

The Leah Manning - Wilfrid Roberts correspondence

30 April 1937 to 21 May 1937

Located at Carlisle Archive Centre.

The Charles and Cecilia Roberts archive: the Leah Manning - Wilfrid Roberts correspondence is listed at Carlisle Archive Centre DROB Accn H15988.

Between 2020 and 2023 the descendants of Charles Roberts and Lady Cecilia Roberts of Boothby deposited an extensive archive related to the Basque children hostels at Brampton and Ambleside between 1937 and 1939. In addition two files of Wilfrid Roberts' papers (Wilfrid was the son of Charles and Cecilia, MP for North Cumberland and closely involved with events in Spain during the 1930s) were deposited amongst the Brampton and Ambleside papers.

One of these files consists of the correspondence between Wilfrid Roberts and Leah Manning. Leah Manning was a leading activist within the Labour party who had also formerly served as president of the National Union of Teachers. In December 1936, she became one of the main organisers of the Spanish Medical Aid Committee, and on 24 April 1937 she arrived in Bilbao as an agent of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief (NJCSR) following an invitation from the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV). In the wake of Francoist bombings in Basque towns such as Elorrio and Durango in March 1937, the PNV, along with the central Republican government, was keen to evacuate children to places of safety. While the Home Office had been reluctant to support the evacuation of Spanish child refugees to Britain, public outcry at the bombing of Guernica on 26 April 1937 led to the British government's acquiescence. The newly-donated correspondence shows Manning's, at times, tense exchanges with Roberts—Liberal MP for North Cumberland and another key organiser of the evacuation—as they tried to secure the transportation of the Basque children to Britain. The donated files also include Roberts' correspondence with retired naval commander-turned-journalist Harry Pursey (later Labour MP for Hull East), who recounted the desperate circumstances of refugees waiting to be evacuated.

The correspondence takes the form of original cablegrams from Manning to Roberts, and secretarial copies of Roberts's replies to Manning. There are also three letters from Manning to Roberts written on 11 May, 16 May and (probably) 18 May 1937. This correspondence covers the period from 30 April to 21 May 1937, the 22 days before the sailing of SS *Habana* and relates to the planning of the evacuation of some 4000 children to Britain. Consequently, it forms a significant addition to the history of those vital weeks when the plans were being made.

The entire correspondence has been transcribed by Gerald Hoare from photographs taken by Dr Stephanie Wright and it is his transcriptions which are presented here. Images of the original cablegrams of 30 April and 21 May have been included to show what the collection looks like.

(We are grateful to Stephanie Wright and Carlisle Archive Centre for permission to use these images).

The Basque Children of '37 Association is grateful to the Roberts family and Carlisle Archive Centre for permission to transcribe this correspondence and to place it on the Basque Children of '37 Association website.

There are other telegrams of this period sent by Leah Manning to Ernest Bevan, Clement Atlee and Sir Walter Citrine. These are to be found in the following archive:

Warwick University, Warwick Digital Collections, The Trade Union Congress and the Spanish Civil War, Basque Children's Committee – Manning Telegrams.
https://warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/archives_online/digital/scw/buchanan/

Leah Manning also sent cablegrams to the Archbishops of Canterbury & Westminster and David Lloyd George. Their current whereabouts are unknown.

Leah Manning and Wilfrid Roberts's roles in the events of April and May 1937 have been explained on a number of occasions, but rarely in any degree of detail and not with reference to the Roberts family archive. See for example:

Leah Manning, *A Life for Education* (1970)

Ron Bill and Stan Newens, *Leah Manning* (1991)

Adrian Bell, *Only for Three Months* (editions of 1996 and 2007)

Natalia Benjamin and Cliff Kirkpatrick, <https://www.basquechildren.org/-/docs/articles/sshabana-e> (an article that predates 2013).

Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, (1997), Chapter 4, 'Aid', pp. 93-120.

Peter Anderson, 'The Struggle over the Evacuation to the United Kingdom and Repatriation of Basque Refugee Children in the Spanish Civil War: Symbols and Souls', *Journal of Contemporary History* 52:2 (2017), pp. 297-318.

Dorothy Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation: Basque Refugee Children of the Spanish Civil War* (1984), chapter 3, 'The Basque Refugee Children in Britain', pp. 99-134.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE CABLEGRAM EXCHANGES BETWEEN WILFRID ROBERTS AND LEAH MANNING

From the 30th April 1937 to 21st May 1937

PRIOR TO AND AT THE BOARDING/SAILING OF THE SS HABANA

Transcribed from the Original Papers of Wilfrid Roberts housed at Carlisle Archives

Leah Manning had established herself at the Carlton Presidencia Hotel in Bilbao.

30 April 1937 to Wilfrid Roberts MP 75, Flask Walk, Hampstead, London

18.45 Hours BASQUE GOVERNMENT DESIRES LONDON DELEGATION CHARTER ENGLISH PASSENGER STEAMER CAPACITY 4,000 CHILDREN WITH ADULTS TO CARE FOR THEM AND SO SOLVE TRANSPORT PROBLEM STOP GIVES YOU TIME ORGANISE HOMES AND HOSTELS STOP INTERESTED TO KNOW OF ENGLAND GIVE SIMILAR ASSISTANCE TO MOTHERS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN REPLY IMMEDIATELY STOP DANGER FRIGHTFUL
MANNING PRESIDENCIA BILBAO

01 May 1937 to Wilfrid Roberts MP 75, Flask Walk, Hampstead, London

22.15 Hours DEEP SATISFACTION FELT HERE DECISION PROTECT EVACUATION SHIPS STOP CAPTAINS ENGLISH VESSELS CONFERRING STEVENSON STOP TOGETHER WITH SPANISH VESSELS STANDING BY CAPABLE EVACUATING 5,000 PERSONS IMMEDIATELY WILL CABLE DETAILS AS SOON AS READY EVACUATION COMMITTEE HARD AT WORK ANXIOUSLY AWAIT DECISION AZCARATE RE BRITISH LINER BEST MEANS TRANSPORT OF CHILDREN TO ENGLAND AS IT SOLVES CLEARANCE PROBLEM CHILDREN STAY ON SHIP WHILST HOMES ARE FOUND PLEASE CABLE PROGRESS ENGLISH PLANS
MANNING

