THE HUMANITARIAN NATURE OF THE EVACUATION OF BASQUE CHILDREN TO ENGLAND DURING THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

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Contents

Introduction

The Spanish Civil War, 17th July 1936 to 1st April 1939, was contextually seen with strong and mixed views by those who looked on at it occurring. Since that time it has become understandably overshadowed by the Second World War. The Dissertation seeks to address how far the goodwill of the British people was a motivational factor for supporting the Basque Children who sought refuge in Britain starting from 23rd May 1937. There is no date of a great exodus of these children from Britain and some even stayed on in Britain. The Dissertation was inspired by the sparse research that had gone into the topic and how it demonstrates the horrors of war being overcome particularly relevant with the contemporary on-going refugee crisis.

The theme for the dissertation is, thus, to open a window onto the effects of the Spanish Civil War and assess Britain's goodwill in taking on the children from a foreign country they didn't quite understand. As will be discussed, there were contradicting attitudes on the issue between the British Government and the British people. The dissertation does not presuppose to know all the difficulties and hardships suffered by those who did suffer them. It does, however, as stated, seek to highlight the kindness of the British people and not the unfeeling attitude of the British Government. How a sense of community and humanity, as in the ability to relate to and genuinely help others with no care for reward, in helping the children exiled to Britain.

As stated, research into the topic is scarce but there remain enlightening books not necessarily wholly on the Basque refugee children. Dorothy Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*: Milton N. Silva decries Legarreta's book about being too sparse with its depiction of the Spanish Civil War as a whole. Ergo, he believes that *The Guernica Generation* is too focused on the Basque Refugees. This is the focus it should have. His most scarring criticism of Legarreta is that her book is "romanticism

tending".[1] This implication that Legarreta is showing some sort of unprofessionalism by allowing her opinion to paint her work is unfair as all histories contain implicit judgement no matter how hard the author seeks to hide this. Legarreta's extensive use of interviews with surviving niños vascos, or Basque children, would more than make up for this perceived flaw in the mind of those cautious of allowing any opinion in histories. Thomas Buchanan's *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* didn't focus on the children as Legarreta does but does brilliantly to provide context to British viewpoint upon the Spanish Civil War. His work emphasises the strength of the British people in enabling the Basque child refugees to escape to Britain. Watkins, in *Britain Divided* creates a didactic picture of the British public's attitude as well as confusion within the British Government. He quotes Prince Bismarck stating he was in communication with the diplomat in Madrid "via British warships in Spanish waters, but the reports coming in were so contradictory that they made it impossible to form a clear opinion."[2] Watkins fails to understand the complexity of British opinion, as Buchanan points out, when he places their attitudes in black and white. Paul Preston's introduction to *Revolution and War in Spain* creates the idea of a legacy after the Civil War created by Francoists of the Civil War as a glorious war against Communists who committed anti-clerical atrocities. Preston demonstrates a more enlightened opinion when he states that these were rather the result of a long past of social oppression.[3] Preston shows cause to handle history of the Spanish Civil War with criticism.

Adrian Bell makes a significant contribution to Steve Bowles' *The Guernica Children*. Bell's opinion on non-intervention was enlightening particularly when he expressed that it was dichotomous of the British Government to use its battleships to escort refugees out of the Basque Country through the insurgent blockade when it wouldn't allow France to turn a blind eye to supplies that could help a democratic government survive. Bell generally creates a convincing general picture and is hugely

[1] Reviewed work: 'Dorothy Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation: Basque Refugee Children of the Spanish Civil War*' Review by Milton N. Silva (The International Migration Review, Vol. 21, No.4, Winter 1987, pp.1562 – 1564, Published by Center for Migration Studies of New York, inc.) p.1564

[2] K W Watkins, *Britain Divided: The Effect of the Spanish Civil War on British Political Opinion* (Greenwood Press, Connecticut, 1976) p.64

[3] Paul Preston, 'Introduction; War of Words: The Spanish Civil War and the Historians' in Paul Preston, *Revolution and War in Spain, 1931-1939* (Routledge, October 2012) pp.2-3

useful towards the documentary. Eric Hawkins also gives an input which is revealing of how warfare scarred the children. Hawkins was a volunteer who was studying Spanish and was a useful translator for the niños vascos and he describes visiting a home for the niños vascos near Cambridge where, in trying to get the children to express their fears through drawings, he states that for weeks they drew Nazi planes dropping bombs. To its credit the document does well by adding the accounts of niños vascos themselves which demonstrates the reluctance to send children away and women's tears ushering goodbye to these children sent into exile. *The Guernica Children* is an essential go to source for any person wishing to learn on the Basque children who took refuge in Britain during the Spanish Civil War.

George Lowther Steer's *The Gernika Tree* is an eye-opening account of the events at which tends towards support of the Basque Republic over the insurgent Nationalists. His account of the bombing of Gernika, or Guernica, carries a haunting depiction of fighter planes escorting the bombers, "As the terrified population streamed out of the town they dived low to drill them with their guns."[4] Steer was the first person to uncover the lie that was the Francoist blockade of the Basque coast and he rightly accredits himself of this feat in his book. Steer's *The Gernika Tree* is an emotive read which casts a vivid picture of the war in the Basque Country as well as the initial reactions of the children upon their arrival in England. His account goes on to prove that the horrors of war are irrevocably emotionally charged.

The first chapter is on the British Government's attitude to accepting the Basque refugees. It explores the issue as a matter of politics in which Britain's official line is to avoid war which seems to be at any cost. This was Britain's Non-Intervention policy. The determination to ensure France closed its borders and ensure that these two republics stayed neutral strangled the Republic of supplies it severely needed. Another issue of the Non-Intervention policy is the passive agreement with a blockade of the Basque Country by Franco's ships which caused starvation throughout the Basque

[4] G. L. Steer, *The Tree of Gernika: A Field Study of Modern War* (Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., London, 1938) p.238

Country, particularly of medical supplies. This is particularly drawn into the moral spotlight as the fascist regimes continued to supply the authoritarian insurgents with weapons, troops and war machines. Famously, the Nazis bombed the Basque town of Guernica with the Condor legion. With this in mind, the British Government's refusal to aid a democratic society was foolish or greedy. Fear of Communism can be identified and it was known to the British Government that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was supplying the Republican side with equipment and training the International Brigades. The picture blurs with consideration of the separatist movements of both Cataluña and Euzkadi (Catalonia and the Basque Country respectively) mixed with the Catalonian anarchism movement and the Communist POUM (the Worker's Party of Marxist Unification or Partit Obrer d'Unificació Marxista) which dominated the Republic. It was not as clear as stating that Spain was a democracy fighting an authoritarian coup d'état even though that was definitely one aspect. British intervention was forced by the people. The Dissertation explores forthcoming evidence of British kindness was the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief (NJCSR)'s part in forcing the hand of the government which was afraid that nothing was going to stop the NJCSR collecting refugees and bringing them over to Britain regardless.

The second chapter seeks to address the treatment of the Basque children in Britain and their experience within Britain. This chapter explores more thoroughly the dangers and famine that the children were being evacuated from. It then approaches the refugees' issues on a more personal level such as how separation and being in a foreign country affected some children. Ergo, a key aspect of this chapter is the results of the famine created within the Basque Country by warfare and Franco's blockade. It also explores the immediate disturbances the arrival of roughly 4,000 children from Euzkadi had upon the almost completely uninformed local governance. This was best demonstrated in the hasty creation of the camp which first housed the niños vascos before their dispersal to private homes across the country. There was also the added issue of trying to ensure the children's Catholic education was continued in accordance with the wishes of the Basque authorities. The camp's volunteers who helped create it and the locals who provided bread and

wellington boots to the children stood as shining examples of good will within the British populace. This chapter continues to follow certain homes the Basque Children were sent to particularly in the south-east of England and the continued hardship of dealing with no government support. It finally seeks to highlight the intent of some within Britain to repatriate the children whom they saw as mischievous and a burden. The second chapter shows, simply, the tossing around of the Basque child refugees.

The Dissertation utilises an interview with one of the Basque Children, Herminio Martinez who was 7 years old when he arrived in England on the 23rd May 1937. His input in the thesis is invaluable and proved that there remains a chasm of understanding between those who suffered the Great Depression and contemporary issues. His experience was invaluable in better understanding that poverty and famine are incomprehensible to many today. Martinez also points out that many of the niños vascos have died making research into the topic increasingly difficult.

The National Archives Documents were essential in understanding the fractured policy upon the question of the Basque children and the lack of control the British Government had. Some difficulty, as is generally the case, was found with reading some of the handwritten and some of the documents were only signed, with no typed name beneath, and when this was the case it was nearly impossible to discover the author of the document. Recorded visits from the Ministry of Health to homes where the niños vascos stayed spell out how readily the Basque children settled into English homes. The West Sussex Records Office (WSRO) Archives in Chichester were incredibly helpful in creating a picture of the perception of the Spanish Civil War within Britain, especially within West Sussex. The local and doubtless lightly used, in academic research, resources were insightful. Like the National Archives, some difficulty in deciphering the meaning of letters of correspondence where handwriting was difficult to read. The WSRO was vital in discovering the personal correspondence between Lilian Parsons, a private citizen who presumably lived in Bognor Regis as some letters were

addressed there when not addressed to her home in Spain. The correspondence was with her friends in Britain or around Spain, generally.

Newspaper articles from the time were, of course, vital to presenting the opinion of the time as well as simultaneously influencing it. This apparent contradiction proves that dealing with newspaper articles can be a double-edged sword. The articles would paint a changing window which would most likely have been the key source of information of the Spanish Civil War for the British public even those who had acquaintances in Spain or who remained in Spain, such as the aforementioned Lilian Parsons. Therefore, the newspapers would be a tarp through which the majority of British citizens would be able to understand the conflict within Spain at the time. This issue, when combined with the point that newspapers create and exacerbate public opinion make newspaper articles very useful and a reflection of the zeitgeist.

Chapter One: How solid was the British Government's policy of non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War?

The Spanish Civil War, as Dorothy Legarreta describes, began outside mainland Spain when General Franco led an insurrection on 17th July 1936 which was, in turn, quickly accompanied by "a planned series of uprisings arranged by General Emilio Mola in Spain itself."[5] Buchanan points to the beginning of the Civil War as being preceded by the murder of Lieutenant Castillo of the pro-Republican Assault Guards by the fascist Falange, prompting the abduction and murder of Monarchist leader Calvo Sotelo in the night of 13th July 1936. The army plotters saw this as an excuse to begin a coup d'état, starting on the 17th July 1936.[6] Spain was tearing itself apart.

