

**4,000 Basque Child Refugees:
Britain's Response to the Victims of the Spanish Civil War**

Isabella Brown

Department of History – Durham University

March 2018



Contents

Introduction	3
CHAPTER 1 Evacuation: The Basque Refugee Children in Southampton, May-September 1937	8
CHAPTER 2 Repatriation: The Role of The Basque Children's Committee (BCC)	13
CHAPTER 3 The Shortcomings of the British Labour Movement	18
CHAPTER 4 The British Government: Non-Intervention and the Rejection of the Basque Child Refugees	24
Conclusion	30
Bibliography	33

List of Abbreviations

BCC – Basque Children's Committee
NJCSR – National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief
TUC – Trades Union Congress

Introduction

Guernica, the most ancient town of the Basques and the centre of their cultural tradition, was completely destroyed yesterday by insurgent air raiders.¹

The personal account of George Steer, a reporter for *The Times* who witnessed the destruction of Guernica, cultural capital of the Basque region, by General Franco's aerial bombers on 26 April 1937, shook the British nation. This merciless attack on the Basque town situated far behind military lines made British politicians fully aware of the true situation in Spain where innocent civilians were facing persecution and murder at the hands of Franco's Nationalists. Steer's article prompted the British government, which had maintained a policy of non-intervention from the outset of the Spanish Civil War, to finally agree to accept 4,000 Basque child refugees in May 1937. This dissertation will examine Britain's response to the cause of the Basque child refugees, looking at why their evacuation to Britain was so problematic for the government. The roles played by the British Labour movement and voluntary organisations will also be reviewed. An analysis of the experiences of the children in North Stoneham Camp, Southampton, where they were housed for their first few months in Britain, illustrates the large scale of funding and support needed to ensure the safety and care of the 4,000 refugees throughout their stay. This support and funding was largely provided by volunteers under the organisation of the Basque Children's Committee (BCC). This dissertation will first assess how and why the initial evacuation was so successful, and then go on to determine how the responses of the Conservative government and Labour Movement to the Basque child refugees affected the BCC's ability to support them. Lastly, this dissertation will examine the debates over the rate of repatriation. Were the children repatriated to Spain prematurely and if so, who bears the responsibility for this?

The Spanish Civil War of July 1936 – April 1939 was fought between the Republicans, loyal to the Second Spanish Republic, and the Nationalists, who rebelled against Spain's first democratic government.² The Second Spanish Republic faced opposition from the moment of its establishment in 1931. Opposition came from the 'traditional sectors of society'³ including the Catholic Church, which feared the loss of its influence, landowners and industrialists who rejected the 'rise on cost of labour', and conservative military officers who believed that Spain's right to territory was under threat under the Republic.⁴ Sebastian Balfour sums up the ideological motivations behind the rebel group: 'the rebels united around a few basic principles: the restoration of the Catholic church, the defence of territorial integrity...the imposition of order over 'chaos', the return to hegemony of the elites and the destruction of democracy'.⁵ A series of uprisings and revolts culminated in the military coup of July 1936. Although this coup ultimately failed, it laid the groundwork for the Civil War between the Republicans and the Nationalists.

¹ George Steer, 'Bombing of Guernica: original Times report from 1937', (2006) at <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/bombing-of-guernica-original-times-report-from-1937-5j7x3z2k5bv> (viewed 1 March 2018).

² Sebastian Balfour, 'Spain from 1931 to the present', in Raymond Carr (ed.), *Spain: A History* (New York, 2000), p. 243.

³ Balfour, 'Spain from 1931 to the present', p. 243.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 253-254.

The Spanish Civil War represented a wider ideological battle over democracy which resonated throughout the rest of Europe. With the rise of Adolf Hitler in Nazi Germany and Benito Mussolini in Italy, both Britain and France believed their interests would be best served by a policy of appeasement towards the fascist dictators. Britain, in particular, feared that intervention in the Spanish conflict would aggravate the fascist leaders, and hoped that fascism could be contained through non-intervention. Consequently, Britain and France urged other European countries to agree on a policy of non-intervention in Spain in September 1936.⁶ Italy and Germany, however, distanced themselves from this non-intervention pact, failing to agree whilst covertly sending aid to Spain's rebels. Mussolini 'provided bombers to air-lift the Army of Africa to the mainland of Spain and began a further and massive programme of military aid to the rebels, including a total of 100,000 regular Italian troops'.⁷ Meanwhile, Germany sent planes and military weapons to help the Nationalist cause. In fact, Hitler saw the struggle in Spain against the democratic government as an opportunity to test out Germany's new war technology.⁸

