

## From the Editor

When I look back on the last six months, the event which aroused so many emotions was the *Homenaje* offered by the Idi Ezkerra Foundation to the *niños vascos*, especially targeted at those who never returned to live in Spain but made their lives in the country that had sheltered them as children.

Reasons for not returning were varied, the most tragic being that parents had been killed so there was no home to go to. Some refugees married other Basque *niños*, or Englishmen and women, others decided not to return for ideological reasons, vowing never to go back while the dictator was in power. They had left their beloved Basque country "only for three months" and ended up spending a lifetime in a foreign country. That they managed to survive and make their lives successfully is admirable and a tribute to their tenacity. Their resilience and determination are legendary and equal to none.

So it was fitting that there should be a tribute to them at this anniversary time. I feel honoured to have been invited to share in this unforgettable celebration. It was touch and go whether the dubbing into Spanish of Steve Bowles' film "The Guernica Children" would be ready in time to be premiered in Bilbao, but luck was on our side and the new version was able to be shown to much acclaim. But the event that moved me most was seeing the hundreds of red carnations floating in the water at the port of Santurce, in remembrance of the *niños* who left from there and who died in exile.

So you can see that the *niños* and their story are certainly not being forgotten. Just recently, I was pleased to attend the unveiling at the Montrose colony of the seventh blue plaque that we have erected. These events not only serve to thank the British people for their welcoming of the Basque children all those years ago, they also help

to propagate their story, through press coverage and publicity.

There is still a great deal of work to be done, especially as regards the different colonies. I was intrigued because, whereas all the large towns in the north, Manchester, Bradford, Bolton, Darlington, Durham, Huddersfield, Lancaster, Leeds and Wakefield, had one or more colonies, I couldn't find out anything about a colony in Sheffield. So when I was visiting my daughter there, I spent a morning in the Local Studies section of the Public Library and trawled through local newspapers of 1937, hoping to find some information. I was rewarded, as I found an article on 14 August about the decision of the Sheffield Basque Children's Committee to send 25 children to the Hollowford Hostel at Castleton, which although in Derbyshire, is very near to Sheffield. Later articles showed that "much hostility had been shown by the people in Castleton" and so the idea was abandoned. Then on 20 October I found a short news item saying that 30 boys were to be taken to Frogatt Guest House for at least six months. An internet search revealed that Frogatt was a little village not far from Sheffield. It seems likely then that the "Sheffield" colony was at Frogatt. Hopefully, on another visit, I can find out more information about it. The whole point of this story is to show you how much there is to still be unearthed. Let me encourage you to go to a Local Studies Library near you and look through old newspapers to see what you can discover!

It is the time of year when we plan the programme of events for the Association for the coming year – if you have any good ideas, please let me know.

Saludos y agur,



Natalia Benjamin

► researching Shomells colony and the response of the people of south-east London to the Spanish Civil War and would be delighted to hear from anyone who has any information.

## Blockade of Bilbao

by Cliff Kirkpatrick

The talk given by Professor Michael Alpert at the Marx Memorial Library on 21 June covered the background and reasons which led the British government to give official consent for 4,000 Basque refugee children to enter this country in May 1937 despite there being no precedent for admitting large groups of refugees. Two main events were cited: the blockade of Bilbao by Franco's warships and the bombing of Guernica. Both had profound effects on a large part of the British public and were instrumental in securing a more sympathetic attitude on the part of the British government as a result of public pressure.

There were still of course elements within the cabinet, notably Sir Samuel Hoare, First Lord of the Admiralty, who did their best to promote Franco's cause. They thought a Nationalist victory probable and did not want to damage future relations with the likely victor. Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary at the time, while a firm supporter of the non-

intervention agreement, nevertheless made a very pro-Basque statement at a cabinet meeting on 20 April 1937 and the Royal Navy continued to protect British ships in international waters, escorting them when necessary to within three miles of the Spanish coast where Basque shore batteries were effective in keeping Franco's ships at bay. A number of incidents during April showed how robust a stand the Royal Navy was prepared to take to protect British shipping engaged in legitimate trade.

British public opinion was also strongly influenced by George L Steer's report on the bombing of Guernica which appeared in The Times and The New York Times on the 28 April, two days after the bombing. All credit to Steer and The Times editor for publishing the report in full when normally the paper went to great lengths to avoid or play down anything that might antagonise Hitler and make a European war more likely.

The extent of public revulsion at the effrontery of Franco's navy attempting to stop, search and confiscate cargoes destined for Bilbao and the terror bombing of Guernica by the German Condor Legion with token support from the Italian Aviazione Legionaria was pivotal in persuading the British government to admit the Basque children. Constraints were imposed, principally that no costs would be charged to the public purse, but the important point was that a generally reluctant British

government did concede and let, what was for the time, a substantial number of refugees into the country. The British public, or at least a large part of it, responded magnificently in providing support, although contributions did fall sharply at the end of the civil war when many of the children had been repatriated.

Professor Alpert went into much greater detail than this summary conveys and his talk was extremely stimulating and informative, enjoyed and appreciated by everyone present.

## Homage in Bilbao

by Natalia Benjamin

It was an excited group of "British" *niños* who met at Gatwick airport on the morning of Thursday 12 June on their way to Bilbao. They were going as guests of the Idi Ezkerra Foundation to attend a four-day event, *Homenaje a los Niños y Niñas de la Guerra Vascos*, for those *niños* who never returned to live in Spain, who went just for a few months but who stayed for the rest of their lives in their host country.