British perception of Spain at the start of the Spanish Civil War

During the opening phases of the Civil War, opinion of Spain in Britain was best summed up by the writer Henry Brinton who stated that when Spain was at the cusp of the Second Republic in 1931 it was as backwards as other countries in the Middle Ages.[7] The British Ambassador of 1930 stated, "The kind of liberties for which progressive Spaniards are still struggling have long ago ceased to be political issues."[8] With this in mind, it becomes more understandable when one considers British support for General Franco. Indeed, Spain had become chaotic and this chaos was best exemplified by the anarchic takeover of Barcelona. George Orwell in his depiction in *Homage to Catalonia* when he writes of there being no private cars in Barcelona after they had all been collectivized.[9]

To some onlookers, the collapse of sections of Spain would have pushed the need for Nationalists to clean up the country, "I have great faith in the triumph of the valiant troops of General Franco".[10] Another letter in correspondence with Miss Parsons states more simply, "Franco will soon clean up

[5] Dorothy Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation: Basque Refugee Children of the Spanish Civil War* (University of Nevada Press, Nevada, 1984) p.9
[6] Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 1997) p.16
[7] Ibid, p.10
[8] Ibid, p.14
[9] George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (Secker & Warburg, London, 1967) p.3
[10] Letter to Lilian Parsons, dated 15th December 1936, WSRO AM 641/3/1

Spain now."[11] These documents illustrate not only authoritarian sympathies, in turn presenting a need for order that sees no boundaries, but also presents individual attitudes towards the Civil War unadulterated by any fear of alien opinion. Such are the luxuries of personal correspondences as histories. It transpires that Parsons had business in Spain, living there at intervals, and her loyalty lay with the conservative Francoists who would likely have placed industry as a pinnacle of importance; above the lives of mere Spaniards. This serves to demonstrate that on an individual level, British people reacted to the Spanish Civil War only so far as it affected them. Yet how could they know better?

The perception of a fragmented Spain under a delicate Republic is reinforced when one takes into account the Republican government's flight to Valencia between the 5th and 6th November 1936. Verle Johnston goes on to state that the defence of the city of Madrid was left down to the defence council.[12] This sense of abandonment is furthered by Raymond Carr when he mentions that "the few" journalists who stayed behind found that ministry doors were mysteriously left unlocked as the government abandoned Madrid and fled the city in the secrecy of night.[13] When a government lacks the commitment to its people to stand with them and defend them, as should be their responsibility, everything is thrown into the air. It had in Catalonia at the start of the Civil War. George Orwell describes the Anarchists as essentially in control of Catalonia in December 1936 before saying, "the revolution was still in full swing".[14] A breakdown of order was absolute. This is exemplified when, on 20th November 1936, right at the start of the Civil War, the leader of the fascist Falange, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, son of the dictator Primo de Rivera who held power in Spain from 1923 before resigning in January 1930, was executed in Alicante. Indeed, José Antonio was regarded as a

[11] Letter to Lilian Parsons, WSRO, AM 641/1/1/6
[12] Verle. B. Johnston, *Legions of Babel: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War* (Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Pennsylvania, 1967) p.43
[13] Raymond Carr, *The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1977) p.155
[14] Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* p.2

landowning aristocrat and a noted socialite.[15] This may have, as Buchanan points out, encouraged not only siding with fascists but also the initial and condescending reaction to the Civil War in Spain exemplified by *The Times*' portrayal of 'The Spanish Tragedy' on 29th July 1936 as irrelevant to modern Europe; specifically as an anachronism.[16] The British press looked down upon Spain as belonging to an antiquated age.

The media signposts British change in attitude

The condescending perception of Spain as a backward country suffering Civil War would change as the course of the Spanish Civil War went on. Buchanan goes on to declare, in a convincing manner, that the general position of the British public changed with the progression of the war.[17] This can be seen as early as May 1937 when the *Morning Post* mentioned children leaving Bilbao without mockery. Respect is also seen in the remark of civilians being evacuated from Bilbao in a factual way contrasting with the *Times*' manner; as earlier stated.[18] Legarreta alludes to the British public being the force for change that prompted the British cabinet to agree to aid Euzkadi's children, using the Royal Navy to escort ships carrying refugees, to France against Franco's wishes. On 30th April, 1937, the Home Office succumbed to the requests of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief that Basque children be accepted into Britain.[19] This furthers the earlier point that the British press was turning away from looking down upon the Basque people. Indeed, the *Guardian*, on 28th April 1937, records Franco's use of German bombers to destroy Guernica and decried this as "Three Hours' Massacre from the Air". The same article expresses solidarity with the Basque people when it appears convinced that "the vicious bombing of Guernica will stiffen the Basque resistance."[20]

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[15] Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution and Revenge* (HarperCollins E-Books) chapter 3 location.1087 (Kindle Version)
[16] Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* p.8
[17] Ibid p.1
[18] 'Children Leaving Bilbao', *Morning Post,* 5th May 1937, The National Archives
[19] Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation* p.101
[20] 'Basque Town Wiped Out by Rebel Planes', *The Guardian,* 28th April 1937, http://www.theguardian.com/media/from-the-archive-blog/2011/may/25/newspapers-national-newspapers (accessed 30th November 2015)

The Home Office Records contain a transcription of a conversation involving Mr Roberts, dated the 28th April 1937, utilizing emotive language, "The bombing in Bilbao during the last day or two has increased the danger of death to the civilian population so enormously that unless immediate steps are taken to evacuate the children from that city there may be no children left alive to remove."[21] The hyperbole employed here demonstrates care for the children. This also paints a strong impression of the need to evacuate because the children were being killed as well as genuine belief in the cause; not merely a public relations stunt. President Aguirre wasn't merely spewing anti-Franco rhetoric in order to gain sympathy from other nations. From an individual viewpoint, it is clear to say that there were individuals within government who were working to push government policy on the topic of saving the children.

The earlier stated correspondence with Miss Parsons shows the opinion that Franco would return civilisation to Spain. Dorothy Legarreta contradicts this when she states that the Francoist army was marred by "reports of the tragic executions of the militia who had remained in San Sebastián, the excesses of the Moorish Legionnaires in the Insurgent army".[22] To further this, in the Archives of the Trades Union Congress held in Warwick University there is a correspondence that glorifies the miners' rising in the Asturias, in reaction to the incorporation of CEDA (Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas, The Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Right-wing Groups) into the Spanish Republic, before condemning the crimes of the Foreign Legion, the *Tercio de Extranjeros*, who "went about with workers' heads on the points of their bayonets."[23] Watkins' argument that there was a perception of the Republican defending liberty and humanity against Fascists [24] becomes much more credible in light of this.

[21] Home Office Records, 28th April 1937, HO 213/287
[22] Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation* p.15
[23] 'Report: The Situation in Spain' letter to 'Comrade' W. G. Spiekman, Archives of the Trades Union Congress, Warwick Digital Collections, Spain: Political Situation 1934, 292/946/9/42(iii), image number 009_0042_003 http://contentdm.warwick.ac.uk/cdm/compoundobject/collection/scw/id/9915/rec/13 (accessed 23rd February 2016)
[24] Watkins, *Britain Divided* p.1

Letters of correspondence between Miss Lilian Parsons, an Englishwoman who fled Spain aboard "a British Destroyer", and her acquaintances sheds light on British opinions on the Spanish Civil War. According to a letter from one Alec Trevett where he also declared his hope that such a thing will not be necessary again "as we have both seen some of the horrors of war, as we were saying at Malaga when that was bombed. I will send you some photo's of the bombing when I get them back from home [sic]".[25] The letter goes on to state a hope that it will be possible for Miss Parsons to return to work, presumably in Spain. Another letter to Miss Parsons from 'Willie L Burke [sic]' finishes with "Heil Mosley, Heil Hitler, Arriba España".[26] These glimpses into the past prove that a didactic impression of the opinion of the Civil War is flawed. Indeed, this supports Buchanan's point that describing Britain during the 1930s as anti-fascist is oversimplified, "anti-fascism, as a concept doesn't give full life to emotions that the civil war in Spain evoked in Britain".[27] This also proves that James Hopkins oversimplifies when he states that the Civil War was a battleground between the totalitarianism of the left against that of the right.[28]

Buchanan alludes to a sense of fraternity between the Basque people and British people when he recalls that in the First World War Basque seamen carried iron ore to Britain despite the threat of submarines. He goes on to state that this "was remembered with gratitude in Britain in 1937 when Bilbao was under attack."[29] Legarreta also backs this up by inciting president Aguirre's plea for evacuation of peoples from Bilbao; that Basques supplied Britain with iron and steel despite Spain's neutrality.[30] This makes a convincing argument that the British rushed to the aid of their 'brothers' in the Basque Country when one considers that many British went out of their way to aid the Spanish without the consent of the government. Yet, the media portrayed that this was not necessarily the case at the start of the Civil War. Herminio Martinez creates a sense of the zeitgeist in 1937,

[25] Alec Trevett, Letter dated 5th October 1936, WSRO, AM 641/1/1/6
[26] WSRO, AM 641/1/1/6
[27] Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* p.4
[28] Nigel Copsey, *Review of 'Into the Heart of the Fire: The British in the Spanish Civil War by James Hopkins* (Oxford University Press, the American Historical Association, Vol. 106, No. 3, June 2001) p. 1047
[29] Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* p.14
[30] Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation* p.100

"'Apparently he [president Aguirre of the Basque Country] said that he wished nothing for the men.' 'No, no. The Basque government was trying to get women and children…' 'Mmm.' 'Out of the conflict.' 'Yeah that's what I mean.' 'Men were expected to fight.'"[31] 'Men were expected to fight.' That is not a common phrase today. He evokes another premise that a contemporary audience could not understand, "the British people were fantastic; very, very welcoming. They showed great solidarity because, in that period, you see – in the world generally and in Britain – we had the Depression. The world Depression."[32] The Great Depression and how it shook the world is something that there has not been anything near an equivalent of since. And maybe empathy with poverty is what made those who lived in the 20th Century kind in some ways. To compare what happened then with today would be difficult to justify. Yet the Depression showed humanity in those that suffered it.

