

## **Children of the War by the Socialist youth of Bizkaia**

Translation from deep L, revised by MDL Power

In May 1937, in the midst of the Spanish Civil War, the approach of Franco's army led the Basque Republican commanders to take a decision that would mark an entire generation. Some called it "the departure" and others, "the exile of the children". Between 6 May and 16 June 1937, thousands of children - it is estimated that more than 13,000 - were evacuated from a country at war by means of a very delicate operation (Franco's navy ships patrolled the Bay of Biscay) in which various vessels took part, the best known of which is the steamship Habana, which made several trips with thousands of small passengers on board, although many others also took part, such as the Warrior, the Marvia, the Goizeko Izarra...

These children were sent to safety in France, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, Belgium or even Mexico. Separated from their parents with the promise that they would see them again in a few months, as soon as a conflict that was to drag on for two more years was over, they suddenly found themselves in foreign countries, uprooted and, in many cases, without the slightest contact with their families.

Many of those children would end up returning to Spain and reuniting with their families, but many others would never return, often due to the death or disappearance of their immediate family members, the difficult post-war situation here, or even the fear of being targeted by the new Francoist authorities. They grew up and built their lives in their host countries, but they never forgot their origins, which is why they formed organisations of memory and fraternity that have kept their stories alive, such as the Basque Children Association '37, the Spanish Centre in Moscow or the association Niños de Rusia, among others.

This year, 2022, marks the 85th anniversary of these tragic events. In February 2022, with the help of these associations, the Socialist Youth of Bizkaia via the Socialist Party of Santurce, presented a motion in the town council of Santurce requesting that a permanent, visible and recognisable monument be placed in the fishing port to pay tribute to the thousands of children who were forced into exile at such a tender age due to the horror and irrationality of the war. We did so fully conscious that remembering them and paying tribute to them is an exercise in memory and dignity that we as a society must never fail to carry out so as not to forget the dire consequences and the horror that comes with the use of violence to achieve any end.

The motion was processed, in a climate of consensus, as an institutional declaration, and was approved with the support of all the political groups. This Friday, 18 November, the sculpture will finally be unveiled in the fishing port of Santurce, in a ceremony that will include the presence and participation of some of those children who 85 years ago had to leave everything behind.

This well-deserved tribute will be possible thanks to the Socialists' firm commitment to memory but, above all, thanks to the invaluable work of remembrance and dignity and

against oblivion that all these associations have carried out for so many decades. To them, always, thank you!