

## Basque Children – evacuees from the Spanish Civil War and the eightieth anniversary of the exile

Lecture by Dr Peter Anderson at the *Instituto Cervantes de Londres*  
Thursday 7 March 2019

*A report by Barbara Coombs.*



An audience of over seventy people listened attentively to the talk given by Dr Peter Anderson of Leeds University at the *Instituto Cervantes de Londres*. The full house included three of the *Niños de la Guerra*, and many descendants of the nearly 4,000 children, teachers, and auxiliaries who travelled from Bilbao to England in May 1937.

The context of the Spanish Civil War where Franco's forces took murderous steps 'behind the lines' to subdue the civilian population was described by Peter both through first hand reporting and recollections. He then went on to relate how the Franco controlled media attempted to blame the atrocities on the very people who were the victims. Attempts by the Basque Government to negotiate fair rules to govern prisoner and civilian exchanges were ignored by the insurgents / *Los Nacionales*.

In these events were the seeds of the evacuation of thousands of republicans from their besieged areas of which the *Niños de la Guerra* were a small part. Switching to the British context the work done by the NJCSR and the BCC Peter outlined and contrasted to the duplicity of the British Government.

Strong themes of good people and the Basque Government grappling with huge European wide events and attempting to address these events with humanitarian and internationalist solutions were developed in the talk. Questions followed answered both by Dr Anderson and by Simon Martinez of the BCA'37UK- the Association for the Basque Children in the UK. And the evening ended with informal discussion and hospitality from the *Instituto*.

Thanks are due to Dr Anderson for his most scholarly lecture, and especially to the Director of the *Instituto*, Sr Ignacio Peyró Jimenéz, and his staff, for making the audience so welcome.

**Barbara Coombs**