02 May 1937 to Wilfrid Roberts MP House of Commons, London

19.50 Hours ARRANGEMENTS PROCEEDING RAPIDLY FOR EVACUATION 2,300 CHILDREN TO FRANCE WHO WILL BE PROVIDED FOR BY FRENCH CONFEDERATION GENERAL TRAVAIL STOP MORE THAN 20,000 OTHER CHILDREN READY STOP DEEP ANXIETY FELT HERE AS TO PART NATIONAL JOINT COMMITTEE WILL PLAY IN CARING FOR CHILDREN STOP HAVE ALREADY SENT THREE CABLEGRAMS ASKING FOR THIS INFORMATION STOP BASQUE GOVERNMENT WILLING CHARTER VESSEL BRING 4,000 TO ENGLAND STOP WOULD ALSO LIKE TO SEND YOUNG MOTHERS STOP CONSTANT AIR RAIDS ON CITY STOP REPETITION GUERNICA FEARED ANY DAY STOP IF LIVES OF THOUSANDS OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN ARE TO BE SAVED THE NATIONAL JOINT COMMITTEE MUST ACT RAPIDLY ALSO SEND ME INFORMATION BY RETURN SO THAT I MAY ASSIST BASQUE GOVERNMENT COMPLETE ARRANGEMENTS
LEAH MANNING

02 MAY 1937 to Wilfrid Roberts 75, Flash Walk Hampstead, London

19.35 Hours HAVE TODAY CABLED PROMINENT MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT ALSO T.U.C . ASKING THEM FOLLOW EXAMPLE FRANCH CGT WHO ARE MAKING PREPARATION CARE FOR 2,300 **STOP** THESE WILL EVACUATED TUESDAY AND ARE TO BE ACCOMMODATED IN CAMP IN OLERON AN ISLAND IN GIRONDE RIVER **STOP** ESSENTIAL TO PLANS BASQUE GOVERNMENT WILL FIND HOMES 4,000 CHILDREN WHO WILL TRAVEL ON SHIP AZCARATE IS FINDING **STOP** REPETITION GUERNICA EXPECTED DAILY **STOP** TERRIBLE ANXIETY **STOP** EXTREMELY HARASSING RECEIVE NO REPLY FROM LONDON REPLANS NATIONAL JOINT COMMITTEE END

LEAH MANNING

02 MAY 1937 to Leah Manning

20.30 Hours Have already collected seven thousand pounds **stop** Homes being prepared **stop** but Basque representatives not yet instructed Basque government to charter ship **stop** Azcarate in Paris **stop** Pye at hotel Madrid

ROBERTS

03 MAY 1937 to Wilfrid Roberts MP House of Commons, London

18.15 Hours GREATLY CHEERED CABLEGRAM **STOP** INSTRUCTIONS WERE CABLED AZCARATE FRIDAY, FAVOURABLE REPLY RECEIVED CAN YOU GIVE ME INFORMATION NUMBER CHILDREN LIKELY TO BE RECEIVED HOSTELS AND NUMBER GOING TO PRIVATE FAMILIES

MANNING

03 MAY 1937 to Wilfrid Roberts MP House of Commons, London

20.45 Hours IN ORDER TO DISIPATE ALL UNCERTAINTY RE PRESIDENTS CABLEGRAM TO AZCARATE HAVE NOW ASKED MINITSTER OF INTERIOR CABLE LIZASO DIRECT CHARTER BOAT CABLE CARRYING FOUR THOUSAND BILBAO TO BRITISH PORT

MANNING

03 MAY 1937 Copy wording of cablegram sent to Mrs. Manning, Presidencia, Bilbao

Basque delegation telegraphing Bilbao tonight to inform Basque government propose chartering ship tomorrow morning capacity carrying fifteen hundred adults cannot say how many children unless they hear to the contrary from Basque government preparations here proceeding but waiting British government decision

ROBERTS

04 MAY 1937 to Wilfrid Roberts MP House of Commons, London

17.10 Hours DELIGHTED NEWS **STOP** FIRST EVACUATIONS BORDEAUX TAKING PLACE TOMORROW **STOP** PREPARATION OF 4,000 FOR ENGLAND PROCEEDING **STOP** CAN YOU LET ME KNOW NAME OF NEXT FOOD SHIP WITH AMBULANCES AND APPROXIMATE DATE OF ARRIVAL **END**

MANNING

05 MAY 1937 Copy wording of cablegram sent to Mrs. Manning, Presidencia, Bilbao

Basque delegation here finds difficulty chartering ships offered two capable of carrying fifteen hundred each at seven hundred pounds a day **stop** Basques have wired Bilbao for further instructions **stop** Joint Committee preparations proceeding satisfactorily propose camp in tents on South coast **stop** French Basques suggest Havana make trip to England with children **stop** Please consult with Basque Government

ROBERTS

06 MAY 1937

17.00 Hours to Wilfrid Roberts MP House of Commons, London

HAVANA CONSTANT USE EVACUATION CIVIL POPULATION AND AGED PEOPLE FRANCEWARDS **STOP** ALSO DIFFICULT PROVISION THIS END **STOP** CONSULTING MINISTER TODAY **STOP** CABLE IMMEDIATELY FULLER DETAILS SHIPS YOU MENTION TO ME AT THE PRESIDECIA **STOP** DOES £700 MEAN COST OF ONE SHIP OR COVER BOTH **STOP** WILL THEY BE PROVISIONED **STOP** DOES ACCOMMODATION 1,500 SPECIFICALLY REFER CHILDREN OR IS THAT ADULT ACCOMMODATION