Government attitude and individual reaction to Guernica were not wholly removable from one another and Member of Parliament Wilfrid Roberts was a living example of this. Edgar Allison Peers stated in an unassuming, objective, manner, "what happened there [at Guernica] or was alleged to have happened, aroused storms of protest in left-wing, and in many neutral, circles; in Great Britain, skilfully exploited by propagandists".[33] Peers' point demonstrates the issue of interpretation in regards to the Spanish Civil War. Manuel Moreno, the son of one of the niños vascos (Basque Children) gave a lecture on 13th February 2016 in which he stated that the Midhurst Committee provided funds for these child refugees and Moreno insisted that support for these misplaced children was a movement as opposed to a few 'politicos'.[34] As will be explored, there were genuine efforts to help the Basque Children taking refuge in Britain. These were not much helped by the government, mind. It would be folly to ignore that the British people only understood the conflict in

[31] Interview of Herminio Martinez by David Crowe, Thursday 3rd March 2016 see Appendix 1
[32] Ibid, see Appendix 1
[33] E. Allison Peers, *Spain in Eclipse* (1943) p.3 found in Herbert R Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica!: A Study of Journalism, Diplomacy, Propaganda, and History* (University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1977) p.90
[34] Manuel Moreno, 'How Worthing Came to the Aid of the Basque Children', lecture given at Worthing Labour Hall 13th February 2016, organised by the Basque Children of 1937 Association

Spain in 1937 through a medium tainted by propaganda again, as Peers emphasises. Depictions of the Spanish Civil War, contextual to the conflict, were often produced in a hyperbolic manner as shown by the use of the term 'propaganda'. Yet propaganda has become an ugly word which allows its easy dismissal. Nicholas Rankin ushers a convincing argument when he states that propaganda is just the spreading of ideas which can be used to further the truth.[35] In turn, the term truth is difficult, however, and one man's truth can easily be another man's lie. A seeming example of propaganda, Franco was exiled to the Canary Islands due to terrible atrocities he committed in the Asturias, northwest Spain.[36] Even if these tales became exaggerated they went on to emphasise the truth of Generalismo Franco's detestable nature which is known through his reign as a dictator.

The fractured nature of the government's decisions

Rumours and hearsay, much like propaganda, impacted British opinion. Although rumours which spurred those fleeing the advance of the Moorish soldiers may have been exaggerated and villainizing, retrospect makes them easy to believe. Yet the open of the Spanish Civil War was marred by atrocities. However, the bombing of Gernika cannot be dismissed so easily as it inspired one of the greatest anti-war pieces of art by Picasso: named after Guernica. Legarreta stated that Bilbao was supposedly defended by an iron ring; likening it to the Maginot line on France's border with Germany in that they both proved useless and that the engineer even defected to the Nationalists with the complete plans.[37] With that stated, the government in the Basque Country had only a single event which saw the Larrinaga Prison Massacre in early January 1937 caused by starved, bombed people who murdered 200 Francoist prisoners. The Basque authorities were transparent and the British reporter George Lowther Steer was allowed to report upon the event.[38] It didn't witness the Red Terror that Madrid and other parts of Spain had. However, the Basque Country was in support

[35] Nicholas Rankin, *G. L. Steer and the Basque Children in 1937*, lecture given Saturday 15th October 2011, www.basquechildren.org/-/docs/articles/lecture2011 (accessed 1st February 2016) p.3
[36] Manuel Moreno, 'How Worthing Came to the Aid of the Basque Children', lecture given at Worthing Labour Hall, 13th February 2016
[37] Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation* p.26
[38] Rankin, *G. L. Steer and the Basque Children in 1937* p.5

of the Spanish Republic over Franco. By association, Euzkadi (the autonomous Basque Country) was seen to have lost civilisation just like could be seen in the atrocities committed against the Church, something that Paul Preston would explain as the culmination of years of oppression.[39] There is no use making excuses for those atrocities but in hindsight, the Basque Country had only a singular case of atrocious violence. Hindsight is the key term here because how could anyone predict that would remain the case?

Sir Anthony Eden is quoted in Jill Edwards' *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War* as stating that the Spanish Ambassador Pablo Azcárate "did not contest my statement that neither the Government of Barcelona, nor the present Government of Madrid could be described as liberal."[40] Eden's position at that point as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs would have provided him insight into the Spanish Civil War on a level most people would have had unavailable to them. In his capacity, Anthony Eden would have been able to shape government policy. How could any observing government not believe that the chaos within Spain would fall under the rule of the USSR? Yet, Eden's depiction of the Spanish Civil War here reinforces an argument against the more popularly held opinion that the conflict was a clash of two extremes with no in-between ground; an easier concept to stomach.

One of the Basque children evacuated to Britain in May 1937, Herminio Martinez, stated, "On the whole I think one can say that Britain's policy was in support of Franco. Not the Republic."[41] When Hitler gained support for his suppression of the Communists in the early 1930s it is easy to paste over a view that Britain was hoping to use this tactic again. Indeed, Jill Edwards' indication supports this, "It was true, of course, that Russian commitment to the Republic was considerable, and was known in the Foreign office to be so from information garnered from Royal Navy ships off Spain."[42] It

[39] Preston, 'Introduction, War of Words: The Spanish Civil War and the Historians' in Preston, *Revolution and War in Spain* pp.2-3
[40] Jill Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (The Macmillan Press Ltd., London, 1979) p.133
[41] Interview of Herminio Martinez by David Crowe, Thursday 3rd March 2016, see Appendix 1
[42] Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War* p.133

most likely would have appeared that supporting the Republic would have been supporting Communism due to the huge presence of Communists in the armies of the Republic, which was shown to be supporting Anarchy and Communism, and their reliance upon Soviet supplies to continue the war. As earlier stated, the huge presence of communism marred the reputation of the Basque Country merely by association due to loyalty to the Republic. Dorothy Legarreta furthers this argument, "The governing Conservative Party soon came to view the Popular Front coalition within the Republic as a social revolution based on bolshevism".[43] This would not have been the case, of course, without Britain's stubborn commitment to non-intervention.

The British Government strictly sticking to non-Intervention was shown in the pressure Neville Chamberlain placed upon France to close its borders with the Basque country where weapons were being supplied to the Republicans through this access point. Carr names this as a death-spell for the Republican side alluding to the import of arms in the war especially as Nationalist army had the aid of by both Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. France closed its borders in June 1938.[44] The British Government was willing to allow Spain to fall to the Fascists in order to maintain its doctrine of non-intervention. How could the British people have related more to a political idea than to the suffering of children?

The British Government agreed to allow Basque children refuge in Britain, despite advice against this action by bodies of noticeability such as Save the Children who in a draft statement stated:

> "The Council of the Save the Children Fund having considered the question of the evacuation of children from Bilbao to this country agreed that whilst the principle of evacuating children and adults to foreign countries from war and/or persecution areas requires considerably more study than the problem has at present received, the Council feels that in the present circumstances of the case it cannot oppose the evacuation of children from Bilbao, but it is opposed to evacuating the above-mentioned children to England and for the following reasons; a) the length of the journey and its cost b) the unsuitability of the climate c) and especially the unsuitability of the food d) the difficulty and expense in providing suitable

[43] Legarreta, *The Guernica Children* p.99
[44] Carr, *The Spanish Tragedy* p.141

education e) the difficulty in providing for the education in and practice of their religion f) and the impossibility of placing children in private families in this country".[45]

The document goes on to recommend south-west France as an alternative. This seems to give grounds to the British Government's refusal to accept the children. However, the document does not acknowledge that President Aguirre had asked for the evacuation of children from the Basque Country the night Gernika was bombed, "I want to believe that other countries will come to the rescue of the more than three hundred thousand women and children who have taken refuge in Bilbao. We ask nothing for the menfolk…"[46] Aguirre's heartfelt plea isn't to merely evacuate to the most convenient and appropriate areas but to evacuate women and children to safety. This furthers the interesting circumstances under which the British Government accepted the refugees as there was solid, perhaps unbiased, grounds to not accept the niños vascos. This also reinforces that the British Government had a fragmented policy on the topic of Basque refugee children. This is best illustrated by the message from the Home Office, "Gentlemen, With reference to your letter of the 6th instant, I am directed by the Secretary of State to say that no arrangements to bring a number of refugees from the Bilbao area to this country as indicated in your letter have been approved by this Department, and he would suggest that no steps should be taken to charter a vessel for this purpose until any proposals which may be made to this Department have been considered and a decision reached."[47] The implication here is that the Home Office feared being bypassed; in turn throwing light on the situation that, as stated, government policy was splintered, making the government seem weak. In turn, the Secretary of State took measures to ensure that was made less obvious.

The Cabinet document dated 10th December 1937 shows awareness of and assistance in the evacuation of refugees from Madrid to Valencia, depicting the acting consul as creating a list of those who deserve to be evacuated the most. The document, signed by Anthony Eden, also betrays

[45] Draft Statement for Consideration, Emergency Meeting of the Council, Held on Monday, 10th May, 1937 at 11.30am
[46] Rankin, *G. L. Steer and the Basque Children in 1937* p.12
[47] GEN 34/4/26, Letter to Gray, Dawes & Co., Passage Department, from E M Cooper of the Home Office, dated 8th May 1937, The National Archives

the British Government's inclination to favour General Franco when it states that evacuation work almost solely aided those who support Franco. It appears that even in light of the Basque Children taken to England in May 1937, the British Government was favouring the insurgent authoritarian General Franco. This supports the opinion of Martinez that the government of Britain was in support of Franco.[48] Anthony Eden here shows an argument within the government for humanitarian aid that was apolitical. Indeed, Legarreta signposts the British Consul in Bilbao, Mr Stevenson, as independently contacting Eden with the proposal that Basque Children be evacuated but that this didn't receive official acknowledgement regardless of assurances from the French consul that his nation would assist and from President Aguirre of the Basque National Party that necessary passports would be provided 'without political discrimination.'"[49] This furthers the point that the British Government, as in Stanley Baldwin's government, was favouring Franco despite the arrival of the Basque children.

The evacuation of Basque children to Great Britain implied support of the Republican side which in turn damaged relations between the British Government and the Nationalists of Spain under Franco. Stanley Baldwin's Conservative Government had sought to avoid this. The British Government was determined to maintain neutrality which the British people offset, best demonstrated by British volunteers in the International Brigades. This is, undeniably, evidence that the British Government, as Buchanan states, was unable to control its own people.[50] A chasm emerged between the British public and governmental aid, marred by the Conservatives; as Nicholas Rankin draws the picture of cruel jokes from the Conservative benches, "'Putting all your Basques in one exit' as Winston Churchill joked to complacent Conservative chortles".[51] Rankin's clear disproval of Churchill's joke paints the Conservative party as apathetic towards suffering and contrasts this with Clement Attlee's argument as leader of the opposition when he asks whether the British Government is pro-Franco

[48] CAB 24/273/27, 10th December 1937 signed A. E.
[49] Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation* p.101
[50] Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* p.5
[51] Rankin, *G. L. Steer and the Basque Children in 1937*, lecture given Saturday 15th October 2011, www.basquechildren.org/-/docs/articles/lecture2011 (accessed 1st Feb 2016) p.16

before declaring that the First Lord of the Admiralty "trailed the honour of this country in the dust over Abyssinia".[52] The House of Commons was clearly strongly divided on the Spanish Civil War and this can also be seen in the British people. Yet this point fails to address that the politics of the Houses of Parliament in Great Britain almost requires the opposing houses to, well, oppose one another. It should not be dismissed that the politicians of Britain were against the idea of allowing Basque children in order to avoid being drawn into conflict at worst. Sam Jones continues this concept that the British Government was very reluctant to take on Basque refugees as it was trying to use the non-intervention pact, to prevent war spreading into France.[53] Perhaps the decision made in the Houses of Parliament was pragmatic committing to Non-Intervention and the fear of war spreading. Jones' contention here is that the British Government saw taking of refugees as a breach of non-intervention. The British Government was forced to take on the refugees.