Britain's neutrality towards the Republican plight can also be explained by the fact that the Second Spanish Republic was Soviet-backed. This association with communism meant that many British politicians were unsympathetic towards the leftist side of the conflict. By November 1936 the Popular Front Government in Spain included republicans, communists, socialists and anarchists, and the stirrings of a communist conspiracy created widespread fear. The Nationalist insurgents portrayed their uprising as a ploy to save Spain from this so-called communist plot. Burnett Bolloten endorses this idea in *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (1991). Bolloten saw the victory of the Popular Front, which came into power in February 1936, as representing the rise of communism.⁹ Whilst this idea of a communist conspiracy has since been widely rejected by historians, the rumours were enough to deter Britain from supporting the Popular Front.

Britain as a nation remained, on the whole, neutral towards the Spanish conflict, although there were some individuals who supported the Republican cause and volunteered to fight on their side. Indeed, up to 150,000 Europeans and Americans are estimated to have travelled to Spain to fight in the International Brigades and many of these volunteers were British.¹⁰ What is more, voluntary committees including the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief were set up across Britain. These provided aid to the victims of the Spanish conflict. It was not until May 1937, however, that the British government itself provided any sort of aid to Spanish victims. It became clear at this point that humanitarian help was needed for the most vulnerable members of the Basque community and so the government agreed to accept 4,000 Basque child refugees.

The crushing of Republican groups in the Basque region was part of Franco's campaign of wholesale domination of Spain during the course of the Civil War. Systematic Nationalist attacks on civilian towns were intended to destroy Basque culture, livelihoods, and ultimately

⁶ Michael Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War* (Hampshire, 1994), p. 45.

⁷ Balfour, 'Spain from 1931 to the present', p. 255.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (North Carolina, 1990), p. 3.

¹⁰ David Malet, *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identities in Civic Conflict* (New York, 2013), p. 98.

to take lives. Martin Minchom describes the brutality of the attack on the Basque town of Durango on March 31 1937: ‘this dreadful massacre in the predominantly Catholic Basque country took the lives of nuns, priests, and many others, and religious buildings were destroyed...as many as 250 people probably died’.¹¹ Ian Patterson describes the bombardment of Guernica in April as ‘the first time that a completely unmilitarised, undefended, ordinary civilian town in Europe had been subjected to this sort of devastating attack from the air’.¹² According to Steer, the destruction of civilian towns such as Guernica was intentional and the aim ‘was seemingly the demoralization of the civil population and the destruction of the cradle of the Basque race’.¹³ Following the attacks, many civilians fled to the coast, desperate to escape to France: ‘when the Francoists had taken the port of Bilbao, the refugees fled in cars, lorries, horse carts or on foot’.¹⁴ Pleas for help from the Basque government led to the international evacuation of Basque children to Belgium, the Soviet Union, Switzerland, Denmark, the United States, Mexico and Britain in the summer of 1937.¹⁵ The total number of children aged three to fifteen who were evacuated is estimated to have been around 20,000-25,000.¹⁶

The Basque Children’s Committee (BCC) in Britain was set up without any help from the British government. It took on the task of ensuring the safe evacuation of the children in the first instance and then with the ongoing care of the children while they remained in Britain. Significantly, the BCC also took on the role of verifying the gradual repatriation of the children. This dissertation will draw attention to the limitations of the BCC in the face of the repressive regime in Northern Spain from July 1937 onwards. It appears that in spite of the best efforts of the BCC, the safety of all the children returning to Spain in the late 1930s and early 1940s could not be guaranteed. Evidence suggests that the Nationalists pressurised Basque parents to request the return of their children, regardless of their ability to care for them. This undermined the BCC’s ability to ensure the safe return of all children to their parents. The BCC received limited support from both the British government and the British Labour Movement. It will be argued that the Labour Movement, comprised of the Trades Union Congress and the Labour party, remained largely uncommitted to the Spanish cause. Fears of communist association limited the movement’s ability and willingness to support the Republicans. Although the plight of the Basque children appealed to the humanitarian sympathies of many Labour individuals, the Labour Movement’s support of the Basque children was, on the whole, short-lived. The British Conservative government, meanwhile, took a harsh stance on the Basque refugee children from the outset. The non-intervention policy agreed in 1936 meant that that the proposed acceptance of the refugees was met with fierce debate. Whilst the government did eventually agree to the evacuation, the children were refused further aid once they arrived in Britain. Furthermore, the government continued to press for the repatriation of the refugees from the moment of their arrival in May 1937, prioritising the appeasement of Franco and its own financial obligations over the children of a foreign conflict. The start of World War Two