MANNING

07 MAY 1927 to Roberts House of Commons, London

12.50 Hours ANXIOUS REPLY LAST CABLE **STOP** ALSO ASISTENCIA SOCIAL ASKS YOU MAKE ENQUIRIES WHETHER LORD NUFFIELD WOULD FIND A SHIP TO SEND CHILDREN TO RUSSIA WHICH IS WILLING TO TAKE LARGE NUMBER

MANNING

07 MAY 1937 to Roberts House of Commons, London

20.15 Hours CONSIDERATION BEING GIVEN POSSIBILITY USING HAVANA AFTER NEXT VOYAGE FRANCE **STOP** PRESUME THIS CASE PROTECTION WOULD BE AFFORDED HER ON RETURN JOURNEY **STOP** DECISION WILL BE MADE AFTER COMPARISON TERMS EXPECTING FROM YOU RE OTHER SHIP **STOP** MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS APPLICANTS FOR ENGLAND TAKING PLACE ALL THIS WEEK **STOP** AMERICAN JOURNALISTS GIVING PUBLICITY AMERICAN PRESS IN HOPE RAISING MONEY THERE ASSIST OUR FUND

MANNING

Undated

Copy wording of cablegram sent to Manning, Presidencia, Bilbao

New committee formed in England including T.U.C., Representative Catholic Archbishop Westminster, Save the Children Fund, Quakers, National Joint Committee. Sixteen thousand pounds available to date. Basques inform me this morning intention to charter ship capacity 1500 adults. Not confident that this arrangement being made with adequate speed. Basques still state that full authority for this has not been given by Bilbao Government. Approximate total cost £4,000. Have applied British Government for approval and assistance. Have not received answer. Persuade Basque Government to wire London delegation hurry on this arrangement or as alternative divert Habana one trip English port. Sending two Doctors and Nurses Bilbao today to travel with ship to England.

ROBERTS

11 MAY 1937 to Roberts House of Commons, London

13.00 Hours EXPECTATION SHOULD PROVE CORRECT IF CONTENTS OF MY LAST CABLE ARE APPRECIATED STOP RUSSELL CABLED YESTERDAY PLANE DELAYED STOP RAIDING CONTINUOUS TODAY STOP ELEVEN WARNINGS SINCE 6.30 STOP IMPOSSIBLE FIND ANYONE IN SUCH CONFUSION END

MANNING

11 MAY 1937

13.40 Hours to Roberts MP House of Commons, London

STEVENSON INFORMS ME WILL NOT AUTHORISE EMBARKATION CHILDREN UNTIL HE RECEIVES WORD FROM HMG STOP HAVE ASSURED HIM FUND WILL BEAR STRAIN OF CHILD MIGRANTS AND THAT YOU GUARANTEED SAME SIR JOHN SIMON BEFORE I CAME HERE STOP EVERYTHING PRACTICALLY READY THIS END ONLY WAITING RETURN HABANA WHEN SHE WILL BE PREPARED ALL HASTE STOP LET ME KNOW IMMEDIATELY NUMBER COLONIES AND APPROXIMATE NUMBER EACH CAN TAKE STOP INSIST SIMON CABLE STEVENSON IMMEDIATELY STOP SO MANY DIFFICULTIES BEEN OVERCOME A SNAG OF THAT KIND WOULD BREAK HEARTS OF WOMEN HERE WHO TRUST ENGLAND IMPLICITLY STOP MAKING ENQUIRIES ON OTHER MATTER STOP PRACTICALLY CERTAIN IT WAS ALL DISTRIBUTED IMMEDIATELY BY ASISTENCIA SOCIAL A MINISTRY MOST ABSOLUTE PROBITY

MANNING

11 MAY 1937

20.45 Hours to ROBERTS HOUSE OF COMMONS, LONDON

ELLIS ET ALS ARRIVED TODAY STOP VERY GLAD OF THEIR HELP AS CONSTANT RAIDS TODAY HAVE INTERRUPTED EXAMINATIONS STOP EVERY FACILITY WILL BE GIVEN THEN AND MINISTRY OF HEALTH CAN REST ASSURED ON ALL POINTS STOP FOUR THOUSAND CHILDREN WILL LEAVE IN HAVANA SUNDAY STOP SHIP ITSELF CAN BE USED AS CLEARING STATION TAKING OFF 1000 CHILDREN AT A TIME = MANNING

11 MAY 1937 Copy wording of cablegram sent to Mrs. Manning, Presidencia, Bilbao
Homes being prepared for 2000 children by Monday **stop** Government making difficulties **stop** Intend overcome these Thursday **stop** Seventeen thousand pounds collected **stop** Catholics can place twelve hundred children **stop** Rely upon you to get children sent without fail = ROBERTS

14 MAY 1937 Copy wording of cablegram sent to Mrs. Manning, Presidencia, Bilbao
Home Office still hesitating to approve our plans here. Very unlikely to authorise more than 2000 at present. If Habana can really carry 4000 send her to Bordeaux first then send on from Bordeaux Habana with our 2000 children to Southampton where camp established for 2000. Fully expect authorisation 2000 to reach Stevenson tomorrow. Home Office wish one adult woman to be sent with every 20 children, adults to include proportion of teachers. Prefer children 6 to 12 years. Give interviews to press in Bilbao telling enormous need for evacuation. Just received latest telegram. By all means send telegrams prominent politicians attack those responsible for delay not us. Please do not underestimate official difficulties we are experiencing, but we believe these will be overcome tomorrow. Am informed by Foreign Office Habana not returned Bilbao yet from last trip. Inform me if Habana at Bilbao. = ROBERTS

14 MAY 1937

18.00 Hours to ROBERTS HOUSE OF COMMONS, LONDON

YOU NEED HAVE NOT FEAR ABOUT NUMBER CHILDREN **STOP** FOUR THOUSAND SELECTED A WEEK AGO **STOP** COULD EASILY GET TEN THOUSAND **STOP** RUSSELL AND ELLIS ENGAGED ON EXAMINATION **STOP** MUCH INTERRUPTION FROM AIR RAIDS SO HAVE DECIDED CONTINUE WORK EIGHT TO MIDNIGHT DAILY **STOP** WHAT ABOUT THAT AUTHORIZATION SHOULD BE GLAD TO HAVE IT P D Q **END** = MANNING