Events within government in the lead up to the children's arrival

The most interesting article that can describe the most immediate trigger that forced the British Government to accept the Basque refugee children was dated 4th May 1937. In it there is stated that Mr Golden, the secretary of The Save the Children Fund had telephoned. It goes on to state that The Save the Children Fund is represented on the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief and from such a representation had heard of plans for the acceptance of 4,000 children from the Basque Country into a camp being prepared in Southampton. The author of the document goes on to state that they were unaware of such plans and that the Home Office was awaiting detailed plans from the NJCSR. Interestingly, the author only knew about Leah Manning, the representative of the NJCSR in Bilbao, proposing the removal of 4,000 children to Britain through *The Times* dated 2nd May 1937. However, the document goes on to exclaim, "It is possible that some of the more ardent members of the Committee [NJCSR] may act precipitately and send a large number of children to this country in a

[52] Ibid, p.8
[53] Sam Jones, 'Forgotten Children of Spain's Civil War Reunite 75 Years After Exile', *The Guardian*, Friday 11th May 2012, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/may/11/forgotten-children-spain-civil-war (accessed 18th January 2016)

ship chartered for the purpose without waiting for Home Office approval to be given to the scheme."[54] There was a sense that some within the NJCSR would, like the International Brigades fighting in Spain, act without consent of the British Government, which in turn would force the British Government to take action.

The previously mentioned *Morning Post* article of 5th May 1937 stated, "Four thousand more [children] are being assembled as fast as passports can be issued for them, and they will be taken in a liner which the Basque Government will charter in London. This party will go to England."[55] As earlier mentioned, this doesn't paint the Basques as Communists or Anarchists creating chaos but they're represented by the 'Basque Government' which 'will charter' rather than steal which implies a civilized hiring of a ship.

A document dated 10th May 1937 states that Mr Wilfrid Roberts had telephoned and mentioned that the Catholic Church was prepared to take on 1,700 children for an undetermined length of time "of both sexes" and that the Salvation Army was prepared to take on 600. Roberts goes on, according to the author, to claim that his committee, the NCJSR, had raised £17,000 which would provide enough for the child refugees for 6 months at five shillings a head. The author then states, "We have been advised by Mr Golden of Save the Children Fund that 15/- [fifteen shillings] per week per head including overheads(?) is a minimum. On this reckoning(?) £17,000 [can?] only last 1 to 3 months."[56] The document, going on to demonstrate the confusion of those in government at the time, later stated that there was no mention of the number of refugees to arrive in England but guessed at 150 to 200. There was clearly persons within government who had no idea what was going on with regards to the Basque refugee children's arrival.

A letter addressed to 'Hoyer Millar', presumably Frederick Robert Hoyer Millar 1st baron of Inchyra and assistant private secretary to the Foreign Secretary from 1934 to 1938 which would have

[54] Document dated 4th May 1937, The National Archives
[55] 'Children Leaving Bilbao', *The Morning Post,* 5th May 1937, The National Archives
[56] Document dated 10th May 1937, The National Archives

included Anthony Eden whom, as earlier stated, was acutely aware of the need for humanitarian aid to assist more than the nationalist insurgents. This document, dated 11th May 1937, encloses a letter from the NJCSR which asks for assistance from the War Office in creating a camp for the Basque refugees. Interestingly, this document goes on, "I understand that it is unlikely that the 4,000 Basque women and children referred to will be arriving in this country in the very near future, and in the meantime we have informed the Committee [NJCSR] we shall await a further communication from them when they, for their part, are able to give us more precise information without promising to do anything."[57] The document, from the War Office, goes on to state that the possible need for equipment for the camp could be met if the government is stringent with its supplies and then asking whether it would be acceptable to use military personnel in order to help create the camp if the NJCSR wished before stating that it will send on this letter to the appropriate people at the Home Office and the Ministry of Health. This expresses a willingness to help the NJCSR but also an obedience to the Foreign Secretary as they refuse to go to action without his expressed permission. Considering that the Basque children would arrive on 23rd May 1937, the government's preparedness for the eventuality was absent. However, this may not have completely been down to negligence on the government's end but also a failure from the NJCSR in being forthcoming with information. Information that would have been difficult to obtain under the cloud of war, an understandable issue.

Conclusion

The British Public, stirred by the brutal bombing of Guernica, was strongly in favour of supporting these refugees and the modest request of the Basque President's to take the women and children whilst asking nothing for the men and reminding the British that the Basques had taken greater risks during World War One to supply iron and steel to Britain is humble and admirable. The British Government's policy in regards to the Spanish Civil War was chaotic and marred by the Conservative

[57] Letter to F. R. Hoyer Millar, Esq. from G. D. Roseway, dated 11th May 1937, The National Archives

Party's unwillingness to offend the Francoist rebellion and determination not to support the Communist aided Spanish Republic. However, there were still many attempts within government to change this and allow humanitarian breaches such as the Basque children refuge as best demonstrated by the actions of Anthony Eden, Wilfrid Roberts, and Mr Stevenson. The British Government was finding its hand being forced and, it has been shown, would much rather have remained out of such a political disaster.

Chapter Two: How far does the evacuation of children from Bilbao in 1937 demonstrate the good will of the British people?

Like histories, first-hand accounts are personal opinions. They both colour the picture of the past one can obtain from the facts such as that the Spanish Civil War occurred at all. It does not create a more accurate picture of the past to use many histories and first-hand accounts in conjunction but it powerfully provides life to otherwise stale histories that would merely be dates. This can best be seen in the depictions of the arrival of the Basque refugees to England. Susana Sabín-Fernandez thoroughly discusses this and probes into the hugely varying and individually defined ideas of what 'home' is. She arrives at the conclusion that home as an idea can be carried around through the imagination.[58] In turn, this would have allowed the person providing the first-hand account to recreate the event in a way that would be different to an account made very soon afterwards, such as a diary, but would include emotions that portray the event as something more pertinent to the humanity of the person in question than a so-called factual history.

Basque children were scattered across Great Britain, there are records in the Ministry of Health of houses which took in the children from Spain in Wales, but it would have been simplest to keep them in the south of the country. For example, 'Beach House' in Worthing took 70 children in as did the 'Nazareth House' in Southampton. In Tunbridge Wells, 60 children were homed at Rusthall Beacon. The owner of 'Hurstmonceaux [sic] Castle', an ex Admiral of the Navy, took in 12 boys.[59] This clearly demonstrates willingness of the British people to go out of their way in order to help refugees from a country that wasn't their own. The British Government, in turn, sent officials to houses that were to take in these children in order to ensure that they would have apt facilities as though to ensure some professional care was ensured for the children. For example one Ministry of Health document stating that 60 children were due to go to Rusthall Beacon had a statement that it wasn't

[58] Susana Sabín-Fernandez, November 2010, *The Basque Refugee Children of the Spanish Civil War in the UK: Memory and Memorialisation* University of Southampton, Faculty of Law, Arts and Social Sciences, School of Humanities, PhD Thesis p.41

[59] MH 57/324, Ministry of Health, The National Archives

approved for 60 children in pencil next to the typewritten ink. This document was dated 28th May 1937 and a separate document dated the same day, almost identical to the former, stated that Rusthall Beacon was approved in the ink of a typewriter.[60] This could show the British Government as somewhat disorganised at the time but it does show commitment to ensuring the safety of these foreign children; or keeping their end of the bargain with the British people. Whilst the British Government was not willing to participate in the Spanish Civil War as the Nazis and Italian Fascists were, it was forced to placate its populace who were intent on saving the children. This would cause friction between the British Government and Franco's government and, as the Nationalists won the war, the return of the children to the Basque Country became of paramount importance to the British Government. Yet not all Basque children would end up returning to their country of birth and some would stay for a long time in Britain.

Difficulty uprooting and living in England

It can be easy to ignore the difficulties of being uprooted from one's home country, particularly when one has no such experience of an event and at such a young age as the Basque Children were it would have been terrifying. Indeed, uprooting from an established home would be extremely difficult for even adults as a decision not taken lightly. One Basque Child describes becoming a sort of mother figure for the other girls at the camp in North Stoneham, "Me sentía un poco la madre de todas ellas; incluso les daba clases de aritmética, gramática e historia."[61] The need for this portrays, vividly, that the lack of resources allocated to the children in the UK as the children themselves had to take some classes for the younger children. Obviously it would be preferable to have more experienced teachers on site and as stated earlier, the ability to educate the children about their religion would have been much diminished in a Protestant country. Information derived from an oral history interview with Herminio Martinez clears this up, "'I've read an account that said that… the

[60] MH 57/323, Ministry of Health, The National Archives
[61] Susana Sabín-Fernandez, November 2010, *The Basque Refugee Children of the Spanish Civil War in the UK: Memory and Memorialisation* University of Southampton, Faculty of Law, Arts and Social Sciences, School of Humanities, PhD Thesis p.120

youngest adapted the most easily.' 'Yes, of course.' 'Would you agree?' 'Of course. This is normal in a sense the older ones, of course they sought out relationships and contacts with English people; the younger ones, we tended to keep together.' 'Mm.' 'Much more. But certainly, we had a better chance in that we were younger… some of those who arrived were 14 or 15, very shortly, they found they had to go out to work.'"[62] The British Government provided little support for the children and then threw them out into work at the earliest acceptable moment.

