



OUT ON STRIKE IN RESPONSE TO THE SLASHED PENSIONS

On 27 January 2011, ELA, along with the Basque trade union majority, organised a widely-supported strike as the highpoint of the dynamics to respond and demonstrate against the drastic slashing of pensions envisaged by Rodríguez Zapatero's government.

The strike on 27 January was widely supported by the different companies and sectors, a clear reflection of the widely-felt rejection of this latest attack on the rights of the workers. Along with the mass walkouts in the companies, special mention should be made of the high turn-out demonstrations held in the pro-

vincial capitals of the Basque Country at midday and in the evening, with tens of thousands of workers protesting democratically against the attack on their rights.

That same day, it was announced that the government, UGT & CCOO trade unions and the CEOE-CEPYME employers' organisation had reached an agreement regarding pensions and other socio-employment issues that will hardest hit the working class, after a process noted for its excessive secrecy. Finally, the pension reform bill was passed on 28 January.

ELA REVALIDATES ITS CLEAR MAJORITY

The first part of the trade union election period ended on 31 December 2010 with excellent results for ELA, which has consolidated, and even improved, its clear majority in all regions and federa-

tions. ELA yet again accounts for over 40% of trade union representation in the Basque Country (40.33% specifically), which is twice as high as the second trade union.

Summary of the measures adopted and their objectives:

MAIN OBJECTIVE: HINDERING ACCESS TO A PENSION

1.- Raising retirement age to 67 years old progressively from 2013 onwards. Each year, the legal retirement age will be increased by one month, which will be sped up to two months from 2019 onwards, until it is 67 years old by 2027.

The possibility of retiring from 65 years old is established on the following terms:

- 100% of the pension if the worker has accumulated 38.5 years of Social Security contributions.
- An annual reduction coefficient of 7.5% will be applied if the worker has not accumulated contributions for that period.

2.- Hindering early retirement and raising the age from 61 to 63 years old. The worker will have had to have paid 33 years of contributions, 3 more than currently, in order to be entitled to early retirement.

3.- Hindering partial retirement and the release contract.

4.- Committed to new future changes. In other words, the plan is to rise the age for retirement, early retirement, etc. even further.

SECOND OBJECTIVE: REDUCTION OF THE AMOUNT OF THE PENSION

1.- Increasing the number of years to be taken into account to calculate the calculation basis of the pension from 15 to 25. Each year, between 2013 and 2022, one additional year will be taken into account to calculate the pension. This measure means an average reduction of the pension by 10% with respect to the current situation.

2.- Reducing the pension assigned for each year of Social Security contribution paid. The worker currently needs to have paid 35 years of contributions to receive 100% of the calculation basis. This is going to be increased to 37 years, a further two years, an increase that will be introduced progressively.

3.- Calculating the periods when no contributions have been paid. The workers who have paid less than 25 years of Social Security contributions will receive significantly smaller pensions, as the difference in years are going to be calculated as follows: the first two years, using the minimum calculation basis, and the remaining using half the minimum basis.



According to Txema Laiseka, Trade Union Election Official, these results are a triumph for ELA and further consolidation of its trade union model of confronting neo-liberal policies. This model is committed to defending the rights of the workers based on coherence and commitment.

"We have met our best expectations. There are

many good things to be mentioned, but I only want to highlight two. On the one hand, this percentage is 0.15% up on the same date in 2009. On other hand, we are the only trade union that is growing".

ELA will continue to use its majority to serve the interests of the working class. "This result has one very clear interpretation: it is a triumph for

ELA as an organisation to see how the working class has endorsed our trade union model. A trade unionism characterised for its political and economic independence and for having opted for standing up against the neo-liberal political and economic power, hell-bent on imposing restructuring and cuts against the working class".

The trade union election process in the Autonomous Community of Navarra is taking place

on a different timescale: it began in October and will last until June. "The percentage of elections held has been very small; the important period is precisely now ahead of us. 2,095 of the total 6,509 trade union delegates in Navarra will be elected between January and June, which accounts for 32.18 of the total or, what is the same, 60% of the whole trade union election process".

TRADE UNION ELECTIONS Election period

Data as of 31-XII-2010. Difference with respect to 31-XII-2009 in brackets.

ELA	40,33% (+0,15)
CCOO	20,01% (-0,17)
LAB	16,24% (-0,48)
UGT	13,02% (-0,11)
OTHERS	10,37% (+0,60)

An ELA delegation in the Western Sahara



An international delegation of different European trade unions, including ELA, visited the Western Sahara from 23 to 25 January to see the situation of the Saharawi people for themselves. The trip was organised in conjunction with UGT SARIO, the Saharawi trade union with which ELA works and is closely connected, in order to discover at first hand the serious situation in which the Saharawi people are living and express their solidarity with them. ELA saw for itself Morocco's occupation policy in the Western

Sahara, along with the repression and violation of the human rights of the Saharawi people, which is all aimed at preventing the latter from exercising the right of self-determination. The Moroccan Government has therefore ignored the calls from the international community and from different political, cultural and social platforms to stop violating human rights, and also the civic and political ones, in the occupied territories. ELA also wants to denounce the complicity of the Spanish State in this strategy.