14 MAY 1937

18.35 Hours to ROBERTS FLASK WALK HAMPSTEAD LONDON

I DON'T KNOW IF YOU REALISE PAINFUL POSITION IN WHICH YOU ARE PLACING ME BY YOUR FAILURE OBTAIN AUTHORIZATION FOREIGN OFFICE TO EMBARKATION CHILDREN MONDAY **STOP** WE HAVE WORKED DAY AND NIGHT TO COMPLETE ORGANIZATION **STOP** AT YOUR SUGGESTION BASQUE GOVERNMENT HAVE DIVERTED HAVANA FROM WORK IT WAS CARRYING OUT NOW THAT EVERYTHING IS READY STEVENSON DECLARES CANNOT ALLOW EMBARKATION WITHOUT THIS AUTHORIZATION **STOP** WHITSUN HOLIDAY OUGHT NOT TO BE ALLOWED INTERFERE WITH A MATTER SUCH URGENCY **STOP** PLEASE ASK FOREIGN OFFICE CABLE STEVENSON TONIGHT **STOP** IF THEY SAY STEVENSON HAS ADVISED THEM IT IS UPSETTING ORDINARY EVACUATION REPLY THAT ITS URGENT WISH BASQUE GOVERNMENT CHILDREN SHOULD HAVE PRIORITY OVER EVERYTHING ELSE **STOP** INTENSE BOMBARDMENT LAST THREE DAYS STEVENSON KNOWS NOTHING ABOUT AS HE WAS IN FRANCE **STOP** AM ALSO SENDING COPY CABLEGRAM SENT PROMINENT POLITICIANS STOP RELY ON YOU ACT TONIGHT WITHOUT FAIL **END**
MANNING

14 MAY 1937

18.40 Hours to ROBERTS FLASK WALK HAMPSTEAD LONDON

IMPOSSIBLE YOU SHOULD REALISE INTENSE ANXIETY WHICH IS BEING FELT HERE
FATE FOUR THOUSAND CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN PROMISED EVACUATION TO
ENGLAND **STOP** GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT WORKING DAY AND NIGHT COMPLETE
ORGANIZATION **STOP** EVERYTHING READY FOR MONDAY **STOP** STEVENSON
DECLARES NO AUTHORIZATION FROM FOREIGN OFFICE **STOP** BEG YOU NAME
CIVILIZATION AND HUMANITY OBTAIN THIS AUTHORIZATION IMMEDIATELY **STOP**
GERMAN PILOT CAPTURE YESTURDAY DECLARES INTENSE BOMBARDMENT BILBAO
IMMINENT **STOP** = MANNING

14 MAY 1937

19.30 Hours to ROBERTS 75 FLASK WALK HAMPSTEAD LONDRES

DESPERATELY URGENT EVACUATE CHILDREN BY MONDAY **STOP** PREPARATIONS
PRACTICALLY COMPLETE **STOP** HAVANA AVAILABLE NOW BUT WILL BE DIVERTED
UNLESS AUTHORIZATION FOR EMBARKATION OBTAINED FROM FOREIGN OFFICE
IMMEDIATELY **STOP** NIGHT BOMBARDMENTS NOW AS WELL AS DAY **STOP**
PROFOUND EFFECT ON MORALE OF CHILDREN = RUSSELL ELLIS

15 MAY 1937 Copy of wording of Cable to Mrs. Manning, Presidencia, Bilbao

Have five minutes ago received official sanction for two thousand children and no more. Useless to discuss with you enormous difficulties we have overcome. Further 2000 may be sanctioned later. Big demonstration public opinion in this country has been necessary to overcome official opposition. Regret proposed arrangement via Bordeaux unsuitable appear to me business-like. Still doubt Havana to carry four thousand. If children fail to come next week worst possible effect will be created here. Fully appreciate your situation. Kindly try to understand ours. Stevenson instructed today in the following terms: 900 boys, 1100 girls, over six and under twelve. In addition 100 adult female teachers and attendants and fifteen priests. Each child to have an identification disc and the following particulars for each child – Full names, sex, date of birth, full names of parents, full names of next of kin, last permanent address in Bilbao. Capacity. All your figures for evacuation to France greatly exaggerated according to French sources.

ROBERTS

15 MAY 1937 Copy of the wording of Cable to Foreign Ministry, Bilbao

Mendiguren, Presidencia, Bilbao – Warmest welcome assured from British people. Camp established from which children will be drafted to institutions in groups of not less than fifty. No children will go into private families. Arrangements entirely in

accordance with the wishes of Basque representatives London. British Government approves reception two thousand children. Stevenson receiving authority embarkation and conditions today.

ROBERTS

15 MAY 1937

12.50 Hours to ROBERTS 75 FLASK WALK HAMPSTEAD LONDON

IF YOU WERE HERE YOU WOULD REALISE UTTER IMPOSSIBILITY CARRYING OUT YOUR SUGGESTION STOP HOW CAN ONE DISCRIMINATE AMONG CHILDREN ALREADY CHOSEN AND PROMISED THEY SHOULD GO TO ENGLAND STOP YOU TOLD ME IN FORMER TELEGRAM THE CATHOLICS WOULD TAKE ONE THOUSAND TWO HUNDRED DIRECTLY INTO THEIR INSTITUTIONS SALVATION ARMY FIVE HUNDRED STOP IF YOU HAVE ROOM IN SOUTHAMPTON FOR TWO THOUSAND THAT PRACTICALLY SETTLES ALL THE CHILDREN STOP AS I POINTED OUT IN A FORMER CABLE THERE IS NO NEED TO DISEMBARK ALL THE CHILDREN THE FIRST DAY STOP RATHER THAN HAVE THE UTTER CONFUSION YOU SUGGEST IN YOUR CABLE ESPECIALLY THE BORDEAUX IDEA IT WOULD BE PREFERABLE TO WAIT A COUPLE OF DAYS WHILST YOU ASSURE THE HOME OFFICE THAT THESE ARRANGEMENTS ARE SATISFACTORY STOP ADULT ARRANGEMENT ALREADY MADE AS SUGGESTED STOP ELLIS SATISFIED GENERAL HEALTH CHILDREN GOOD ALTHOUGH ALL SUFFER FROM NUTRITION STOP PLEASE CABLE RETURN END HABANA WAITING IN PORT POSSIBLY WILL BE DIVERTED AS GOING TO BORDEAUX BECAUSE OF THIS DELAY

