

MARCH 2026

## Broad support for the general strike on 17 March: the fight continues

The general strike on 17 March was proof of the organised strength of the working class in the Hego Euskal Herria (Basque Country and Navarre). The call promoted by the unions ELA, LAB, Steilas, Hiru and Etxalde under the slogan '*Gutxieneko soldata hemen erabaki. SMI 1.500 €.* *Mejorar salarios para repartir la riqueza*' ('*Decide the minimum wage here. IMW 1.500 €. Improving wages to distribute wealth*') has been widely followed in many strategic sectors, evidencing the deep discontent that exists in the face of the deterioration of living and working conditions.

The call, which has also had the support of more than 100 social agents and citizen movements, has had specific demands: the requirement to establish a Minimum Wage decided in Euskal Herria of at least €1,500, which responds to the socio-economic reality of the country.





Since the early hours of the morning, thousands of union delegates, along with militants and workers, joined the information pickets in industrial estates, logistics centers, shops and work centers. The objective has been clear: to explain the reasons for the strike and to reinforce the need to organize collectively in front of employers and institutions that want to impose Spanish labour legislation to further precarize the Basque working class.

The strike turnout has been particularly significant in the industry, with significant stops at numerous workplaces, especially in Gipuzkoa, as well as in the public sector, education and various services. The strike achieved a very high follow-up in the schools, exceeding 80 per cent in some sections and standing at around 60 per cent among teachers. In many workplaces the activity has been severely reduced or completely paralysed. This turnout confirms that there is a growing awareness among the working class that social progress is only achieved through mobilization and organized conflict.

The streets have also been the scene of massive participation. More than 125,000 people have demonstrated in different cities and regions of Euskal Herria, with mass demonstrations in Bilbao, Donostia, Gasteiz and Iruñea, as well as in numerous towns. Throughout the country, demonstrations have gathered thousands of people both in the morning and in the afternoon, showing sustained high support throughout the day. The marches have been composed of columns of workers from different sectors, reflecting the transversal nature of the protest and the broad social support for the claims raised.

For ELA, the strike of March 17 reaffirms the need to continue strengthening union organizing in the workplace and to continue promoting social mobilization. Days like this show that when the working class is organized and mobilized, it is able to pave the way. This general strike is not an end: the fight for decent living conditions and a minimum wage decided in Euskal Herria will go on.



[Click here to see a video summary of the strike day.](#)



[Click here to see a gallery of images from the demonstrations](#)



## 40 years since the NATO referendum: trade unionism as a counter-power to the new imperialism

ELA presents in the political document *Union power before the new imperialism* a reflection that seeks to place the role of unionism in a global context marked by the neoliberal offensive, the increase of inequalities and the intensification of geopolitical disputes.

It is 40 years since the referendum on the membership of Spain in NATO, held on 12th March 1986. That day marked a significant political moment in Europe and in the Spanish State. Although the overall result was favourable to the permanence in the military alliance, in some territories —among them Euskal Herria— the social majority clearly positioned itself against.

The ELA members remember that episode not only as a historical fact, but as a fully valid political reference. Four decades later, the international context is marked by a new cycle of confrontation between powers, the increase in military spending and a growing militarisation of European politics. In this context, it is essential to open an in-depth debate on Europe's direction and the need to reorient its policies towards peace, social justice and cooperation between peoples.

In recent years, the European Union has reinforced an agenda combining neoliberal economic policies with a growing strategic subordination to NATO. The increase in defence spending, the centrality of the arms industry and the subordination of political decisions to geopolitical interests are forming a model that is increasingly remote from the social needs of the citizens. In view of this, European priorities must be redirected towards strengthening social rights, redistributing wealth, a fair ecological transition and the effective defence of democracy.

In this debate, it is also inevitable to question the role of NATO in the current international order. The Atlantic Alliance was a pillar of the military architecture that emerged after the Second World War and during the Cold War. However, far from disappearing after the end of that historic period, NATO has expanded its scope of action and its political influence. From the perspective of peace, international cooperation and the sovereignty of peoples, we advocate a security system based on demilitarisation and international law, which also means opening the debate on dissolving NATO.

The construction of an alternative requires that the sovereignty of peoples and the democratic control of strategic resources be placed at the centre. Energy, food, health, care, finance, industry or technology cannot be subordinated to corporate interests or to military logic. They must be managed collectively to ensure social rights, wealth redistribution and gender equality. These demands are part of a political and trade union strategy aimed at building an anti-fascist and profoundly democratic society.

Our trade union tradition has always been linked to internationalism. ELA was in 1973 one of the unions that founded the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and has since been an active part of the European trade union movement. This commitment expresses our conviction that solidarity between workers must go beyond borders. At the same time, we have maintained a critical position with the evolution of the European Union when its policies have reinforced the neoliberal orientation, weakened labour rights and put the interests of capital before those of peoples and the working class.

ELA understand that the fight against militarism is closely linked to the social struggle. The advancement of the extreme right, the deterioration of labour rights and the increase in inequality are all part of the same process. Therefore, strengthening trade union power, class awareness, anti-racism, feminism and the defence of the Basque language are central elements of our daily work.

Forty years after that referendum, we continue to argue that another kind of society is possible: one based on peace, real democracy and the sovereignty of peoples. At a time when Europe is debating its future, trade unionism must also assume its historic responsibility and act as a real social and political counter-power, capable of organising the working class and of promoting an eco-socialist and feminist transition that gives priority to life and the rights of the social majority.

## **Economic growth, stagnant wages: a new ELA report reveals the growing gap between capital and labour**

A [new study published](#) in March 2026 by the ELA Research Office analyzes the wage evolution in Hego Euskal Herria between 2008 and 2024. The results are convincing: while GDP grew by 39% in that period, the real wage barely increased by 2.9%, which is equivalent to only 838 euros in fifteen years. Corporate profits, on the other hand, have reached annual all-time highs. The report shows that the adjustment following the 2008 financial crisis fell disproportionately on the working class, as successive labour reforms weakened collective bargaining and facilitated wage devaluation.

The study also reveals deep structural inequalities within the labour market. Women earn on average about 15 per cent less than men, a gap that persists even when compared by occupation, sector and experience. Migrant workers face even more pronounced disparities, being paid 30% less per hour than non-migrants, a penalty linked to labour market segmentation and not to individual characteristics. Part-time workers (mostly women and migrants) also earn less per hour, over and above the mere reduction in working hours.

The report concludes that the pattern has been the same over the last few years: both in the crisis and in the recovery or in the inflationary period, capital has increased its share in the wealth generated while that of labour has decreased.