



# Newsletter

## Basque Children of '37 Association UK



Registered charity no. 1115920

[www.basquechildren.org](http://www.basquechildren.org)

No.9

April 2008

### News

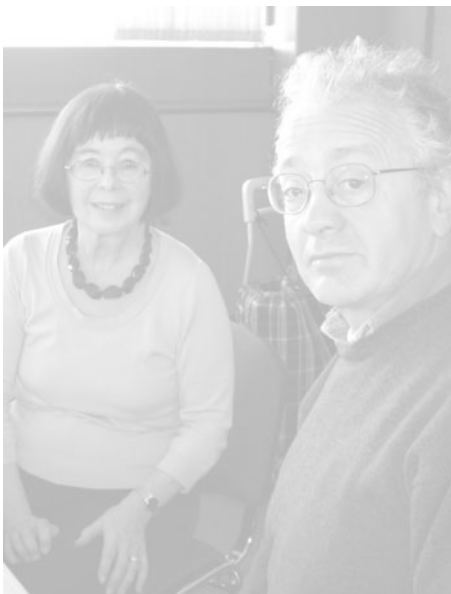
## AGM and members' lunch

by Nerea Mendicutte

This year's annual general meeting was held on 16 February. The Association was fortunate in being able to use a committee room in the Consejería de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales in London. There were 22 people present.

The Secretary, Natalia Benjamin, opened the meeting with a full report, summarising the events that the Association had embarked on during this exciting 70th anniversary commemorative year, including the day school in Oxford jointly organised with Oxford University, the event in Southampton attended by 250 guests and an impressive list of dignitaries, the erection of a further two blue plaques at Worthing and Southampton and many other events. The Association was grateful to the Spanish and Basque governments for grants it had received, without which the events and special projects could not have been undertaken. An attractive list of forthcoming events was proposed for the coming year.

Carmen Kilner, Membership Secretary and



Association President Manuel Moreno (right) and Secretary Natalia Benjamin at the AGM.



The Kukai dance company from San Sebastián performed at a week-long series of events at Eastleigh to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the arrival of the niños vascos. See page 3: "Los Niños de Guernica Project, Eastleigh".

Treasurer, followed with the year's membership statistics followed by the annual accounts, which showed that the Association was in a healthy position (see Summary of Accounts). At the end of the meeting, there was the opportunity to hear the new song: "Solo Por Tres Meses" by Roberto García, the son of a *niño vasco*.

After the meeting, the Member's Lunch was held at The Mall Tavern in Notting Hill Gate.

## Fundación Idi Eskerra

We were approached in December 2007 by Mauro Calvo, one of the directors of the above-named foundation which works for human rights and activities to do with la *memoria histórica* and the Spanish Civil War. He wanted to involve the Association in two projects. The first one was their plan to create an audio-visual archive which would include interviews with *niños* who had not returned to Spain to live but who had made their lives in the host country. Herminio Martínez managed to muster some twelve *niños* who were interviewed in December. When the recordings are finished, we shall

be sent copies. For the second plan, see "Forthcoming events" section.

## Stalin and the Spanish gold

by Colin Carritt

Did Stalin expropriate the Spanish gold reserves during the Spanish Civil War or were his motives towards the Republic more honourable? It has been one of the myths of the war that the Republic was cheated. In fact, according to Ángel Viñas, this year's guest lecturer for the International Brigade Memorial Trust's Len Crome Memorial Lecture at the Imperial War Museum, London, on 8 March, Moscow behaved quite properly in its handling of the Spanish gold reserves

Viñas is professor of Political Economy at Madrid's Complutense University. He also has had a distinguished career as a diplomat serving as European Ambassador to the United Nations and holding other diplomatic posts in Washington, Bonn and Brussels.

He explained that the role of the Soviet Union during the civil war has often been



## From the Secretary

This time last year we were in the thick of preparations for the anniversary commemorative event at Southampton. In some respects this year has been quieter, although still packed with interesting events. One of our members has produced a CD of the Southampton conference. It is well worth getting hold of, especially as most people who attended appear on the CD! As well as an overview of the whole occasion, the CD features speeches and dancing.

