

Sir, – I am writing to you on behalf of the BCA'37 UK – The Association for the UK Basque Children.

The recent review (May 18) by David Herman of Tony Kushner's *Journeys from the Abyss* makes reference to a chapter on child refugees and the transport of nearly 4,000 Basque children during the Spanish Civil War to Britain. Herman quotes Kushner pondering: "Why do we remember some refugees and not others? There are memorials to the Kindertransport but not to the Belgian and Basque children and those who rescued them".

I would like to draw attention to our association, which was founded precisely to prevent this forgetfulness. It is run by children of those Basque children and their teachers, who came to Britain in 1937. Our aims are to archive all possible material and evidence (our archives are part of the Special Collection at the University of Southampton); to erect commemorative plaques at sites where groups of children stayed, and to educate both here and in Spain via our website, talks and exhibitions.

The exodus in May 1937 of over 3,860 Basque children was the largest single influx of child refugees to this country. As party to a non-intervention treaty, the British government was very unwilling to accept any child refugees from the Spanish Civil War for fear that this would be regarded as aiding the Republicans (the democratically elected government). Prime Minister Baldwin offered the less than convincing explanation that "the climate here would not suit them". However, following the bombing of Guernica and faced with mounting public pressure, the Government agreed to permit one boatload to enter this country, but on condition that the children would not receive a penny of public money. And they never did; they were supported and maintained by a wide range of groups: churches, trade unions, the Co-operative Society and businesses with a philanthropic tradition such as Cadbury's. Most returned, but 250 of the children remained to make their lives in Britain.

Carmen Kilner

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