

Demonstration

The biggest demonstration in history

- In San Sebastian on February 22 tens of thousands of people took to the streets in defence of EUSKALDUNON EGUNKARIA

Choc-a-bloc. On February 22 a whole world of people came together in San Sebastian to show their support of EGUNKARIA; the city was packed to the hilt. The demonstrators didn't all fit into the official route and, in addition to occupying the pavements, had to take to other alternative routes to get to the Boulevard via improvised demonstrations which we could hear shout «Egunkaria aurrera!» (Long live *Egunkaria!*). The head of the demonstration left the tunnel of the El Antiguo neighbourhood at 17h10, and arrived at its destination at around 20h05 to the ovation of the crowds packed into the Boulevard. For three hours, the streets of San Sebastian, both the official and alternative routes, sounded out with cries of «Egunkaria aurrera!», «Atxilotuak askatu!», or «Adierazpen Askatasuna!».

This, by all accounts, would seem to have been the biggest demonstration ever seen in San Sebastian. That's certainly what it looks like from the photographs of the occasion.

The beginning of the demonstration at the tunnel of the El Antiguo neighbourhood was highly emotional. When the leaders of Kontseilua entered the tunnel carrying the banner, reading *Egunkaria Aurrera, Euskarari Bai*, they were welcomed with thundering applause. People holding high copies of EGUNKARIA and EGUNERO let roar in unison: «Egunkaria Aurrera!». Some of them couldn't stem the tears.

Behind the leaders of Kontseilua –Xabier Mendiguren, Juan Mari Larrarte, Ane Agirregomezkorta, Mikel Arrizabalaga, Gabi Basañez, Antton Iztueta, Imanol Lazkano, Joxe Mari Irazusta, Ana Izagirre, Miren Gabantxo and Joxerra Olano, among others– came the families of the detainees. The wife and children of Joan Mari Torrealdei, parents and family members of Iñaki Uribe, brother of Martxelo Otamendi, husband and children of Inma Gomila, sisters of Txema Auzmendi, wife and brother of Fermín Lazkano, wife and son of Luis Goia, children of Pello Zubiria, wife of Xabier Oleaga and girlfriend Xabier Alegria.

Accompanying the families and just behind them were representatives of the institutions, of the Basque parties and cultural sphere. In representation of the Basque Government were Minister of Culture, Miren Azkarate (Deputy-Minister Patxi Goenaga was also present), the Minister of Justice and Labour Joseba Azkarraga and the Minister of Education Anjeles Iztueta. Also present was the Deputy General of Gipuzkoa Román Sudupe (accompanied by Councillor José Ramón Beloki), and the candidate for the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa Joxe Joan González de Txabarri. Also present were Joseba Egibar, spokesman of the Basque National Party, PNV, Begoña Errazti, President of EA and Antton Karrera, MP for IU-EB. Representatives of Batasuna were extremely numerous, including Arnaldo Otegi, Pernando Barrena, Joseba Permach and Joseba Álvarez. We also saw Jakes Bortairu and Mertxe Kolina from Abertzaleen Batasuna, Patxi Zabaleta, from Aralar, and, from Elkarri, Jonan Fernández. There were also members of the PSE-EE: we noted the presence of Gemma Zabaleta, Ramón Etxezarreta and Ernesto Gasco. The Secretaries General of ELA and LAB, José Elorrieta and Rafa Diez, were also present at the event.

As was to be expected, there was also a large representation from the area of Basque culture:

representatives of EGUNKARIA, AEK, Ika, UEMA, Bige, EHE, Euskalgintza Elkarlanean, Bertsozaleen Elkarte, Argia, Emun and many others bore the main banner, behind which we could see Antonio Campos, ex-Chairman of the Federación de Ikastolas, Xavier Isasi, Chairman of UEU, Lontxo Oiartzabal, Joxean Lizarribar, Ramón Labaien or Hasier Etxeberria.

Behind them came the group which was most loudly acclaimed and which received the biggest demonstrations of solidarity. Dressed in blue shirts and caps stating EGUNKARIA, they completed the demonstration as a group. Old folk, youngsters, children, the workers at EGUNKARIA received along the entire route the support of Basque lovers, a backing demonstrated with cries like «Egunkaria aurrera!» (Long live Egunkaria), «Atxilotuak askatu!» (Free the prisoners) or «Euskaraz bizi nahi dugu» (We want to live our lives in Basque). The most emotional moment of the demonstration took place when the workers of EGUNKARIA entered the El Antiguo tunnel. Holding copies of EGUNKARIA, the workers received thundering applause from the multitude who were packed into the surrounding area waiting for the demonstration to start. Thousands of people lined the streets, among whom were numerous well-known faces. To name but a few: singer Mikel Laboa, ex-President of the Athletic Football Club, José María Arrate, writer Joan Mari Irigoyen, likewise writer Jimu Iturralde, Iñigo Santxo, representative of the Sindicato de Abogados Euskaldunes (the Basque-speaking Lawyers' Union), the clown Agirretxe *Porrotx*, Editor of Le Journal Hur Gorostiaga, Edorta Jiménez, Koldo Izagirre, Txaro Arteaga, Pedro Miguel Etxenike...

The workers made their way slowly through the thousands of people lining the streets. Behind them came the workers from *Argia* and de Herri Irratia-Radio Popular, EITB, Gara and Irutxulo, each bearing a banner. The chief executives of Basque TV and radio, EITB, were also among those present: Andoni Ortuzar, Bingen Zupiria, Iñigo Camino, Odile Kruzeta and Julián Beloki. And behind them more banners (that of EHGAM, of the traditional Basque sportsmen and women, the family of stone lifter Iñaki Perurena among them)...

And following them came the crowd. When the demonstration was about to make its way along calle San Martín, calle Zubieta was full of people. These were demonstrators who were improvising another route on their way to the Boulevard.

Shouts and slogans were the order of the day; they were demanding that the prisoners be set free, spoke in defence of EGUNKARIA and of press in Basque and asked themselves why the Basque President, or *Lehendakari*, was nowhere to be seen at the demonstration. The question «Ibarretxe, non zaude?» (Where are you, Ibarretxe?) was repeated yesterday on more than one occasion. When the head of the demonstration reached the square in front of the Town Hall at around 18h45, the Boulevard was overflowing with people, full among others, with those who had improvised their own parallel route along the calle Oquendo and with those whom, unable to advance, had chosen the Paseo de la Concha. The applause and slogans started again in the final straight: Egunkaria aurrera!, Atxilotuak askatu e Ibarretxe non zaude? When the head of the demonstration stopped before the music stand, those carrying the banner, without letting it go, held high their copies of EGUNKARIA. All you could see in the Boulevard were copies of EGUNKARIA and of EGUNERO.

A deeply affected Juan Mari Larrarte read out a communiqué in the name of EGUNKARIA followed by Xavier Mendiguren who spoke in the name of Kontseilua. The cries of the demonstrators interrupted the discourses on more than one occasion. And, meanwhile, thousands of people continued to demonstrate, with the “Hor Dago!” group from Bilbao bringing up the rear.

One indication of the number of people who gathered in San Sebastian on that 22 February are the problems experienced by people trying to get into the city. Most of the trains, whether RENFE or Euskotren, were arriving packed to the hilt, often unable to stop in many stations and tailbacks of up

to four kilometres formed on the A-8 motorway.