¹¹ Martin Minchom, *Spain’s Martyred Cities: From the Battle of Madrid to Picasso’s Guernica* (Eastbourne, 2015), p. 140.

¹² Ian Patterson, *Guernica and Total War* (London, 2007), p. 17.

¹³ Steer, ‘Bombing of Guernica’.

¹⁴ Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (London, 2012), p. 436.

¹⁵ Dorothy Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation* (Nevada, 1984) p. ix.

¹⁶ Iris Guske, *Trauma and Attachment in the Kindertransport Context: German-Jewish Child Refugees’ Accounts of Displacement and Acculturation in Britain* (Newcastle, 2009), p. 6.

in 1939 added weight to the argument that Britain should not be responsible for the care of another nation's refugees whilst Britain itself was facing war.

The continued persecution of the Basques after the end of the Civil War meant that many Basque child refugees in Britain lacked safe homes to return to. It had been anticipated that the children would stay for a short period of a few months, but as late as 1939 the continued repression in Spain meant that around 1,600 Basque children remained in Britain.¹⁷ The fall of Bilbao in July 1937 had enabled Franco to control the Basques through fear and persecution. Hundreds of Basques fell victim to firing squads, and 'many doctors, lawyers, architects, and engineers had their licences to practice withdrawn'.¹⁸ The Basque language was suppressed as part of Franco's goal to assimilate the region into the new Spanish regime. Under these circumstances, the British government faced disagreement over the planned repatriation of the Basque children. The debates over repatriation within the government and the British Labour Movement will be discussed alongside the response and approach taken by the Basque Children's Committee. In order to fully understand these debates concerning the acceptance and repatriation of the Basque child refugees, it is first necessary to outline the level of attention and care required by the children in Britain. Chapter one of this dissertation will examine the support the children needed in their early base at Southampton. This will explain why both the Conservative government and the Labour Movement were reluctant to take responsibility for the costs involved.

Whilst there has been limited research into the experience of the 4,000 Basque child refugees evacuated to Britain in May 1937, Dorothy Legarreta's *The Guernica Generation* offers the most comprehensive analysis of the Basque children evacuated overseas. Legarreta uses detailed primary sources which shed light on the role played by the BCC and the debates over repatriation. The works of Paul Preston, Michael Alpert and Raymond Carr provide useful analysis of the broader Spanish conflict, whilst Burnett Bolloten's texts examine the part a suggested European communist conspiracy played in the Spanish Civil War. Tom Buchanan and Jim Fyrth discuss the roles of the British Labour Movement and the Trades Union Congress in supporting the Republican cause. Whilst Buchanan argues that the British Labour Movement played a significant role in aiding the Basque refugees and the Republican cause, Fyrth contends that the movement failed to mobilise any form of significant support. He argues that the Labour Movement was crippled by its fear of communist association. Peter Anderson's research into the repatriation debates is useful for detailing the hazardous conditions faced by many repatriated children. Primary sources including the House of Lords and House of Commons archives have been essential in researching the parliamentary debates concerning the acceptance and repatriation of the children, whilst the Archives of the Trades Union Congress in Warwick's digital archives collection gives insights into the roles played by the Labour Party and TUC in the care and support of the Basque refugees in England. Finally, the University of Southampton's Special Collections relating Basque refugee children contains a number of items including letters, newspaper cuttings and photographs documenting the experiences of the Basque children in Britain, particularly during their stay in Southampton. These documents have been examined in order to understand the level of funding and care the evacuees required.