Eric Hawkins, a Spanish speaking Cambridge student recruited to visit the North Stoneham camp to translate, recalls finding the camp full of homesick children.[63] This is an expected outcome from the distance of children from their parents but what is interesting is when he describes the niños vascos at a home in Pampisford, near Cambridge, where they encouraged the children to share their fears and this saw them draw planes dropping bombs for the first few weeks.[64] Regardless of how happy the children appeared on the outside, seeing your country bombed is something few can relate to today and it is difficult to presume to know the psychological effects this must have incurred, this surely demonstrates that it did incur such damages. George Lowther Steer stated,

> "Though interpreters were always explaining to the children that the aeroplanes were *nuestras, our ones,* the youngest would not be convinced that the enemy had not followed them from Spain, but threw themselves on the ground at the appearance of every superannuated English kite and cried, *'Bombas, bombas.'*"[65]

It is easy to see that the damaged children from the Basque country had every excuse to be mischievous, something Steer later notes as he recites well to do people noting that these children "sometimes stole apples, broke windows with stones, teased little girls".[66]

In regards to the initial arrival of Basque children at the camp in North Stoneham the local government were not particularly pleased,

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[62] Interview of Herminio Martinez by David Crowe, Thursday 3rd March 2016 see Appendix 1
[63] *The Guernica Children* (dir. Steve Bowles, 2005)
[64] Ibid
[65] G. L. Steer, *The Tree of Gernika: A Field Study of Modern War* (Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., London, 1938) p.263
[66] Ibid, p.263

> "You are to understand that Eastleigh is for various reasons predisposed to deep sympathy with the child-victims of political passion, but that no sympathy with them, however deep, can exclude an awareness of certain important practical considerations, in part material, in part financial. Your Committee has seen fit to choose a site for dumping almost unpreparedly some 4,000 young foreign children, without the foresight and the courtesy of letting us know anything whatsoever about it – our only information is that of press and handbill, rumour and enquiry."[67]

The offence at not having been consulted is very palpable, their explicit statement that their "only information being from the press… rumour and enquiry" shows that they went out of their own way to collect information that they believed should have been supplied to them. The language emphasises a disgruntled reaction to the forced, as they see it, acceptance of the children, especially evident when it states, "Your Committee has seen fit to choose a site for dumping". However, the statement also emphasises a need to appease the British public when it tries to avoid sounding heartless especially when addressing as popular a body as the Committee for Spanish Refugee Children. Yet local governance was powerless to protest. The local government's offence at being suddenly made to make preparations to accommodate the children was ignored as the national government was barely holding those intent on aiding the Basque children from taking matters into their own hands.

A letter to the MP Wilfrid Roberts, champion of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief in the House of Commons, demonstrates the need felt in the British Government to grasp control from a situation that had run out of their control, "I have now considered the proposal made in your letter of yesterday on behalf of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, to bring to this country a limited number of Basque children, who are, I understand, to be evacuated from Bilbao, and I am glad to be able to inform you that I should be prepared, in the circumstances, to grant facilities for this purpose, on the understanding that the number of children to be brought to this country would be in strict accordance with the means your Committee had at its disposal and there is no charge on

[67] A letter from the Town Hall of Eastleigh to the Committee for Spanish Refugee Children, dated 20th May 1937, The National Archives

public funds for their maintenance."[68] This letter demonstrates a need for tight control over the situation upon which the children are brought to Britain using firm language such as 'strict accordance' as well as clearly stating the limited number of children with no charge to public funds. The official line was an attempt to placate individuals from taking private action as well as trying to distance from the idea that any official support for the Spanish Republic existed. The British Government's stubbornness was a fashion of stating that the children were in Britain due to the kindness of the government whilst simultaneously reducing the offence afforded to Franco.

Contact with British locals

To contrast with the local government's being professionally offended, an account of the British populace visiting the children is inspiring. "This morning at 10 a.m. the Borough Engineer of Eastleigh telephoned and said that he was very concerned about the crowds collecting in the lane which skirts the camp at North Stoneham. He said that the crowds collect there and feed the children with sweets, etc., and he was afraid of the introduction of infectious diseases."[69] The document continues stating concern over the spread of diseases and expressing the need for stricter control over the boundaries of the camp. This proves that upon arrival, the Basque children were treated well by the British people. Ergo, that the reception of the niños vascos was a warm one. *The Worthing Gazette* dated 2nd June 1937 has a short article named, *Bilbao to Beach House* in which it states that the younger children seemed trusting and would happily and easily make friends despite the language barrier but it also stated that the older children would reflect the horrors that they have been through in the form of distrust they expressed. *The Worthing Gazette* presents children who were, for the most part, incredibly easy going and that, it goes on, "when I visited Beach House on Saturday morning the sixty boys and girls who constitute Worthing's share of the 4,000 child refugees had taken less than sixteen hours to settle down. They must have a measure of a child's

[68] GEN 34/4/14, Letter to Wilfrid Roberts, Esq., M.P. from the Ministry of Health, dated 29th April 1937, The National Archives
[69] Letter for Dr Carnwath signed R Stodl(?) dated 25th May 1937, The National Archives

blessed quality of adaptability".[70] From this, it would seem that the youngest of the children were able to put what they were running away from behind them and continue to live happily in this new, foreign environment. Obviously, different children had different reactions to their evacuation. As the older children seeming to hold on to "the abnormal life they had been living"[71] seems to show is that the more settled and older in age, the less easily they can adjust to being displaced like these Basque children were. This would reinforce Sabín-Fernandez's assertion that home is an idea that can be taken anywhere in the mind and her example of that being seen by the responsibilities taken up by the children in North Stoneham. It is very possible that the young children's age and attitude of being less accustomed to the idea of being raised in one particular place made them more content to be in a foreign place.

Sam Jones, in a retrospective article for *The Guardian* shortly before the 75th reunion for the niños, describes the English as having been "only too happy to help" not only in Southampton but also in many of the areas where the Basque children were sent.[72] It is a much easier task to decide that one's own countrymen were heroes because this grants some present satisfaction. Yet it takes little stretch of the imagination to imagine kindly British men and women giving the children food, clothes, shelter. It would have been rewarding to see the gratitude many of them must have showed and, Steve Bowles' *The Guernica Children* states that many of the niños still express this gratitude.[73] G. L. Steer describes the good will of the English in the best way, "The feeling of ordinary English people for the Basque children was reflected in their gifts: taxi drives from a Southampton taxi company, fifty loaves of bread weekly from a Southampton bakery, free laundry on Sundays by the employees of the Southampton corporation wash-houses, nominal rent for a camp of thirty-six acres, voluntary labour of all kinds, a daily ration of chocolates, 20,000 oranges, boots and

[70] *The Worthing Gazette,* 2nd June, 1937 found in www.basquechildren.org/-/docs/articles/col038 (accessed 22nd February 2016)
[71] Ibid
[72] Sam Jones, 'Forgotten Children of Spain's Civil War Reunite 75 Years After Exile', *The Guardian*, Friday 11th May 2012, www.theguardian.com/world/2012/may/11/forgotten-children-spain-civil-war (accessed 18th Jan 2016)
[73] Bowles, *The Guernica Children*

underclothing."[74] Humanity was demonstrated when the British people cared for these refugees in the little ways.

Logistics of looking after the Basque children

Total number of children arrived according to the report of the Ministry of Health at the time was 4,056, a number stated to be subject to correction.[75] Indeed, this figure has been corrected by Dorothy Legarreta who stated in a footnote that "some 263 children who were signed up did not actually join the expedition".[76] The figures Legarreta provides, stating that 3,889 children did embark upon the evacuation to England does not match the Ministry of Health's statistics however. This could show poor administration over the observance of Basque children into England but more likely reflects again the disjointed stance by the British Government upon the Basque children. Regardless of exact numbers, Adrian Bell referred to this as the "Biggest single influx of refugees into this country [Britain] that there had ever been."[77] As earlier discussed, accepting such a large number of children would have been difficult for the British Government and although France was making a huge effort in comparison – taking many refugees across the border – it did not have the same logistic issues. It was a commitment yet, Bell goes on to point out that the British Government would paradoxically use its navy to escort refugees to England, France, from Gibraltar etc., but they would refuse to use a penny of public money on their upkeep when the children were in England.[78] The British Government was pushed into accepting the Basque children by the British people and the action of individuals. This was not the action of some sort of soft-hearted government.

60 children were sent to Worthing for only a month. These children were then sent onwards to Lancing, just outside Worthing.[79] A Ministry of Health document describes a visit to Beach House on

[74] G. L. Steer, *The Tree of Gernika* p.263
[75] Ministry of Health, The National Archives
[76] Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation* p.106
[77] *The Guernica Children* (dir. Steve Bowles, 2005)
[78] Ibid
[79] Manuel Moreno, 'How Worthing Came to the Aid of the Basque Children', Lecture given at the Worthing Labour Hall, 13th February 2016

9th June 1937, stating that it was run by a local committee headed by Miss Thornycroft and it details that there will be the need to find alternative arrangements for the children "within the next few weeks". The same document also details, "There is a nice friendly atmosphere in this home and the children appear to have settled down quite happily."[80] Another destination for niños vascos was Penstone House, Lancing which was described as having thick stone walls, having been built sparing no expense by a South African Millionaire, which "kept us warm in winter and cool in summer. It was equipped with central heating".[81] This depiction states a contrast with life at the Eastleigh camp where it seemed they slogged around in the mud with barely enough facilities to cater for them. The wealthy area of West Sussex demonstrates a stark change. The experiences of the niños would have varied drastically depending on where they were and how many other niños they may have been staying with. Would niños have kept their culture with more ease when they were with other niños? Undoubtedly.