MANNING

13.45 Hours to ROBERTS 75 FLASK WALK HAMPSTEAD LONDON

OWING DELAY RECEIVING OFFICIAL SANCTION LONDON GOVERNMENT HAVE BEEN OBLIGED TO USE HAVANA ONE MORE VOYAGE WITH FOUR THOUSAND CIVIL POPULATION BORDEAUX STOP CANNOT POSSIBLY RETURN UNTIL TUESDAY EARLIEST MUST THEN BE PROVISIONED STOP CABLE STEVENSON SAYS FUND NOT LARGE ENOUGH SUPPORT CHILDREN STOP UP TO YOU CONVINCING THEM IT IS STOP MOST INTOLERABLE SITUATION FOR ALL OF US AND INHUMAN TOWARDS THE CHILDREN

MANNING

16 MAY 1937 to ROBERTS DOLPHIN HOTEL SOUTHAMPTON – ROBERTS 75 FLASK WALK HAMPSTEAD LONDON

EVERY EFFORT MUST BE MADE BETWEEN NOW AND THURSDAY TO RAISE SUFFICIENT MONEY TO SATISFY THE HOME OFFICE THAT YOUR COMMITTEE IS COMPETENT TO FULFILL ITS PROMISE TO THE FOUR THOUSAND BASQUE CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN THOROUGHLY PREPARED FOR THE ENGLISH EVACUATION STOP ELLIS FLYING HOME TO PLACE ALL THE FACTS BEFORE THE HOME OFFICE STOP PLEASE HELP HIM IN EVERY WAY YOU POSSIBLY CAN

MANNING

17 MAY 1937 to WILFRID ROBERTS HOUSE OF COMMONS LDN

GOOD CONTRACTS MADE - A HOTEL WILL BE CHARTERED BIARRITZ BY BASQUES AS CLEARING HOUSE - DOCTORS NURSES TEACHERS ACCOMPANY - ARRANGE TAKE 2000 CHILDREN ENGLAND

MANNING

17 MAY 1937 Copy of wording of telegram sent to Manning Presidencia Bilbao

Thanks for Jordan's and your telegrams. Our Difficulties refer simply to Cabinet decisions. All preparations Southampton and elsewhere proceeding splendidly. Splendid reception assured **Stop** Basque delegation Paris informs me arrangement for Havana to call Bordeaux first and proceed Southampton agreed. Wire when Havana leaves Bilbao **Stop** Foreign Office sent Stevenson full instructions and authorization Saturday afternoon. Ministry of Health strongly requests avoid overcrowding on Havana. Can provision Havana Bordeaux if desired. ROBERTS

17 MAY 1937

19.30 Hours to ROBERTS 75 FLASK WALK HAMPSTEAD LONDON

NO INFORMATION RE BORDEAUX RECEIVED HERE **STOP** ASISTENCIA SOCIAL WILL STRONGLY RESIST SUGGESTION ON ACCOUNT EXTREMELY UNSATISFACTORY CONDITIONS COMFORT AND CARE OF CHILDREN **STOP** HAVANA AMPLY CAPABLE CARRYING FOUR THOUSAND **STOP** HAVE DISCUSSED ALL ARRANGEMENTS WITH CAPTAIN YESTERDAY MORNING **STOP** SHE WILL NOT BE BACK IN BILBAO TILL NEXT WEDNESDAY **STOP** THIS GIVES YOU AMPLE TIME AUGMENT FUND AND SO FULFILL PROMISE TO CHILDREN **STOP** OUT OF QUESTION TO CONFUSE PREPARATIONS MADE HERE IN ORDER MEET MINISTRY'S REQUIREMENTS RE AGE AND SEX **STOP** SUCH INSTRUCTIONS SHOULD HAVE BEEN SENT A FORTNIGHT AGO BEFORE CAREFUL SELECTION AND MEDICAL EXAMINATION OF CANDIDATES HAD BEEN EMBARKED UPON **STOP** ELLIS LEFT ON PLANE TODAY TO EXPLAIN WHOLE POSITION **END**

MANNING

17 MAY 1937

18.05 Hours to 75 FLASK WALK HAMPSTEAD LONDON

AFTER A LONG CONFERENCE ASISTENCIA SOCIAL AGREEMENT REACHED THAT TWO THOUSAND CHILDREN MIGHT BE LANDED BORDEAUX ONLY TO FIND WHEN I VISITED FRENCH CONSUL THAT HE HAD RECEIVED NO INSTRUCTION CONCERNING ANY SUCH AGREEMENT AS YOU MENTIONED IN YOUR CABLE **STOP** WILL YOU MAKE INQUIRIES WHY INSTRUCTIONS HAVE NOT BEEN SENT **STOP** POSSIBILITY WE SHALL LEAVE WEDNESDAY NIGHT SO NO TIME TO LOSE **STOP** STILL HOPE YOU MAY HAVE SUFFICIENT FUNDS BY THAT TIME TO SATISFY HOME SECRETARY **STOP** WOULD A GUARANTEE OF TEN THOUSAND POUNDS BE SUFFICIENT IF SUCH COULD BE ARRANGED **STOP** PROCONSUL HAS CABLED FOREIGN OFFICE ASKING THEM WAIVE REGULATION RE AGE AND SEX **STOP** IF THEY DON'T WE MUST START COMPLETE RECLASSIFICATION WHICH WILL TAKE TEN DAYS AT LEAST