Today, the Association for the UK Basque Children encourages research and inquiry into the evacuation of the 4,000 Basque children. The aim of the association is 'to advance

¹⁷ Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, p. 219.

¹⁸ Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust*, p. 439.

the education of the public, academics and students in the subject of the exile'.¹⁹ Founded in 2002 by 'Natalia Benjamin, daughter of a *maestra* and by Manuel Moreno, son on a *nina vasca*, in collaboration with Helvecia Hidalgo, herself a *nina*',²⁰ the website is used to publicise upcoming meetings and talks and to provide a community for those impacted by the evacuation.

¹⁹ 'The Association: Who we are', The Association for the UK Basque Children, <https://www.basquechildren.org/colonies/history> (viewed 12 March 2018).

²⁰ Ibid.

Chapter 1
Evacuation: The Basque Refugee Children in Southampton,
May-September 1937

The Basque children arrived in Britain in May 1937, traumatised by war and in need of a high level of care and support, most of which came from British volunteers and generous donations to the cause under the direction of the Basque Children's Committee (BCC). Alpert writes, 'the British public was very sympathetic to the cause of the Basque people, whom it saw as resembling themselves – conservative seamen, farmers, miners and steelmen – and fighting for their ancestral liberties'.²¹ This chapter will examine the experience of the children in North Stoneham Camp, Southampton, between May and September 1937, in order to demonstrate the level of care the Basque evacuees were in need of. The responses of the local community and voluntary organisations will be compared with those of the government and the Labour Movement. The refugees arrived in need of medical attention, funding for food and clothing, and then long-term residency after the camp was closed in September. The British government was reluctant to offer any form of aid since the country was in economic decline in the late 1930s.

Aileen Moore, a nurse in a medical unit which accompanied the children, describes the journey on board the S.S. Habana from Bilbao to Southampton in *The Nursing Mirror*: 'sounds of anguish filled the air – the children were very seasick'.²² The chaos on board was intensified by mishaps in organisation due to the rapid nature of the evacuation: 'through some misfortune only 500 of the 1,500 mattresses ordered to supplement berth accommodation arrived. We had 4 children to a berth and rugs on the floor when mattresses failed. All saloons were crammed'. An account in *The Boston Medical Journal* reported that on their arrival some children 'were lying rolled in blankets, others running about the ship screaming, and a few, cool and complacent, appeared to accept the circumstances of their arrival in a strange land, having been parted with their parents, without any emotion'.²³ The Civil War in Spain, which had seemed so distant for the majority of British people, became a reality when these desperate children disembarked from the S.S. Habana at Southampton in the summer of 1937.

In the lead up to the arrival of the children, 'a crew of over two hundred (including Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, professors and plumbers) worked to prepare the site'.²⁴ The Southampton camp consisted of three fields of tents set up just two weeks in advance by volunteers from the community.²⁵ 140 acres of land was covered by 120 tents and 3-4 marquees, one of which was a designated medical marquee.²⁶ Upon their arrival, the children were given medical examinations, their tags indicating their health: 'white meant "clean", red was

²¹ Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, p. 120.

²² Aileen Moore, 'The Exodus of the Basque Children', *Nursing Mirror and Midwives' Journal* 29 (19 May 1937), p. 436.

²³ Maurice Williams, 'The arrival of the Basque children at Southampton', *The Boston Medical Journal* (12 June 1937), p. 1210.

²⁴ Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, p. 109.

²⁵ 'Overview of the Colonies', The Association for the UK Basque Children at <https://www.basquechildren.org/colonies/history> (viewed 12 December 2017).

²⁶ Robert Gibson, 'Four Thousand Basque Children: The Refugee Camp at North Stoneham', *The Lancet* (6 November 1937), p. 1091.