13th June 1944 a document from the Children's Branch of the Home Office details the functioning of certain places as homes: Culver House, Carshalton, Surrey; Basque Children's Home, 66, Woodside Park Road, Finchley, E.12; Basque Children's Home, 18 Cross Street, Caerleon, Mon. The document goes on to query whether the Department of the Ministry of Health still inspects these places.[82] This is a pertinent example of the good will of the British people continuing beyond what was asked of them. Adrian Bell states that, for many, their parents would have been shot, imprisoned or thrown into exile.[83] The British Government did right by the niños when it made sure that these children had homes to go back to before sending them back. However, as Herminio Martinez points out that some documents were forged when he recalls the Red Cross intervening to prevent his going back to Spain. This was decided after they had contacted his mother who had said, "She hadn't signed

[80] Document signed M. Hobbs, dated 12th June 1937, MH57/324, Ministry of Health, The National Archives
[81] Harry Ricardo, *Memories and Machines* (1968) found at Basque Children of 1937 Association presentation accompanying the lecture at Worthing Labour Hall given by Manuel Moreno, 13th February 2016
[82] Ministry of Health, Letter from the Children's Branch of the Home Office to the Ministry of Health, dated 13th June 1944, The National Archives
[83] *The Guernica Children* (dir. Steve Bowles, 2005)

anything; she couldn't have us [Herminio Martinez and his brother] back; our father was in prison and they were hungry and destitute – starving – and that we shouldn't go back."[84] Having many of its citizens electing to be in exile, Franco's Spain would have lost reputation internationally even if those children initially left to avoid the bloodshed in the Civil War and may not have been able to return due to their parents' deaths or imprisonment or exile their failure to return – whether their choice or not – would have implied to other nations that Francoist Spain wasn't a fit environment for children. Indeed, the initial need for the evacuation of children demonstrates Franco's brutality in warfare. Legarreta recounts Dr Richard Ellis' description of being in Bilbao to begin the required medical examinations of children due to be sent to Britain, "Whilst we were there a little boy of five was brought in from a neighbouring village with eight machine-gun wounds in his belly. He died a few minutes later."[85] Dr Ellis demonstrates that there was a need to evacuate the niños vascos and his account shows that they were in direct danger. The question that remains would be to query whether Franco, and his history for atrocities already very much accomplished, was allowing his Moorish soldiers to have such free reign that they were liable to kill anything that moved. Were the Basque Children escaping a battleground wherein they may be deliberately targeted? Herminio Martinez speaks of escaping poverty rather than the fear of bombs or warfare directly. Indeed, he also adds that he was escaping a terrible time in Spain whereupon some child refugees sent back to Spain who found they didn't have parents to go back to were being placed into "all manner of institutions and there, of course, the young ones were brought up to be young fascists." Martinez goes on to state his relief to have averted that.[86] War brings famine and poverty, that much is a given. Although Franco's Spain was not a country for orphaned children it was also, clear by its authoritarian nature, Martinez provokes harsh imagery of an enforced uniform society, "The Civil Guard were very inclined to knock hell out of someone[sic]… He [Franco] wanted unity of Spain. He

[84] Interview of Herminio Martinez by David Crowe, Thursday 3rd March 2016 see Appendix 1
[85] Richard Ellis, 'Basque Children in England', *Guy's Hospital Gazette* (London, June 1937), p.6 found in Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation,* p.104
[86] Interview of Herminio Martinez by David Crowe, Thursday 3rd March 2016 see Appendix 1

didn't want any diversity."[87] As a member of a culturally different region of Spain, any homecoming would not have been sweet. In retrospect it is easy to see Franco's Spain as an inhospitable country.

An outlived welcome

Some British people who never wanted the niños vascos in Britain tried repatriate them and Martinez paints a picture of horrendous eagerness to send these child refugees back to Spain, "certain sections of the British community and of individuals – the very conservative types – they didn't want us in the first place and the Catholic Church here didn't want us – to get us repatriated back to Spain."[88] British society was divided on the issue of allowing refugees from Franco's 'glorious' troops in Britain. Correspondence between Alec Trevett and Lilian Parsons paints the picture of the difficulty of evacuating refugees particularly from Gibraltar aboard the British destroyer HMS Gallant on 27th October 1936. Alec Trevett writes of passengers complaining about mild discomfort when, he states, the sailors lived in little comfort themselves. It is understandable that he would find these complaints 'petty'. He also writes to Miss Parsons that pictures she had sent him help "to tear away from the memories of the horrors of Spain".[89] This demonstrates that evacuating refugees would have placed a large strain on the British Forces and an avenue for the British populace to become knowledgeable of what was happening in the Spanish Civil War. Julio Alberca enriches the image of evacuation when he recounts the tale of one Captain Edward Lance, an anti-communist who had fought in support of the Whites in the Russian Civil War had also witnessed persecution of a range of people; businessmen to Church members in Madrid on the 18th July 1936. Captain Lance thus began humanitarian aid favouring the Nationalists; moving over 600 people from the British Embassy to Valencia and then onwards to Gibraltar.[90] The combination of

[87] Ibid, see Appendix 1
[88] Interview of Herminio Martinez by David Crowe, Thursday 3rd March 2016 see Appendix 1
[89] Alec Trevett letter dated 27th October 1936, WSRO, AM 641/1/1/6
[90] Julio Ponce Alberca, *Gibraltar and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39: Local, National and International Perspectives* Translated by Irene González (Bloomsbury, London, 2015) p.90

these accounts serves well to exemplify why a polarisation of opinion on the Spanish Civil War occurred.

Yet the displacement of peoples fleeing the authoritarian regime of Franco created the opportunity for interesting, uplifting and humane persons. Herminio Martinez describes Pepe, a young intellectual who went on to later win the national award for what he achieved working for the Spanish theatre, whom also ran the last of the colonies of refugee children for a few months before travelling on to South America. This man inspired Martinez and left a legacy in this way other than winning the national award for his work.[91] The displacement of peoples, the creation of refugees, therefore, provided the opportunity for interconnection in a way that began with the sympathy of the British people which, in turn, allowed for more humanity. Although the British Government made it difficult for the upkeep of the child refugees the people themselves stepped in. "We found that the British people were fantastic; I mean after all it was all done by volunteers."[92] Martinez's aforementioned argument alludes to the Great Depression provoking solidarity in the British people. An important factor is that the British people could relate to, and empathise with, poverty on a level unfathomable today.

Conclusion

The Spanish children were well cared for by the British when they arrived. Herminio Martinez champions that. And empathy towards others' suffering through the universal suffering caused by the Great Depression would have only strengthened aid to the Basque Children and humanity. The British Government did little to help throughout their time in Britain and their excuse was to maintain a good relation with Franco's government according to Non-Intervention and to prevent the war spilling into France. That was a wrong move but it allowed the good will of the British people to shine through better than anything else could.

[91] Interview of Herminio Martinez by David Crowe, Thursday 3rd March 2016 see Appendix 1
[92] Ibid, see Appendix 1

Conclusion

Was there a humanitarian nature to the decision to take the Basque children within government? The British Government was, as a whole, determined to keep the Basque children out of the country in order to avoid political issues with Generalissimo Franco and avoid the potentiality of war; hinted at by Sam Jones' deduction that France was pushed into closing its borders to stop the war spreading over the Pyrenees. It may have been sound foreign policy in all of its multi-faced impersonality but it would remain a weak argument for refusing to take on these refugees. It wasn't as though the British Government were supplying Franco's enemies with weaponry. As is shown to be the case through the International Brigades, the British Government didn't have full control of the situation. In the end, its hand would be forced on the issue.

The British Government were less than helpful in helping the Basque children who came to England as refugees. The terrors of war proved to be more than the immediate threat of death. Knowing exactly how many refugees were going where and when would have been very difficult and infringed upon the British Government's ability to be decisive and coordinate within itself. Some Members of Parliament were clearly in favour of staying out of the war but the opposition leader Clement Attlee threw a clear signal to the government that they were abandoning their virtues by not aiding these child refugees. The same virtues that they had left in the dirt after Abyssinia. This was a beginning of a pattern of appeasement that would culminate in the Second World War. The British Government sought to appease dictators so that it wouldn't have to fight any war against Communists or them. The British Government was forced to take action, partly from fear that some individuals would take action themselves, but this action would be weak and lacking in direction.

Was a humanitarian nature shown in the British people when they took on and cared for the foreign Basque children? Yes. Yes it was. The British Government's refusal to step in only further highlighted this. £17,000 was also collected from the wider British public showcasing the British public anonymously using their hard-earned money to help provide for these children coming into their

country. No matter how little was donated, this still presents a human touch in that those who donated were at least a bit concerned about the children. The private care in which many of the children took refuge was voluntary, as was the support in creating the camp at North Stoneham, Eastleigh. The local businesses who pitched in to provide free food for the refugees shows unselfish humanitarianism.

The children would prove to demonstrate that the British public displayed, in 1937 particularly, unity and humanity. Some voices, perhaps quieter at the start with the celebrated arrival of the children, would later push to have these children sent back to possibly poverty and, most likely, persecution. The forged letters allegedly from Herminio Martinez's parents, but actually never sent by them, would have returned him to poverty which is something the Red Cross simply couldn't allow. This demonstrates that war's affect upon the people would often be famine, a bigger issue under a persecuting dictator like Francisco Franco. Martinez's point of view is just one window through which to see the Basque children in exile in the United Kingdom and, due to their ages, this is becoming less and less diverse; like a picture being drained of colour. His opinion is a mere brush-stroke for creating an image of the past; being the closest one can ever get to the past itself.

The Basque children, the niños vascos, taking refuge in Great Britain became a blessing for the British people. Although some would fail to realise it, the Good Samaritan nature could be found in abundance. The kindness would then usher in opportunities for brilliant people to meet in ways that may not have been possible otherwise. The British Government was embarrassed by its pathetic attempt to control the situation and the British people performed a brilliant show of solidarity.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

The Oral History Interview with Herminio Martinez, a niño who lives in north London. This was collected and recorded by myself. The interviewee has given permission for this recorded interview to be used in this dissertation.

Transcription of Interview with Herminio Martinez

Herminio Martinez: But I would ask you to speak… How shall I say? Clearly

David Crowe: Yeah, yeah.

HM: You tend to mumble rather a lot which is a disadvantage in your future career. If you're in teaching, for instance, you need to be understood.

DC: I see.

HM: Sorry?

DC: I see. Yeah.

HM: You see? Right. Yes. That May the 23rd 1937 we arrived in Southampton and there's a book written by – have you seen this book?

DC: I've heard of it. I haven't read it.

HM: *Only for Three Months* by Adrian Bell. This is in quite a lot of articles and some books have been written about it [The Basque Children as refugees in Britain]. This is about the best. It is someone who discovered us reading a history book *The Spanish Civil War* [and] came across just a few lines about the arrival of the 4,000 Basque children in Britain in 1937. He says, "goodness…" – he was a lecturer of sociology at Norwich University – and he says, "I've never heard of this." So he started investigating and he found some of us – he found me for instance – I introduced him to certain people, other people introduced him and he managed to interview a lot of us when there were a lot of us about. Because now there are very few of us because most have died. Because our age. I mean I was one of the younger ones and I shall shortly be 86. So…

DC: Yeah.

HM: He got in at the time when he could interview quite a lot of the people that… who had been older than myself. For instance, their… the ages of the children varied between 6 and 15 you see. Well, some of those who came over 15 obviously they were young men already. But some of us were only tiny children. Some of the photos of the children are quite, quite touching. When you realise how young they were.

Rustling papers and murmuring as Herminio Martinez finds pictures of the colonies which housed the Basque children in Britain

HM: There are mainly older ones because they are dancing. Some of them – oh I've got one that will show you exactly what I'm talking about…

DC: Sure.

HM: That is from Southampton, the camp, there. This is the first home I went to. That's me perched on a bench up there.

DC: Okay.

