



CITIZEN MOBILIZATION



►► The header of the march, with the slogan "For a dignified present and future". The little ones in the house also attend, with messages and drawings.

«Elections now!»

In front of the gaze of tourists, the trade union march gathers half a thousand people despite the bad weather

The Police overcomes a demonstrator for insulting the officers, with the disapproval of those present

EL PERIÒDIC
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Despite the rain, the cold and the festive long weekend, last Thursday the unions managed to mobilize half a thousand people through the streets of Escaldes-Engordany and Andorra la Vella to protest against the Government's policy in matters of housing, wages and pensions, as well as the failure of social consultation within the Economic and Social Council (CES). In the absence of official figures from either the Traffic Service or the Police, the Unió Sindical d'Andorra (USdA) was optimistic and placed attendance at over a thousand, but the presence of demonstrators was similar to the march on May 1st, with an attendance of almost 500 people. In his parliament at the end of the demonstration in Guillemó Square in the capital, the general secretary of the USdA, Gabriel Ubach, called for «elections now!» and warned about the possibility of calling a general strike if their requests were not met.

«We don't want Mr. Xavier Espot [head of government] to listen to us, we want him to listen to us once and for all, and if he doesn't want

to listen to us, to be brave enough to come out and say that the middle class and the working class don't care about anything Today we made a show of strength, for us it was a complete success, with the rain and with cold, because we can't continue like this, they will end up burdening this country», denounced the union leader. «What worries us -he added- is that the em-

ployers and the Government deny the loss of purchasing power». For this reason, «we will go to the streets whenever necessary and we are ready to reach the last consequences, and if we have to call a strike, we will do it, we will not be afraid at all», he warned.

The march started promptly at 8:00 p.m., from Coprínceps Square. It was immediately apparent that,



►► The Police overcomes a demonstrator, last Thursday in Meritxell avenue.

as they had announced, there were representatives of the Social Democratic Party (PS) and Progressives-SDP. Under a light but constant rain, the demonstrators went down the Carlemany avenue, in front of the attentive gaze of the few tourists who were still making the last purchases of the day, in some cases with surprised faces. The attendees carried various banners, so-

me of which were covered by many umbrellas, with participants of all ages.

The demonstration continued at a steady pace, faster than planned, and halfway through the high police presence became more evident. Precisely at the moment of going up Meritxell avenue after La Ronda square, an incident occurred. At that moment, a protester who was reprimanding the officers, as confirmed by both the law enforcement and trade unionists, was overcome and arrested, to the disapproval of those present. «People are getting very nervous, and the Government must start to realize that this is getting out of hand, because the evidence cannot be denied», Ubach denounced.

After the incident, the demonstration continued until it reached Guillemó Square in Andorra la Vella, where the unions read the protest manifesto, with the slogan It's enough, in which question Espot and the Government. After the unions intervened, the Stop Violence association also took the floor, which supported the march. From there, the unions passed the ball to the Government's response to decide whether or not to call the strike. ≡



Gabriel Ubach

SECRETARY GENERAL OF USDA

«People are getting very nervous, and the Government must realize that this is getting out of hand»

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PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Bus companies hire temporary workers due to a lack of drivers in the country

The concessionaires admit that they need more staff, but that they will now be able to provide service properly

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The Principality's public transport concessionaires, Coopalsa and Autocars Nadal, are taking advantage of the month of December to finish hiring the staff needed to provide service during the winter season. It should be noted that both companies have had to hire occasional drivers, due to the great lack of qualified and licensed drivers in Andorra. Therefore, Autocars Nadal, which is responsible, among other services, for the L1 line and the Express Bus, has already hired four seasonal workers. Even so, they still need between seven and 10 more employees to complete the staff of about 60 people. For its part, Coopalsa, which is in charge of the rest of the regular lines, already has between 20 and 25 casual workers and, in total, approximately 80 drivers. In this sense, the manager of the company, Gabriel Dallerès, assessed that «we are happy because we have managed to hire quite a few drivers, and it gives us some peace of mind that we can provide adequate service».

In context, this year, the arrival of temporary workers has been brought forward by a month, a factor that increased by 80% the number of users who were using the bus service in November, as explained by Dallerès. Added to the free transport, the drop in the price of the pass and the increase in the price of energy products, this situation «generated a cluster that caused saturation in some lines», he remarked, and hence the need to hire more staff, since the staff was not yet structured enough to take on all the demand in a hurry. Therefore, many changes had to be made in a short time.

In this line, the general manager of Autocars Nadal, Bartumeu Gabriel, asserted that some frequencies have been reduced to reach the Epizen shopping center and extend the journey, but on the rest of the lines, frequencies have been increased. At the same time, there have been changes in the timetables to avoid queuing. Another of the novelties has been «the reintroduc-



MARICEL BLANCH

► The number of users will increase mostly in January, although it will be high until March.

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tion of L3, which has managed to relieve the saturation of L2 and L4, especially when downloading, for the users who suffered the most, coming from Soldeu, El Tarter and Canillo», Gabriel detailed.

With the Puríssima long weekend, and entering the height of the season, it is expected that the number of public transport users will increase even more. In this sense, the manager of Coopalsa reported that the strongest month will be January, because it has 31 days, and February only 28. As for March, he observed that during the first days there is a high period of overnight stays, but from the second half of the month it starts

to decrease, following «the normal trend», explained Dallerès. So, to prevent the lines from collapsing again, additional expeditions will be launched to meet this possible rise in demand, especially in the direction of Encamp and Ordino. At the same time, slight incidents are expected in the coming days due to the bad weather and the continuous arrival of workers in the country.

For their part, temporary workers cannot enjoy the free bus service. This is why concessionaires offer them the 30 euros monthly pass with unlimited trips. «In any case, compared to previous years, they are in a much better situation, be-



Gabriel Dallerès
COOPALSA MANAGER

«We are happy because we have managed to hire quite a few drivers, and it gives us peace of mind»

Bartumeu Gabriel
AUTOCARS NADAL DIRECTOR

«The reintroduction of the L3 has managed to relieve the saturation of the L2 and L4, especially downhill»

cause for example, the Pas de la Casa pass used to cost 160 euros», observed Dallerès.

POOR SERVICE// Finally, the Government has opened a case against Coopalsa, as it has been detected that it does not respect the terms of the concession. Supposedly, it uses vehicles for private services intended for regular lines. The Minister of the Presidency, Economy and Business, Jordi Gallardo, assured that «it is a situation that does not help and does not respond to what is planned in the award». Otherwise, Dallerès indicated that it has not yet been determined what the company has not done well, but if the problem resides in the vehicles, he opined that «we should say which ones, how many and in what way, we don't think it goes like this». In addition, he always informed that the FEDA Solutions database documents the movements of the buses and sends the information to the operators and the Executive. ≡

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