“verminous”...Blue meant “infectious” or “contagious”²⁷ Within the camp the children were organised ‘according to their parents’ political affiliations: Republican, Communist and Nationalist’.²⁸ At the camp the children followed a strict daily routine, had regular medical check-ups, and enjoyed outings to keep them occupied. Writing for *The Lancet*, Ronald Gibson paints a vivid picture of the newly arrived children grieving their devastated homes and families:

Picture the medical tent that night. In the inner room a hysterical maestra weeping for her lost relatives in Bilbao; in the outer room two young boys found by the St. John’s men too exhausted and collapsed to reach their own tent.²⁹

Victims of trauma, the children required constant care and attention. Richard James Sillence and John Henry Sillence, brothers and volunteers at the Southampton camp, kept a scrapbook of mostly newspaper cuttings and photographs of the children’s experience at Southampton for the weeks or months that they were there (time spent in the camp depended on the transferral of the children to ‘colonies’), throughout May to September 1937. A ‘Personal Statement’ attached to the scrapbook explains the intentions behind their documentation of life in the camp:

In making this book, we who were volunteer workers at the Basque Camp Southampton, have tried to present the record of the childrens’ stay at this camp as truly as possible.

We have chosen the newspapers of Southampton as the material with which to construct this book.

It is our desire that this book will be eventually taken to Spain so that the parents of these children will have amongst them a history of their stay at this camp.³⁰

The Sillence brothers’ scrapbook is a first-hand record of daily life in the camp and provides an insight into the work carried out by volunteers. It appears that political differences in the Southampton community were set aside in order to prioritize the safety of the refugees on their arrival in Britain:

Over one thousand people, representing many different shades of political and religious opinion, passed unanimously, at a meeting in Southampton Guildhall last night, a resolution welcoming to England the four thousand Basque children due to arrive from war.³¹

²⁷ Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, p. 108.

²⁸ Rumeana Jahangir, ‘Spanish Civil War: The child refugees Britain didn’t want’, (2016) at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-35532286> (viewed 4 March 2018).

²⁹ Robert Gibson, ‘Four Thousand Basque Children’, p. 1092.

³⁰ Hartley Library, University of Southampton, MS 370 Basque refugee children archives A4010/1, Artefact, scrapbook: ‘A concise history of the Basque Children’s Camp, Southampton, 1937 compiled by Richard James Sillence and John Henry Sillence, Coxford, Southampton, volunteer workers at the camp’, May-September 1937.

³¹ Ibid.

Early newspaper cuttings from May 1937, preserved in this scrapbook, detail the voluntary work that went into ensuring the camp was ready in time for the arrival of the refugees: ‘hundreds of men and women have given up their Whitsun holiday to get this camp ready for the refugees’, and ‘employers of the Southampton Gas Company and Corporation Water Department offered to work right through the holiday to have these essential services ready as quickly as possible’.³² Providing the children with entertainment, particularly as the prospects for their repatriation became less clear, helped to ensure the order and structure of the camp. Another newspaper cutting describes a typical night when ‘the children were kept thoroughly amused with a special entertainment. Music was relayed over the loud speakers, and the whole camp joined in community singing’.³³ This scrapbook provides evidence that the volunteers gave the children the means to build reasonably normal and productive lives in Britain. In North Stoneham camp the refugees enjoyed ‘freedom from fear, quiet and good food’.³⁴ The lack of government aid, which will be later discussed in depth, meant that the Basque refugees were totally reliant on the support of the local community in Southampton and other communities across Britain as they were later dispersed into colonies. Fortunately, volunteers and donations were forthcoming and the level of care and support provided was, on the whole, of high quality. Local shops and bakers provided the camp with food when possible and ‘water was piped into the site and cooking facilities constructed. A clothing tent was raised to house the tons of used clothing which poured in from the general public as well as a huge donation from Marks and Spencer’.³⁵ The children were also treated to a daily ration of chocolate donated by Cadbury’s.³⁶

The Southampton camp did face ongoing health issues. According to an article from *The British Medical Journal* in October 1937, ‘war conditions had affected the hygiene habits of the children, who deposited faeces and urine everywhere’.³⁷ It is unsurprising that a camp which housed four thousand temporarily parentless children was struck by serious cases of illness, including typhoid and scarlet fever. An article in *The Lancet*, November 1937 states, ‘on the first day [of the children’s arrival in Southampton] 23 sick children were sent from the camp to Moorhill and some from the port, including one pulmonary tuberculosis’.³⁸ This same article also reports that 22 children fell ill with measles during their stay at Southampton.³⁹ Volunteers and helpers were faced ‘with two cases of typhoid from the boat and another from the camp in the first week’.⁴⁰ The large number of weakened children living in close quarters provided a breeding ground for disease so the children were watched carefully for symptoms. Illness and fear of the spread of infection meant the camp was laid out into a headquarters marquee, a casualty marquee, an isolation camp, and Moorhill, which acted as a temporary hospital.⁴¹ These health concerns were an added burden for volunteers.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, p. 109.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Richard Taylor, ‘Typhoid Fever in the Basque Refugee Camp’, *The British Medical Journal* (16 October 1937), p. 760.