MANNING

17 MAY 1937

20.50 Hours to ROBERTS 75 FLASK WALK HAMPSTEAD LONDON

BRITISH PROCONSUL HAS JUST SHOWED ME TELEGRAM FROM STEVENSON ADVISING DESEMBARKATION CHILDREN AT BORDEAUX FROM HAVANA ON ITS WAY TO SOUTHAMPTON WITH OTHER CHILDREN **STOP** PLEASE ASK FRENCH AUTHORITIES TO LET FRENCH CONSULATE IN BILBAO HAVE THE NECESSARY INSTRUCTIONS **STOP** IT IS IMPORTANT YOU ADVISE ME THESE INSTRUCTIONS HAVE BEEN SENT **STOP** THIS SHOULD BE URGENTLY ATTENDED TO TONIGHT OR FIRST THING TUESDAY MORNING **STOP** CONFIDENTLY EXPECT TO SAIL WITH FOUR THOUSAND CHILDREN ON THURSDAY IF THIS MATTER IS SET RIGHT YOUR END **STOP** HAVE ALSO CABLED BASQUE DELEGATION PARIS

MANNING

18 MAY 1937 to ROBERTS 75 FLASK WALK HAMPSTEAD LONDON

11.30 Hours FILM OF ORGANIZATION AND MEDICAL INSPECTION MADE HERE YESTERDAY METRO GOLDWIN MAYER **STOP** FILM WILL ARRIVE LONDON WEDNESDAY **STOP** ASK GAUMONT BRITISH NEWSREEL IF AVAILABLE FOR INFORMATION OF HOME OFFICE

MANNING

18 MAY 1937

13.10 Hours to ROBERTS 75 FLASK WALK HAMPSTEAD LONDON

IMPERATIVE THE AUTHORIZATION TWO THOUSAND CHILDREN LAND BORDEAUX REACH ME WITHIN NEXT FEW HOURS OTHERWISE THOSE PLACES WILL BE FILLED WITH GOVERNMENT REFUGEES WHO WE SHALL HAVE TO LAND BORDEAUX ON OUR WAY TO SOUTHAMPTON **STOP** JUST RECEIVED CABLEGRAM ATHOLL SHE IS WORKING GET AUTHORIZATION FOUR THOUSAND **STOP** THIS ONLY MAKES IT ALL MORE URGENT WE GET AUTHORIZATION TO COVER ALL PLACES IN BOAT **STOP** QUITE CERTAIN YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND POSITION HERE AND OVERWHELMING DIFFICULTIES GOVERNMENT END

MANNING

18 MAY 1937

08.06 Hours to ROBERTS HAMPSTEAD LONDON

PLEASE TELL SIMON ABOUT RELIEF MEETING SYDNEY FRIDAY ALSO THAT DEL VAYO WROTE EDEN APRIL CASES VIOLATION FROM AGE OF TWELVE MANNING WANTS REPLY TOMORROW

ATHOLL

18 MAY 1937 Copy of wording of telegrams sent to Manning Presidencia Bilbao

Not timed Seen Home Office today hope for larger numbers and extension of age **stop** French Consul should now have authority for landing two thousand in France - will wire again tonight - ROBERTS

18 MAY 1937

3 p.m. Copy of wording of telegrams sent to Manning Presidencia Bilbao (cont.)

Informed by Paris authorisation sent French Consul this morning. However fully expect removal age limitation and authorisation 4000 England by British government. Ellis returning. Will wire later – ROBERTS

7 P.M. Authorisation for maximum of 4000 children to come Southampton sent to Stevenson this afternoon. Age group from five to fifteen but special preference must be given to older girls. Arrangement therefore for France cancelled. Cable directly Habana leaves - ROBERTS

19 MAY 1937

15.00 Hours to ROBERTS 75 FLASK WALK HAMPSTEAD LONDON

DEEPLY GRATEFUL ALL STAFF WORK DONE IN LONDON EXPECT EMBARKATION EIGHT TO TEN THURSDAY EVENING **STOP** KEEPING BRINTON FULLY INFORMED **STOP** STRONGLY ADVISE DEPUTATION FROM COMMITTEE COME ABOARD SOUTHAMPTON BEFORE DISEMBARKATION BEGINS END - MANNING

19 MAY 1937

22.45 Hours to ROBERTS 75 FLASK WALK HAMPSTEAD LONDON

ADULT REFUGE TRIPS NOT MANAGED BY ASISTENCIA SOCIAL **STOP** THEY KNOW ALL ABOUT THE LAST TRIP TO BORDEAUX AND ARE QUITE ASSURED THAT FOUR THOUSAND CHILDREN WILL TRAVEL COMFORTABLY WHERE FOUR THOUSAND ADULTS WERE CROWDED **STOP** BOAT HAS BEEN DISINFECTED TODAY ELLIS AND I HAVE ALSO CAREFULLY INSPECTED IT **STOP** WILL GIVE INSTRUCTIONS TO CAPTAIN RE WIRELESS AND CABLE EXACT INFORMATION FOR HOME OFFICE RE PASSPORTS AND IDENTIFICATION DISCS TOMORROW **END**

MANNING

20 MAY 1937

14.30 Hours to ROBERTS 75 FLASK WALK HAMPSTEAD LONDON

FOR THE INFORMATION OF HOME OFFICE **STOP** THE IDENTIFICATION DISC BEARS ONLY THE WORDS ENGLISH EXPEDITION AND THE CHILD S NUMBER **STOP** THE NUMBERS CORRESPOND TO CARD INDICES IN MY POSSESSION WHICH GIVE FOLLOWING INFORMATION **STOP** NUMBER NAME ADDRESS PARENTS NAMES SEX AGE = **STOP** THE ONLY OTHER INFORMATION REQUIRED BY HOME OFFICE IS NEXT OF