In all, 55 *niños* with their relatives came, from France, Belgium, Russia, Mexico and Great Britain. It was an emotional time for all: there were moments of crying, moments of laughter, meeting up with old friends and



At the Homenaje in Bilbao: Agustina Cabrera, Mari Sanz and friend (above) at the final lunch and (right) Helvecia Hidalgo with wreath.

relatives they hadn't seen for a long time.

As a background to the events, there was a fine exhibition in the Museo Marítimo, *Toda una Vida Siendo Niño*, which was to remain until the end of September. It showed the journeys that the *niños* had undertaken, using photos, letters, drawings and documents from each of the different countries, as well as video testimonies projected on a screen.

The first evening, there was a showing of Steve Bowles' film "Los Niños de Guernica", which had been specially dubbed into Spanish for the occasion, followed by a round table discussion where four *niños* spoke movingly about their experiences, so similar at the beginning, yet so different subsequently.

On Friday morning, all walked to the Doña Casilda Park to the symbolic memorial, the sculpture *Memoria Viva* by Nestor Basterretxea, representing the victims of Franco. Javier Madrazo, Minister for Housing and Social Affairs welcomed everyone and reminded people that it was important not to forget the past in order to avoid it happening again. Wreaths were laid, by Helvecia Hidalgo among others, at the foot of the sculpture and Basque and Republican flags were unfurled. Then those who had lived in San Sebastián before their evacuation were taken to their birthplace for the day by coach.

Saturday was the best day weatherwise, with sunshine throughout the day. Two coaches took the *niños* to Santurce where the *niños'* odyssey had started with that terrible sea voyage. On arrival, all were handed a red carnation and there was a service of remembrance for all those *niños* who had lost their lives. Juanita Vaquer was invited on stage, and she recalled her childhood as the daughter of a *sardinera*, and, her voice breaking, asked that the *niños* should not be forgotten. Then everyone was invited to cast their flowers into the water for those who never returned.

On the final day, everyone gathered at the Palacio Eskalduna for the keynote event: tribute was paid to the *niños* by the people of Bilbao, with speeches, poems and songs from a wonderful Basque choir conducted by a young Englishman! Finally, all the *niños* came up on to the stage. This was their moment: some of

them spoke spontaneously to the audience with great feeling. Carlos Pascual, whose photo as a little boy had figured in all the posters, tried to address the audience but was completely overcome by emotion. Herminio Martínez reminded us of the importance of remembering, of keeping up the fight, because today many children are suffering, in Palestine, Darfur and the Congo. He spoke warmly about Euskadi, the country they had to leave but where they still have their roots. The *Homenaje* closed with a splendid lunch, where there was much singing. People had the feeling of having taken part in an unforgettable gathering, full of affection and deep emotion, the memory of which will remain always in their hearts.

## In brief

### Glasgow to Barcelona 1938 and 2008

A cycle ride in July and August from Glasgow to Barcelona (via Portsmouth and Bilbao) commemorated Ray Cox and Roy Watts, two International Brigade members of the Clarion Cycling Club who died fighting for the liberty of the Spanish people. The Clarion Cycling Club 1895, together with the International Brigade Memorial Trust and the Basque Children of '37 Association UK, organised a re-enactment of a 1938 bike ride by two other Clarion Cyclists, Ted Ward and Jeff Jackson. The event received extensive coverage in regional and national TV, radio and newspapers.

### Film on niños on Spanish TV

The film made by Roberto Menendez mostly at Eastleigh entitled "Los Niños de Guernica Tienen Memoria" was shown in Spain on La Sexta on Monday 28 April.

### Jubilee Gardens memorial day

It was a fine day and a larger than usual crowd gathered at the Jubilee Gardens International Brigade memorial on 19 July for the annual commemoration organised by the International Brigade Memorial Trust. They included veterans Jack Jones, President of the IBMT, Sam Lesser, Chairman, Jack Edwards, Bob Doyle, and centenarian Lou Kenton. There

followed a speech from the Spanish Ambassador, Carlos Miranda, who laid a wreath on behalf of the embassy. Other wreaths were laid by, among others, Natalia Benjamin of the Basque Children of '37 Association UK. The meeting was wound up by the singing of "The Internationale".

### Sussex and the Spanish Civil War

It was standing room only on Saturday 21 June, writes Mike Anderson, as Jack Jones, International Brigade veteran, welcomed nearly 150 people who had come to Lewes to hear the story of Sussex and the Spanish Civil War. Among those who took part were Jim Jump, who read poems written by his father James, a journalist who had left Worthing for Spain and came back to marry his mother, Cayetana, one of the *señoritas* on the *Habana*. Many of the Basque *niños* were sent to colonies in Sussex, at Worthing, Brighton and Blackboys, near Uckfield. Bill Thornycroft, from Worthing, now in his 80s, told the audience how as an 11-year-old schoolboy he had witnessed the arrival in Southampton of the *Habana* with the 4,000 refugee children. His brother Chris, fearing that his mother would try to dissuade him despite her being an outspoken opponent of Franco and deeply involved with the Basque refugees, had gone off to fight in Spain secretly.

### Viva la República

Billed as a celebration of the Spanish Republic 1931-39, with music, film, poetry and dance, the Viva la República lived up to expectations, with over 300 attending the event at the Yaa Asentawaa Centre in west London, writes Pauline Fraser. Children stole the show, whether singing with the choir of the Instituto Español Vicente Cañada Blanch or dancing with the Grupo de Baile del Centro Gallego. *Niños* and their descendants played a large part in proceedings, with Koke Martínez and Herminio Martínez reading or rather, in Koke's case, singing poetry. Rob García, son of a *niño*, and his duo partner in Na-Mara, Paul McNamara, performed songs from the Republic and a new song especially written for