HM: But this is the younger ones how we were…

Martinez points to the younger children sitting in front of the benches in the picture

HM: You see, only just 6 or 7 years of age.

DC: How old were you?

HM: I was 7 and one week when we arrived.

DC: Okay. Was it a huge shock to the system? Do you remember, vividly?

HM: At that age, the life we had led in Spain was not inhibited as tends to be now in towns where parents don't let their children out to go to school until they're about 10 or 11. They accompany them and so forth. No, I lived in a small village and we roamed and wandered all over the hills, the rivers, the woods and so forth. So… and in any case at that age you're just too young to understand what's going on. But of course you realise that you are being separated from your family and you were among strangers but, as children you adapt very quickly.

DC: Okay. I've read an account that said that… the youngest adapted the most easily.

HM: Yes, of course.

DC: Would you agree?

HM: Of course. This is normal. In a sense the older ones, of course, they sought out relationships and contacts with English people; the younger ones, we tended to keep together.

DC: Mmm.

HM: Much more. But certainly, we had a better chance in that we were younger… some of those who arrived who were 14 or 15 very shortly they found they had to go out to work. And also that they sometimes had to just fend for themselves; find a room or lodging somewhere and fend for themselves which was obviously tough. This was one of the problems really that… you see the British Government didn't want to accept us. Because of the Spanish Civil War there was a treaty of non-inten…

DC: Non-Intervention Pact.

HM: Non-Intervention – Is that recording? Do you want to check it?

DC: Yeah it's still going.

HM: Yes there was a Non-Intervention treaty between the European nations and the United States.

DC: Yeah.

HM: France, Britain, Italy, Germany. Which was a farce because the Italians and the Germans were supplying Franco with men and with the most modern war material. And the British Government stipulated when the Basque government and the Spanish government were trying to get our women and children out of the conflict areas. The British Government wouldn't accept refugees as the reason stated was, in the north of Spain for instance, before the fall of the Basque Country, that if

people left – refugees left – there would be fewer mouths to feed and consequently resistance to Franco's forces would last longer.

DC: Yeah, and they didn't really want that did they?

HM: Sorry?

DC: Did they not want that?

HM: They didn't want that?

DC: As I understand it, they wanted Franco's men to win.

HM: Well on the whole, on the whole, I think once can say that Britain's policy was in support of Franco. Not the Republic.

DC: Yeah.

HM: For various reasons, and consequently it refused to accept refugees but then there followed… and some of the children from the Basque Country – over 30,000 – left, some for Belgium, for France, and the Soviet Union – what you know today as Russia – and some even to Mexico.

DC: Yeah.

HM: And then there followed the destruction of Gernika, or Guernica as you call it, on the…

DC: Shown by Picasso.

HM: Sorry?

DC: Picasso's painting.

HM: That's the painting there by Picasso, yes. That was on the 25th April 1930...7. And the Civil War started on the 18th July 1936 so the Basque Country was surrounded, really, by Franco's forces – it was a matter of time before it fell – and as you say the Basque government was trying to get as many women and children out. Areas like Bilbao were being bombed every day and the British Government gave that excuse that it would be contravening the treaty of Non-Intervention; if they were to allow – accept – refugees. Well the bombing of Gernika created such protests, here [in England], that the British Government relented and accepted refugees but only children and stipulating that it would not provide any assistance whatsoever. The cost would be borne by those people who organised for the refugees to come over.

DC: Didn't the Basque president, I don't know how to say his name is it… Aguirre?

HM: Sorry?

DC: The Basque president, he asked for nothing for the men very famously.

HM: Asked who?

DC: When he was asking for places to send refugees.

HM: Yes.

DC: Apparently he said that he wished for nothing for the men.

HM: No, no. The Basque government was trying to get women and children…

DC: Mmm.

HM: Out of the conflict.

DC: Yeah, that's what I mean.

HM: Men were expected to fight.

DC: Yeah.

HM: Yes. So therefore the bombing of Gernika took place on the 25th of…

DC: April.

HM: April. We left Santurtzi[?] just near Bilbao by boat on the 21st I think of May.

DC: Yeah.

HM: And we arrived here on the 20th… – in Southampton – on the 23rd. So the whole thing was organised extremely quickly. There was formed a joint Spanish aid or something sub-committee and they formed the Basque Children's Committee and they got… – just outside Southampton – a farmer loaned three fields… and volunteers in two weeks; they set up this camp.

DC: Mmm.

HM: Expecting about 2,000 children. They laid on water, latrines and so forth. Then, suddenly, it wasn't going to be 2,000 it was going to be 4,000. So anyway it was all done very quickly all by volunteers.

DC: Okay.

HM: That's the Southampton camp at Eastleigh, just outside Southampton, and these are photos of the camp. Tented camp. 4,000 children under canvas and of course none of us had ever had such an experience.

DC: Did it feel like a holiday?

HM: No, because obviously the older ones understood what had happened as they had been separated from their parents; their families. It wasn't a holiday experience at all, in that sense, no.

DC: But did you feel welcome?

HM: Oh yes the people of Southampton; all manner of people from the cooperative, from the boys scouts, from religious groups, from the trade unions, all sent representatives and some business enterprises provided bread and wellington boots because it rained a lot and so forth. No, the British people were fantastic: very, very welcoming. They showed great solidarity because, in that period, you see – in the world generally and in Britain – we had the Depression. The world Depression.

DC: Yeah.

HM: Where, in Britain, thousands and thousands of people were out of work – you had the hunger marches and so forth – so the British people knew what it was to be destitute and so forth you see. So in those days there was real solidarity.

DC: Okay, and did you think that ever changed?

HM: Sorry?

DC: Did that treatment ever change?

HM: We found that the British people were fantastic; I mean after all it was all done by volunteers.

DC: Mmm.

HM: And the money collected was voluntary; it wasn't any government help at all.

DC: Yeah.

HM: But then, of course, that was 1937. In 1939… What happened in 1939?

DC: Start of the Second World War.

HM: Start of the Second World War. So the British people had their own problem: men were conscripted and so forth. So things became more difficult.

DC: Of course.

HM: I was born in 1930 so in 1939 I was 9 years of age and many of us were 9 years or even 8 years when the war started. So we were not in a position to be independent.

DC: Yeah.

HM: Those… and also most of the children were repatriated back to Spain.

DC: Were you not?

HM: No. Obviously not, I wouldn't be here. Now, you see, Franco's government wanted us back.

DC: Yeah.

HM: Those people who worked to repatriate – to send us out of Spain as refugees to the various countries – were considered as traitors: criminals. We were accompanied – the 4,000 children, or nearly so, nearly 4,000 – were accompanied by about a hundred women teachers – about a hundred young women, they called them auxiliaries – to help with the young children and I think it was about 14 or 15 Basque priests.

DC: Mmm.

HM: Now those priests were considered criminals. One of them was sentenced to death in his absence and others, obviously, they had problems. Some of them didn't go back to Spain: some went to Mexico, some went to Belgium, they had to be careful because when Franco took over the Basque Country, some 52 Basque priests were executed. And others were, what's the term.. desdicados[?]; sent to exile away from the Basque area.

DC: But I thought Franco was very pro-religion?

HM: Sorry?

DC: Isn't Franco, or wasn't Franco, very pro-religion? Wasn't he very Catholic?

HM: I don't know that he was necessarily pro-religion and also you have to ask yourself what you mean by religion. The Spanish Catholic Church, on the whole, supported Franco.

DC: Yeah.

HM: Not in the Basque Country. That's a strange thing you see. In the Basque Country you had a very sort of bourgeois society.

DC: Yeah.

HM: It was one of the most – more prosperous – parts of Spain and the Church and the government supported the Republic largely because under the Republic the Basque government got some measure of autonomy.

DC: Yeah, there was a statute.

HM: That's right. The Basque Country had always enjoyed what they call the *fueros*. These were certain rights that were respected by the monarchy, you see, and they always considered themselves to some extent a different entity within Spain. With the military, and Franco's lot, they were all for one Spain; unity of Spain. No differences. No allowance for any diversity even when they took over, or instance in the Basque Country – and in Cataluña where they spoke their own languages – they forbid the use of the Basque language, and of Catalan, even they forbid the folklore of the Basque Country.

DC: Okay.

HM: I mean I was in France in 1948 on the border with Spain and Spaniards would come over to dance the regional dances. Which they couldn't dance in Spain. It was a fantastic suppression of this so-called culture and, you know, cultures. They wanted Spain to be one great nation as it had been, you know, in the… when Spain had its fantastic world empire.

DC: Yeah. So would the, like, punishment have been severe even for just dancing Basque dances?

HM: It wasn't allowed. It wasn't allowed and uh…

DC: Would it have been like death penalty?

HM: It's not a question of would have been. It wasn't allowed and in those circumstances the public didn't contravene the law because you could be taken in and be given a heck of a beating. You see?

DC: Okay.

HM: The Civil Guard were very inclined to knock hell out of someone.

DC: But Franco wasn't sympathetic towards the Basques at all?

HM: Oh no, not at all. Not to the Catalonians. He wanted unity of Spain. He didn't want any diversity.

DC: Mmm. But he didn't take sympathy that the Basques were more controlled than the Catalonians seemed?

HM: No, no, no. He was… Look. Franco, in many ways, was a total ignoramus. He was a military man.

DC: Yeah.

HM: He had gone to military academy, I think he was a bit of a wimp, he wanted to join the navy but he was rejected.

DC: Right.

HM: He went to the military academy and he finished off in North Africa because Spain was trying to… Spain had lost its vast empire. In 1898, Spain lost the last remnants of its empire: Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. And then the army came back from Cuba, for instance, and then Spain tried to forge an empire in North Africa, in Morocco, and there was a horrific war in the early 30's and France, and other European countries, were doing the same forging an empire in Africa: the Germans, the Italians, the French, the British and Spain joined in. Then the war in Morocco was a disaster for Spain and then the monarch, Alfonso XIII I think it was…

DC: Mmm. Sounds right.

HM: He took over control of the army and there was a hell of a massacre of Spanish young soldiers at a battle called Annual. Thousands of thousands of Spanish were massacred. And this caused such resentment in Spain that some municipal elections in 1936, early 1936… The elections were all pro-anti-monarchist parties and the king was advised to leave. He didn't abdicate, he left. He went off to

Italy. That was in early July so the Republic, there was then elections, and the Republic was proclaimed on the 14th April 1931.

DC: Yeah, but it was always a strenuous thing wasn't it?

HM: Always…?