³⁸ Gibson, ‘Four Thousand Basque Children’, p. 1094.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 1095.

⁴¹ Taylor, ‘Typhoid Fever in the Basque Refugee Camp’, p. 760.

Whilst the camp at Southampton provided a safe haven for the children, they continued to be disturbed by news of the ongoing events in Spain which affected their parents, families and homes and which delayed their return to Spain. On June 19 1937 Bilbao fell to Franco's Nationalists. Gibson writes, 'it is impossible to describe the howl of dismay and anguish which went up as the news was broadcast'.⁴² The events which unfolded in the Basque region confirmed the need for refuge in Britain for the Basque children. Following the collapse of Bilbao 'nearly eight thousand [Basques] were imprisoned...when executions began, in December following the first trials, there would be several hundred victims of firing squads'.⁴³ Franco's mission to destroy his enemies endangered the families of many of the child refugees in Britain, making it impossible for those children to return home in the near future. The fall of Bilbao made it clearer than ever that their stay would be longer than had been originally anticipated. As the weeks turned into months and in some cases into years, the refugees' reliance on voluntary funds became even more important, and the British government's lack of aid even more significant.

As many children remained in Britain by the beginning of winter, they were distributed across the country to 'colonies' established by the Basque Children's Committee. These colonies were homes set up and run by local communities. Less than 300 children had been repatriated home to Spain by the end of 1937 and therefore 'a full-scale campaign to send the children to more permanent colonies in the various communities where local BCC committees were active was launched shortly after the refugees arrived in May...Some 90 colonies were opened in England, Scotland, and Wales during 1937'.⁴⁴ The Montrose colony in Scotland, which housed twenty four Basque children, is a typical example. An article in *The Scotsman* reported that help for the children in this area came 'chiefly from the poor people of Britain'.⁴⁵ Funding in the region of £15 a week was needed for this home.⁴⁶ Visitors to the colony noted that the children seemed generally contented and entertained, with the younger children able to play on the spacious grounds and the older girls 'assisting in the running of the home'.⁴⁷ Lessons in English were given by volunteers who commented that the children received a better education than they would have done in wartime Spain.⁴⁸ Inevitably, there were differences in conditions across the various colonies given that they were run by local volunteers and funded by local communities.

This chapter has evidenced that the level of care and support the children received from volunteers was, on the whole, extremely good. The credit for this lies with the Basque Children's Committee, which organized the evacuation and raised the required funds. The child refugees, traumatised by war, arrived malnourished, and in need of a high level of medical, emotional and educational support, none of which was provided by the British government. Whilst the evacuation and the organisation of the care provided for the children was somewhat rushed and haphazard, the generosity of volunteers enabled the children to have access to food, housing, and medical care, which they were unlikely to have received in wartime Spain. It must

⁴² Gibson, 'Four Thousand Basque Children', p. 109.

⁴³ Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust*, p. 436.

⁴⁴ Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, p. 116.

⁴⁵ 'The Basque Children', *The Scotsman* (8 December 1937).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ 'New Home Enchants Basque Refugees', *Montrose Review* (24 September 1937), p. 8.

⁴⁸ A directory of the colonies across Britain can be found at 'The Colonies', The Association for the UK Basque Children, <https://www.basquechildren.org/colonies/directory> (viewed 2 March 2018).

be noted, however, that the British government's failure to provide any type of aid did put great pressure on local communities and voluntary organizations who rallied round to support the refugees.