It is great news that "The Guernica Children", the film re-edited by Steve Bowles last year, has won a prestigious television documentary award. Well done Steve! It is a fitting accolade for this sensitive and moving documentary.

We very much look forward to the ¡Viva la República! fiesta at the end of April (see page 5). Designed for all the family to enjoy, the fiesta hopes to attract Spaniards living in London (and further afield). The delightful choir from the Spanish School in London will be performing (this is the same choir that recorded

the CD "Songs of the Basque Children"). Other treats in store include poetry readings, folk dancing and songs accompanied by guitar. Roberto García, one of our members and the son of a *niño*, will be performing his song "Solo por tres meses" at the fiesta.

One of the aims of the Association is to collect material about the *niños* and their experiences for our archive. We would be very grateful to receive any photographs or press cuttings that you would like to give. Eventually, the archive will be deposited at Southampton University, where it will be catalogued and made available for relatives of the *niños* and researchers to consult.

It has been snowing in Oxford over Easter, although as I now gaze out of the window, a few sunbeams are struggling through. I hope you all enjoy a bright and hopeful spring.

Saludos y agur,

*Natalia Benjamin*

Natalia Benjamin

► misunderstood, but 35 years of research using original source documents and the opening of archives in Russia, Spain and throughout the wider world has thrown new light on this role.

Viñas conceded that even as early as the end of 1936, the Franco coup had all but succeeded, because of the western powers' policy of non-intervention. For a year Stalin did almost nothing for the Republic. While Hitler and Mussolini were supplying Franco with armaments, ammunition, aircraft and manpower, his main concern was supporting the Chinese in their on-going war with Japan.

During this period, the reaction in Republican sectors to fascist advances was for the communists to enjoy increasing public support, which alarmed many of the other political groups in Spain. But Largo Caballero and Negrín contained the disquiet,

which only became unmanageable during the final year of the war, when the Republic began suffering multiple defeats. Viñas dispelled the myth that discord and strife within the Republican parties in Spain was a significant factor in Franco's eventual victory: it was simply a desperate reaction to fascist successes rather than a contributory cause of them. Ángel Viñas repeatedly underlined the overwhelming significance of the non-intervention policy of the western powers and Negrín's pleadings for more Soviet military support. But Stalin could see the looming crisis of WW2 and wanted more leverage with the western powers, leverage that direct intervention in Spain would have denied him. Eventually, after Munich, Stalin began to act more positively. But by then it was too late.

Another myth that Viñas exposed as false is the belief that Stalin was determined to

create a communist state in Spain. His studies of archives in Britain, France, Germany and Spain show no evidence that this was Stalin's motive. By contrast, there is overwhelming evidence that despite the apparently passive policy of non-intervention, the British government was actively supporting the Spanish coup leaders through its secret services: it knew of Franco's coup well in advance but did nothing to alert the Spanish government.

And the gold? The Republic first sold some 25 per cent of Spain's reserves through French banks, to pay for weaponry, supplies and to maintain industrial production, but much of it was subsequently frozen by the non-intervention policy. In the end, most was transferred to Moscow banks for safe deposit. This was properly agreed by Negrín, his Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers. Most was in the form of gold coins and it took time for the Moscow authorities to count and assess the gold content and to establish an agreed value. Despite the complexity of the task, the Soviet authorities completed the valuation within three months. Any discrepancy between the actual and assessed value was probably less than 10 per cent. The gold was then sold to the Soviet Union in return for credits, which remained the situation until the end of the war.



Symposium at the Eastleigh commemoration, including (left) Association Honorary President Helvecia Hidalgo and (right) organiser Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez of Southampton University. See "Los Niños de Guernica Project, Eastleigh".

## Los Niños de Guernica Project, Eastleigh

by Crispian Cook

This project was a large-scale multi-art form commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the evacuation of the *niños* to Great Britain and was presented at The Point in Eastleigh,