A century of ELA

ELA celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2011 and a varied programme has been organised to mark it. Our trade union wishes to thank all those people who in one way or another have helped ELA get to this landmark anniversary. It has therefore organised a travelling exhibition throughout the Basque Country. Numerous talks have also been organised and a DVD will be released and two



books published on the history of ELA. These initiatives will end with the main central event on Saturday 11 June, the date on which the ELA Articles of Association were approved 100 years ago.

ELA at the Brussels Spring Social Conference

On 10 and 11 March, the first spring social conference, organised by twenty or so trade unions and social movements involved in the European Social Forum, will be held in Brussels. ELA is part of this group of organisers and will send a delegation of three people. The Conference will be attended by around 200 delegates. The five main areas to be discussed will be: 1.- Monetary Policies and the European Central Bank 2.- Public Budgets, Debt and Fiscal Policies 3.- Competitiveness and Wage Policies 4.- Social Security and Pension Systems and 5.- EU Foreign Trade.

“Don't waste this opportunity”

On 10 January 2011, ETA announced a “unilateral, permanent and verifiable” cease-fire. ELA expressed its hopes and assessed it positively. It hopes that this marks the start of a new period to channel the national demands of our people in a civil and democratic way.

ELA believes that the time for armed conflict has ended and this must therefore be ratified by ETA.

The assessment of the permanent and general cease fire is positive as this decision will mean a period of détente and the easing of tension for society as a whole.

ELA believes that these opportunities for peace should be seized. It therefore calls on the Spanish government to work to ensure that this détente becomes permanent peace.

Competition over trade union and labour rights

The Basque Competition Court has deemed in a report published in response to a question raised by the Basque Employer's Organisation as to whether the demands that the trade union central offices made regarding areas such as limiting contracting through Temporary Employment Agencies, bans on sub-contracting and other issues are conducts likely to restrict competition.

Yet again, this Court is attaching the standard contents of the collective bargaining process on the premise that it restricts the right to competition.

This is yet another attempt to restrict the rights of the workers, by making them subordinate to economic and business interests. ELA considers this latest example of the court's interference in the sphere of collective bargaining to be unacceptable and will continue to defend the contents of the agreements as strongly as before.

Adolfo Muñoz, Txiki, the ELA General Secretary, denounces the policy to slash social and labour rights

“WE ARE WITNESSING BRAZEN ROBBERY”



During the general strike on 27 January, the Basque working class yet again showed that it is not ready to give in to the continuous attacks that it is weathering. Adolfo Muñoz analyses the socio-economic situations and warns that we will have to continue fighting and taking action to protect our rights.

-The attacks against the working class are continuing. The latest was on 28 January when the Spanish government passed its bill to reform the pension system.

-The government said that it would implement the adjustments “no matter what it takes” and went straight ahead. It is introducing all the reforms (as was the case with the labour reform), either with the approval or abstention of the different political groups that are willing to back it: PP, PNV, CiU, UPN... Zapatero is looking to the right to introduce right-wing policies.

The parties that are likely to govern are focusing their attacks on the working class. The control that capital has over that political class is obvious. Wages and social rights are being attacked. The economic powers-that-be are not willing to make do with “normal” profits. They have just enjoyed a phase of speculative profits and they are demanding reforms for the situation not to change. The reforms are set up in such a way that we are the ones paying for them. That is why it is sheer robbery.

The banks and large corporations give the orders and politics just obeys and turns its back on solidarity. Neither wages nor social rights can be seen to have in any way contributed to the cause of the crisis. Apart from a capitalist crisis, we are suffering from a deep democratic crisis: we do not choose the people who are in charge and there is no democratic control of the power.

-That political classes calls on us to be “responsible”...

-They manipulate language. Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission between 1985 and 1995, has pointed out that “capital does what it wants in the European Union” and that “we are governed by very irresponsible politicians”. That is also true here. They control the media and they use them to manipulate the information... They do not want people to be well-informed and aware. It would be much more difficult for them if there was a real debate about alternatives.

-How would you assess the response of the Basque trade union majority to these new attacks?

-We are working to bring about a change in the policies and make them more just. That will not be possible unless people take action. That is the option of the Basque trade union majority.

-The principles regarding the collective bargaining reform

have also been established in the Madrid agreement.

-Eliminating the automatic extension or ultraactividad of collective agreements (the agreement continuing to be applied after it ends), denying the possibility to select sphere and contents, and opening up the way to the salary opt-out clause becoming more widespread are the main dangers of that reform. The document that they have signed is based on the philosophy defended by management. The trade union and management interests are hidden under apparently neutral words (structure and structuring, atomization, etc.).

Monopolising trade union representation by means of centralisation and poorer working conditions are among the objectives of this reform. The possibility of choosing in which sphere and what contents we want to negotiate is fundamental to be able to tackle the job insecurity problems that we face.

-What must a trade union like ELA do in the current socio-economic situation?

-A counter-power model has no future without trade union militancy and members. We do not have problems of discourse or alternatives. We must not overlook trade union militancy at this stage. It has been entrusted with a very difficult task, where it has to act in companies and sectors to get them ready to defend the working conditions and our wages. It has to be committed and prepared. That is our main responsibility and is shared by the whole of the trade union structure.

The reform and blackmail being used by management set many challenges that we will only be able to face with organisation and working collectively. That is a trade union. And I would therefore like to end by making this very simple point: the trade unions have to be stronger in companies and sectors. That involves getting more members and organising them.