Chapter 2

Repatriation: The Role of The Basque Children's Committee (BCC)

In May 1937 the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief (NJCSR), the committee responsible for providing aid to victims of the conflict in Spain, set up the Basque Children's Committee (BCC).⁴⁹ This voluntary committee accepted full financial responsibility for the Basque children as the British government was unwilling to devote any of its sparse resources to the cause. Indeed, the Home Office agreed to the evacuation under a set of predetermined conditions, including the understanding that the children would be of 'no cost to the Treasury'.⁵⁰ In order to cover the initial costs, 'committee members from the NJCSR travelled all over England, Scotland, and Wales to establish small local branches of the BCC to raise funds for the children's care'.⁵¹ The BCC was chaired by the Duchess of Atholl. The Duchess was 'an avowed Tory in her ancestral seat in the House of Lords, she had been nicknamed the "Red Duchess" by the British press for her spirited espousal of the Spanish Republic'.⁵² Prominent members of the committee included 'Mr Tewson, Labour representative of the leftist Trades Union Congress; Wilfred Roberts, a Liberal M.P.; and a Communist M.P. from the Labour Party, Eleanor Rathbone...Right-wing Tory Captain MacNamara, Conon Craven from Roman Catholic Archbishop Hinsley's office, and the Salvation Army's militaristic Colonel Gordon'.⁵³ The BCC was also supported by the Catholic Church and the Trades Union Congress.⁵⁴

Many of the children remained in Britain far longer than originally anticipated and were reliant during their prolonged stay on the full support of the BCC. Whilst the children were cared for in colonies across the country which were funded by donations, local communities and fundraising events, but the BCC remained the backbone of their financial survival. A letter from Vincent Tewson of the Trades Union Congress to Mansfield and District Trades Council outlines this point:

In certain cases the financial responsibility for a Home is taken by a Local Committee in the district, but in many instances the National Committee [the BCC] is compelled either to be entirely or partly responsible for maintenance.⁵⁵

The Basque Children's Committee faced the challenge of looking after 4,000 children who were entirely reliant on donations for food, clothing, medical care and education. In spite of governmental pressure to repatriate the children, by Britain's entry into World War Two in September 1939, 'some six hundred of the original contingent of Basque children were allowed

⁴⁹ Tom Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 163.

⁵⁰ Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, p. 102.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., p. 127.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Susan Pederson, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 287.

⁵⁵ Letter from Vincent Tewson to A. Hooper, 30 October 1939, Archives of the Trades Union Congress, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (292/946/38/62).

to remain'.⁵⁶ What is more, 'by war's end in 1945, exactly four hundred and ten [Basque child refugees] were left, most of whom live in Britain at present'.⁵⁷ This group of children without families in Spain were given the opportunity to build their lives in Britain with the continued support of the BCC.

In addition to organisation of the initial evacuation of the Basque children, their stay in Southampton, and their transfer to colonies, the BCC oversaw the repatriation terms for each child. In this area, the BCC was less successful. Concerns over the whereabouts of parents, the difficult situation in the Basque region following months of heavy bombing, and continued persecution within the Nationalist occupied region following July 1937, meant it was important for the BCC to fully scrutinise every repatriation request. Not only were there fears that the children would return to poverty or to find their parents missing, but there was a real danger that those orphaned by the conflict would be taken into Nationalist care homes and indoctrinated with Francoist dogma. With the fall of Bilbao to the Insurgents in July 1937, the victorious Nationalist forces demanded that parents of expatriated children request their return. The continued stay of so many Basque children in Britain throughout late 1937, and even after the end of the Civil War in 1939, was seen as an obstacle to Franco's mission for Spain. News articles published in the region during this time evidence the Nationalist displeasure:

The presence of our children in England...serves to defame the New Spain, our army, and the glorious Caudillo (Franco). The absence of the children is a sword in our hearts, the evacuation, a political farce...It is required that all parents of expatriated children, especially those in England, immediately reclaim them.⁵⁸

The longer the children remained in Britain, the more Franco considered their exile to be 'a source of international embarrassment'.⁵⁹ Francoist forces in the region placed pressure on Basque parents in the form of fear and violence to demand the return of their children. This was effective since 'help (food, clothing, medical care) was only available through the Fascist channels'.⁶⁰ Lists of the names of children whose return had been requested were sent continuously to the BCC from July 1937 onwards. According to Legarreta, 'parents were afraid of the consequences of not reclaiming their children...Franco wanted every child back'.⁶¹ Even so, 'by February 1939, when war in Spain ended, 1,600 remained in the country'.⁶² The pressure exerted on parents by Francoist forces is evidenced by the example, brought up in a BCC meeting in July 1937, of one child who received a letter from his parents which appeared to have been written under duress:

One of the boys received a letter from his parents, saying that everything in Bilbao was now normal, and food was plentiful...He pointed to a small tear at the corner of the letter which he said was a pre-arranged signal from his father that nothing in a letter with a torn corner was to be believed. Mrs Manning submitted that pressure was being brought on Bilbao parents to write such letters by Bilbao authorities.⁶³

⁵⁶ Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, p. 134.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ *Gaceta del Norte*, September 7th 1937, p. 1, in Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, p. 204.