KIN STOP THIS INFORMATION BEING PREPARED AND WILL BE FORWARDED TO ME
LATER WHEN I WILL ENTER SAME ON CARD INDEX STOP THERE ARE SIX SEPARATE
LISTS OF CHILDRENS NAMES WITH CORRESPONDING NUMBERS TWO OF WHICH CAN
BE PLACED IN POSSESSION OF HOME OFFICE STOP PERSONNEL WILL CARRY ALL
PASSPORTS STOP SAIL DAWN FRIDAY STOP JOURNEY SHOULD TAKE APPROXIMATELY
FORTY HOURS END

MANNING

21 MAY 1937

11.15 Hours to ROBERTS 75 FLASK WALK HAMPSTEAD LONDON

PRESIDENTE AGUIRRE AND CABINET ON BOARD BID US FAREWELL EARLY HOURS
THIS MORNING STOP SAILING SIX OCLOCK MORNING END

MANNING

Carlton Presidencia Hotel, Bilbao, 11th May 1937

Dear Wilfrid,

I hope by the time this reaches you I shall already know

- (a) That Simon has sent authorisation to Stevenson
- (b) What port the Havana is making
- (c) How many camps have been provided
the approximate number in each camp.

The reason for this is that the Basque Nationalists are extremely anxious that the children should be together. There are very good reasons for this. It is the party which strives to keep the National spirit & independence of the people alive and they are anxious it should not be dissipated in the minds of their children during their exile. The main reason however is the religious one. They feel that it will be easier to preserve the integrity of the children's Catholicism if they are altogether.

I have had many conferences with them on these points and it seems I told you in my recent letter. I might ease their minds, since it is only a simple matter of organisation for us. People like the Basques whose sense of spiritual values are very high find the greatest comfort from such sources.

I feel therefore I should be meeting the wishes of the Committee by giving these guarantees. If we cannot repatriate the children before the summer camps are broken up, I am certain English Catholics will find a way out of any difficulties that may exist.

With regard to personnel, thirty doctors & thirty nurses will accompany us on the boat. I have agreed this with Asistencia Social. However, that these people may return with the boat since they are badly needed for the front and since I am sure voluntary services will be easy to obtain in these two directions in England.

The position with regard to teachers is different, since the language difficulty would be such a barrier to their education if their own people were not present. If the camps are broken up before repatriation becomes possible a good number of these could return. They will be in the pay of the Basque Government and their services will be needed at home as soon as we can part with any of them.

With regard to the food from Backworth, I find that it was not distributed by Asistencia Social but by the rationing department of the Government. They were quite unaware that there were any conditions attaching to its distribution – so was I. If you will think back you will remember also there were no conditions. It was distributed in accordance with their usual procedure with gift food ships – milk and such like foodstuffs for children, nursing mothers and institutions, the rest to Asistencia Social

I am attaching the list as given to me by the rationing department. It seem also entirely satisfactory to me – in any event it was eaten long ago, so there is nothing for Werner to get hold of. Are you sure that is Werner's difficulty. When in first case here Asistencia Social were very worried about the attitude Werner had taken up with them – not about the Backworth food stuffs, but about food which he was offering from his own organisation. He wanted to lay down, among other conditions

that they must provide a building in which the foodstuffs should be kept and that no one should have access to it but himself, that it should be kept locked and only he should have the key!!! I will get a copy of the conditions which I have seen and bring them home with me. Please hurry Simon & let me have an answer to my various questions.

Signed K/R L/M

Notes - Simon	refers to Sir John Simon, Home Secretary
Stevenson	refers to Ralf Cornwallis Stevenson, British Consul in Bilbao
Backworth	refers to SS Backworth, British Food Ship
Werner	probably refers to Auguste Reynald Werner of SCIU (Save the Children International Union)
K/R	refers to Katharine Stewart-Murray, Duchess of Atholl aka Kitty Ramsay
L/M	refers to Leah Manning
Havana	refers to SS Habana

Carlton Hotel Presidencia, Bilbao

Sunday

(Probably 16 May 1937)

Dear Wilfrid,

I went to sleep without planning or thinking, last night, for the first time since I've been in Bilbao. At last the matter of the ship has been settled. As I told you in my cable we are to have the Habana. This matter has not been as simple to arrange as one might imagine. Thinking there would be no difficulty in chartering reasonably a steamer in London or France we arranged to use the Habana as a ferry boat between Bilbao and Bordeaux.

It was on this that the first evacuation of 2,300 children and a thousand adult refugees took place last week. She is expected back tonight, has a group of refugees ready to leave on Tuesday and will return at once to take our children.

Actually she is doing extraordinarily good work. All the people going in her are young mothers with their families and old people. It's going to be a terrific squeeze. She has 1,500 berths. We reckon on 1500 children in a berth accommodation - for the others in lounges, dining rooms etc. She will be difficult to provision, but – fortunately in this respect – the children are used to hunger and they can make up for this later.

I was a little surprised to find that you are sending out a doctor and nurses, because as I told you in my first cable and subsequent letter we are sending nurses, doctors, teachers and servants with the children. Even these extra adults on the ship will take sorely need room and food, as well as costing their fares out. However I expect you carefully considered this side of the question before coming to a decision.

I think it will give great satisfaction to the Basques to know that his Eminence will be represented on the Committee. They are glad to hear that we have our Executive Committee which will take over full control. That is what they wish for, as they say "The Spanish is not a good executive".

Please save me a place on the Committee also, in some capacity or another; for I have promised to write a weekly letter to Bilbao describing all that happens to their beloved children. I am coming home on the ship myself – a little uncomfortable I admit – but the suggestion was put up to me by a deputation from the General Council of the Basque to ones Association on the ground that the presence on the boat of the Ingles Signora would give great confidence to the mothers.

I have still to make arrangements about 1,500 further children for France, but this position was considerably eased yesterday by the arrival of 3 French cargo boats capable of carrying between them (deck room) 2,000 passengers. If the children go off early in the morning that should suffice. I will hear that in about 10 days from my arrival we shall have evacuated some 10,000 children and 5,000 adults.

