have turned their backs on people's interests and we have to take industrial action to force other policies.

It is a general strike to show solidarity with the working class compared to the "every man for himself" argument of the neo-liberals. It is a general strike that demands that politics be used to serve the citizens and recover a role that it has lost.

-The call to strike has come from the Basque trade union majority (ELA, LAB, ESK, STEE-EILAS, EHNE, HIRU). What do you make of that?

-We are going to strike with the unions that believe that there are reasons to do so. Despite the differences in other areas - and there are and deep ones - we have agreed that we have to work together in our response.

This is not a strike against one party or another, that would be absolutely stupid. These policies have been reached by mutual agreement by all the parties involved in government.

Militant trade unionism cannot accept, and just stand there with our arms crossed, that the consequences of a crisis that we have not provoked burden the backs of the weakest. At ELA, we do not accept it and we have decided to fight and take action.