DC: Strenuous. It was always a bit…

HM: Yes. Well of course because, you see, Spain was a very ignorant country and you had the division of those who had and those who had not. In other words, the wealthy and the poor. You had… Spain was still a medieval society with fantastic land, big landowners, very little industry – relatively to the rest of Europe – and great poverty, people, landless peasantry. For instance, in the south. So you had this division and into this was thrown the Church, the Catholic Church, that supported, inevitably, the landowners, the wealthy, the powerful, you see.

DC: Yeah.

HM: And so, consequently, that also caused antagonism towards the Church and in Spain – in Spanish society – you also had… it was becoming industrialised and people were becoming aware, because of the contact with the rest of Europe, and you had political parties developing: the Socialists, and also in some areas – in the south especially and in Catalonia – you had the anarchist movement.

DC: Yeah.

HM: That obviously offered something for nothing in a sense.

DC: Which took over Barcelona.

HM: And later on, of course, in Cataluña you had the anarchists who actually took over the government and the fight against Franco and the Civil War broke out.

DC: Yeah.

HM: So you had a very divided society with the landowners; and the landowners had fantastic power, you see, they could give work or leave someone destitute. If someone joined a trade union, then he got no work on the land you see. And there were millions of landless peasants who had work during harvest times – either for the grain harvest or for gathering the olives or whatever – during those periods they had work but apart from that they were destitute.

DC: Mmm. The British foreign minister said at the time that Spain was dealing with issues that long ago ceased to be a problem in the rest of Europe.

HM: Who said that?

DC: The British foreign minister. I can't place his name at the moment.

HM: Eden?

DC: No, I don't think it was Eden… Might have just been an ambassador.

HM: Baldwin?

DC: Potentially…

HM: In those days when we came over I think the Prime Minister in those days was Baldwin. A Conservative.

DC: Yeah, it wasn't the Prime Minister who said it, it was just an ambassador.

HM: An ambassador, I see yeah.

DC: And would you agree with that is my point. Would you say that that was…

HM: Of course. Spain was still back in the Middle Ages. I've described Spanish society.

DC: Yeah.

HM: I mean you don't understand what poverty is.

DC: I don't.

HM: No you don't. You can't imagine the poverty I was born into. My parents came from Castile…

DC: So Madrid maybe?

HM: North of Madrid. And up in the sierras [las montañas; a mountain range in Spain], in the mountains, where it was subsistence farming…

DC: Yeah.

HM: And the land gradually became into smaller and smaller and smaller plots as the families died and the children took over and it became unsustainable. My father and mother emigrated from Castile, from Soria [northeast of Madrid, south of Bilbao] to the Basque Country. My father initially he would walk over to the north, to the Basque Country, to work in the iron ore mines or in the blast furnaces. Then in the early 1930s, or late 1920s, they moved permanently so that some of my brothers were born in Soria, in Castile, I was born in the Basque Country [in 1930].

DC: Okay.

HM: So my father as I said worked in a… we lived in a small village not far from Bilbao… and my father worked in the iron ore mines or in the blast furnaces.

DC: So what was your reaction when you heard of the fall of Bilbao?

HM: Well I reacted like the other children because you are very young and of course you followed what was going on. The older ones, of course, realised what a disaster it was. We were in the camp in Southampton and there was hell let loose.

DC: Yeah.

HM: Some of the children left the camp and wanted to make their way to Southampton to catch a boat to go back to Spain. I mean this is what the reaction was, you see. And of course the reaction also was – do you know this idea of killing the messenger?

DC: Right.

HM: You know, the person who brings the bad tidings – bad news – to kill him. Well in actual fact there was a reaction in the camp itself against the announcement that Bilbao has fallen you see.

DC: Yeah.

HM: So there was a certain amount of upheaval in the camp – a lot of upheaval – and a lot of children left the camp, as I say, making for the boat or trying to make for the port to go back to Spain. Of course it was senseless, but as children you didn't just understand. I remember that incident and there's something I haven't cleared up myself that has been in my mind for many years. I was standing with a group of children at one of the entrances to the camp and there was quite a number of adults there; English people.

DC: Yeah.

HM: And then one of these fellows – one of these men – took the beret of one of the children there because, of course, some of the children wore the beret, the Basque beret, you see, and threw it up in the air. Well what is the reaction going to be?

DC: Anger.

HM: You think? No! The children all jumped to get a hold of the beret when it came down. You see.

DC: Okay.

HM: And then, click, they took photos. And I've always wondered why. This has come out in newspapers, 'The Basque Children Welcome the Fall of Bilbao' because at that time, certain English papers, like *The Daily Mail*, supported Franco. They even, later on, supported Hitler you see. So I've always wondered, "I wonder if there was a photo" because there was such an effort among certain sections of the British community and of individuals – very conservative types – there was an effort to – they didn't want us in the first place and the Catholic Church here didn't want us – to get us repatriated back to Spain. Now this happened… as a child, when you are moved from one place to another, to another, as I was and most of us were, for instance from Southampton my brother and I we stayed there about three months, and gradually they dispersed all the children all over Britain as the groups were formed – committees were formed – to find some dwelling, some large empty school, manor house, whatever, work house to accommodate the children and then they would collect money and blankets and beds and so forth. And they would take in 50 children. This happened all over Britain. Now, my first stop was that photo I've shown you of Swansea in the south Wales where as I remember on a Sunday all manner of people would flock there; it was a manor house in the middle of a park. Sketty Park outside Swansea. And all manner of people would flock there on a Sunday to visit us, to bring, you know, gifts and so forth and there were poor people, for [there were] miners, and there were some more wealthy people, whole sort of stratus of British society there. Now that was my first stop. Then from there I remember that they already started repatriating children back to Spain.

DC: When was this?

HM: This was, let's see, '38, you see.

DC: Okay.

HM: Once the Basque Country fell then the people here said, "right now there's no fighting there now, these children can go back." They hadn't wanted us in the first place and some of these characters, a fellow named [Gerald?] and other people, they set up the Spanish Children Repatriation Committee. I went from Southampton, to Swansea, then up to Newcastle – near Tynemouth –, then across Britain to near Carlisle in Brampton, then from there – near Scotland – there was a home we call a 'colonia'. Colony, colonia. It was disbanded. Most of the children went to Scotland but three, four of us were left behind and then I remember that the colony was in an old workhouse and then when the Spanish children left then women came – refugees – from London, from the bombing.

DC: Okay.

HM: The four of us were then sent to live on a farm for a couple of months or so and then we were sent all the way down to Margate; put on a train at Carlisle, someone met us at one of the London stations – Euston probably – and took us in a taxi over to another station and we arrived very, very late at night in Margate. We were being repatriated or sent to be returned to Spain.

DC: But that didn't happen.

HM: Well we went to Margate and there, at the last moment, the Red Cross intervened and said my brother and I shouldn't go back because the papers signed by my parents, allegedly, had been forged.

DC: Okay.

HM: In other words, the Red Cross managed to contact my mother and she said she hadn't signed anything – she couldn't have us back – our father was in prison and they were hungry and destitute, starving, and that we shouldn't go back.

DC: Right.

HM: So the Red Cross intervened and said we shouldn't go back. Now, that is one example – my own personal example – of how this committee, the Spanish Repatriation Committee, was working: they were forging such papers you see. And then, of course, the Franco authorities were not allowing the Basque Children's Committee to have a representative in Bilbao to check with the parents whether they really were reclaiming their children back.

DC: Right.

HM: You see, they wouldn't allow that. The Basque Children's Committee sent someone down there and he was immediately deported.

DC: So Franco put quite a bit of importance on getting the children back.

HM: He took it somehow as an insult, as lie, that these children had been sent out, after all they were providing 'excellent facilities' for the children to look after them which was of course a total lie, they were putting them – some of the children went back and didn't have parents to go to – they were put into convents and all manner of institutions and there, of course, the young ones were brought up to be young fascists, you see.

DC: Yeah.

HM: So it's a horrific period really. But we – my brother and I – escaped that.

DC: So you feel like you were escaping atrocities under Franco?

HM: Sorry?

DC: Did you feel like you were escaping atrocities like the worst sort of…

HM: I knew my family – especially later on when eventually I went back – and I realised the poverty and what it was that meant. My father was in prison. There was no work.

DC: Yeah.

HM: My family was sort of begging. The poverty we endured. I remember as a child when the [Great] Depression struck Spain all these thousands of miners, and people who worked in the blast furnaces, they were made… they were unemployed. And there was no social security or anything like this so you were just hungry. I remember my father going to Bilbao, to Barakaldo, the nearest towns, begging – knocking on doors – asking for bread. And he would take one or two of my older brothers to just show people that [he had a family to feed].

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Herminio Martinez: Then a Quaker, English Quaker Alec Wainman, he brought out about fourteen of them, including Pepe, and brought them to England. The British Government didn't want them but…

So [Alec Rainman?] had to guarantee their keep and so forth you see. Now Pepe worked, he was in charge of this, the colony, the last colony.

David Crowe: Yeah.

HM: Wonderful person. Young intellectual whose life was the theatre and from England eventually he went to South America where his father had managed to escape to. And then he worked in the theatre there and then he went to Spain and he became lecturer at the Royal Academy of Spanish Dramatic Art in Madrid at the university. Now he died round about 1990-something but he was award the national award for his work for the Spanish theatre.

DC: Right.

HM: Now that sort of person you came across, you see, and he became a friend of mine eventually; I kept in touch with him until he died. Now… so these are the people who inspired me. SO when I started in education myself [started working in education], and I realised what was going on, I said "Christ haven't I been lucky to have missed all of this?" [Due to being moved around so extensively, Herminio Martinez essentially missed out on education in England.]

DC: Mmm.

HM: So-called education in England. Secondary education: what a disaster! At one time, I was a lecturer in higher education – French and Spanish language and literature – and some idiot friends of mine said "Herminio you should be in the front line." So I left and went to work for the London County Council in their special staff team that you were sent either individually or with others to schools where there were problems.

DC: Yeah.

HM: God! What was going on?! Incredible.

DC: Mmm.

HM: Horror. Absolutely horrifical. What was going on.

DC: Yeah, I'm sure.

HM: In English schools. I think it still is going on. So when I started teaching myself, as I say, I thought, "Thank Christ I missed all my education in this country."

DC: Yeah.

HM: So anyway. That's my own experience, as I say, I did certain number of years in English education and then, eventually, I finished off in a comprehensive school. I was head of a so-called faculty.

DC: Yeah.

HM: The technical faculty in charge of ceramics, machines shop, home economics, and things like this you see.

DC: Yeah.

HM: And then at the age of 55 they were offering early retirement so I applied for it and set up on my own designing and building.

DC: Yeah.

HM: And I thoroughly enjoyed it.