Will keep you informed by cable all developments.

Kind regards, L/M

Carlton Hotel Presidencia, Bilbao

Tuesday [possibly 18.05.37]

Dear Wilfrid,

I was very cheered by telegrams from you, Sinclair [Dr Kenneth Sinclair-Loutit] and Ellen [Wilkinson] yesterday. It's a little depressing not to be quite sure what is happening at the other end. Perhaps I ought to tell you just what has happened so far.

1. In Paris I went straight to the Basque Delegation, the Co-ordinating Committee having failed me the right before. I left a note of my whereabouts at the hotel, so one of them turned up while we were in conference. I went to the Embassy and altogether set the wheels working there – impressed them with the urgency of getting the C.G.T. to increase their numbers [of children to be evacuated] and the Children's committee or whatever it's called to let me know their numbers [of children to be evacuated] also. They promised a further 1,500 on the spot.
2. Went to Bayonne – saw the delegation the next morning and flew here by the 11 o'clock plane. Saw Stevenson the Consul, had lunch with him and asked him to take me to the Presidencia. This he did.
3. The position at the moment was that no reply has been received from Salamanca. The British decision to protect refugee ships in the International waters has not been reached. Although we had two vessels – the Havana and a large yacht ready in the river, they could not be used until some protection was afforded. We decided therefore,
 - (a) To send 800 children for whom the C.G.T. had made provision, to Biarritz on the British cargo boat Hamsterley
 - (b) Cable to England and ask Azcarate [Pablo de Azcarate, Spanish Ambassador] to get a large British or French passenger vessel capable of carrying 4000 persons from Bilbao to a British port. I was present when the President dictated the cable so know it went and was therefore very astonished at your two cables saying there had been no authorisation.
4. The decision to protect shipping telegraph here the next morning, together with the promise of the C.G.T. to take another 1,500 children eased the position considerably for it meant we could use the Havana at once.

There are also a large number of persons ready to go who would be no charge on anyone and can easily go with friends or maintain themselves abroad.

Although it was completely practical to get rid of as many as possible of them. You can also see that it created a delicate political situation. To see all the 'well to do' people leaving the city while the children of the proletariat remained behind would have been too much for the people of Bilbao.

Anyhow that's been smoothed out and all the kiddies will go tonight i.e. 2,300 children. The boat to the tune of about 4,000 will be filled by other refugees. The embarkation of the children will be from 8.30 -10.30 tonight. These children are going partly to homes in Biarritz.

I have wired all this to the Basque Delegation in Paris. The Asistencia Social with whom I am working in close contact has all the arrangements for these children well in hand. I'm going down to see them off and have sent full details to Pye. [Edith Pye of The Society of friends]

5. I hope that by now the Basques have received their authorisation to charter a vessel and are having no difficulty finding one. We shall begin the organisation of the next 4,000 children at once. There are one or two questions I should like answered. The Asistencia Social need to know.

1. What number of children are likely to be accommodated in hostels or camps.
2. How many adults, such as teachers and nurses will be required to live with the children. They will send a fairly large number to look after them on the voyage, but would like as many as possible to return as they will be in the pay of the Basque Government. Would you like for example a certain proportion of young mothers who can cook and clean, some teachers and one or two nurses for each hostel.

If you have worked out any plans or have any views let me have them. The Basques are extremely accommodating (although likely to change everything at the last moment). If on the other hand you have a large number of voluntary workers, you will be able to send more people back again.

6. The Question of the Cross Channel Steamer which the Basque delegation in Paris has been asked to charter must not be confused with the liner about which we cabled yesterday. It is needed here for short speedy trips, as the Havana can only put in to ports like Bordeaux and Rochelle. [La Rochelle]

7. It is most likely that we shall sort the children here into
(a) for colonies
(b) for private homes

The reason for this is that the Basque Nationalist families are very strongly Catholic and anxious to preserve a Basqueish atmosphere. It may not seem, in the midst of all this distress and anxiety a factor to be reckoned with. Yet the very existence of the fear makes this element all the stronger I suggested Catholic homes for Catholic children but was met with the argument – 'but all English Catholics are pro Franco', that would be impossible!

8. This is nothing to do with the above, which is intended to convey the position to you as intelligently as possible.

Last night they brought five little children into the hospital here from one of the villages near the front line – streaming with blood and in a state of extreme terror. They had been deliberately machine gunned from planes. One of the journalists who also saw it happen told me that they just machine gunned anything that moved or crept including children or animals.

Please don't worry or let anyone be anxious about me personally. It's much easier for me now that the British journalists, whom I know from Madrid and Valencia, have arrived. They give a feeling of security which was a little bit lacking previously. I can manage everything necessary with ease as I have the complete confidence of the Government and I am invited to every Evacuation Conference; have a room to work in at the Presidencia and a first class interpreter.

Give my love to Ortega and all the rest of the Delegation. Tell them the Basques are all and much more than they said. Indeed I might be made of gold studied with precious stones!!

Kind Regards to Everyone

LeahM

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Pri	Roy	1935	

ORD189 BILBAOPRESIDENCIA 62 30 1845 =

WILFRED ROBERTS M P 75 FLASK WALS
HAMPSTEAD LONDON =

BASQUE GOVERNMENT DESIRES LONDON DELEGATION

CHARTER ENGLISH PASSENGER STEAMER CAPACITY

4000 CHILDREN WITH ADULTS TO CARE FOR

L. & P (d).

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<i>B-</i>	<i>W.H.</i>	<i>11.25.</i>

38 BILBAOPRESIDENCIA 26 21 1115 -

ROBERT 75 FLASK WALK HAMPSTEAD LONDRES -

PRESIDENTE AGUIRRE AND CABINET ON BOARD BID US
 FAREWELL EARLY HOURS THIS MORNING STOP SAILING SIX
 OCLOCK MORNING END - MANNING * *

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