⁵⁹ Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, p.215.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 223.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 217.

⁶² Ibid., p. 219.

⁶³ BCC minutes, July 28 1937, p. 2, in Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, p. 213.

It is clear that the BCC's task of ensuring that all children were returned to their safe, rightful homes was made difficult by this type of Francoist coercion. This battle between parents and Francoist forces continued even after the end of the Civil War. In the following letter a father writes to his children in England in July 1939 urging them not to return to Spain:

I am without job, and therefore, if you are obliged to come to Bilbao, I cannot maintain you...Don't listen to nobody but me.⁶⁴

A programme of political domination meant that children of parents considered enemies of the state faced the possibility of being placed into Francoist care homes set up to indoctrinate the children of political opponents. Peter Anderson, in his studies of the evacuation and repatriation of the Basque children to Britain in 1937, examines the view of historian Ricard Vinyes⁶⁵ who suggests that 'a good proportion of children repatriated to Spain would belong to parents who had perished, or suffered imprisonment, exile or poverty. These children, therefore, stood in great danger of passing into Francoist care homes'.⁶⁶ Indeed, 'General Franco's regime in Spain removed thousands of children from political opponents, placed them in care homes and brought them up to hold their parents and their values in contempt'.⁶⁷ Anderson relates the story of a Basque child brought up in a Francoist home. The girl writes indignantly to her imprisoned mother, "I know my father was a criminal. I am going to become a nun. I renounce my mother and father, don't write to me anymore".⁶⁸ This example of a child taught to disown her parents illustrates the very real threat of life-long separation between parents and vulnerable children in the Basque country as Franco gained dominance over Spain. Under these circumstances it was unlikely that the BCC would be able to ensure the safe repatriation of all Basque child refugees. Yet, slowly but surely, the Basque children were repatriated.

Letters sent to the BCC from individual colonies throughout Britain express grave concerns over the children selected for repatriation. An analysis of the correspondence between Ipswich and District Committee for Spanish Refugee Children and the BCC in March 1938 proves useful for understanding the debates concerning the repatriation issue. One letter highlights the cases of children who were to be repatriated on uncertain terms:

Esther Delgado: this girl's father has been a prisoner for some time...

⁶⁴ This letter, written in English, was made available by Joaqain Sanchez Velado in London, 1980, referenced in Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, p. 224.

⁶⁵ Peter Anderson refers to R. Vinyes 'The Prison Universe under the Franco Regime', *Museu d'Historia de Catalunya, Les Presons de Franco* (Barcelona 2004), 279–90, 285. R. Vinyes, 'Las desapariciones infantiles durante el franquismo y sus consecuencias', *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, 19, 1 (2006), 53–71, 66–8 in 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) (2016), p. 299.

⁶⁶ Anderson, 'The Struggle over the Evacuation to the United Kingdom and Repatriation of Basque Refugee Children in the Spanish Civil War', p. 298.

⁶⁷ Peter Anderson, 'Spain's Lost Children' (2017), at <https://www.britac.ac.uk/blog/spains-lost-children> (viewed 10 December 2017).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

...Felisa Hurtado, Vicentu: these children receive letters, but parents constantly urge them to stay in England as long as possible and not to go back to Bilbao.⁶⁹

A second letter from Ipswich and District Committee for Spanish Refugee Children asserts that the children were being repatriated to 'rebel territory'.⁷⁰ The BCC replied stating that 'arrangements for the physical care of children at Bilbao are quite good...the only other safeguard we have is a definite undertaking that we could ask for children back if there is any evidence that they have been sent by mistake'.⁷¹ In spite of these ongoing concerns, the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief and Basque Children's Trust Report in November 1941 claims, 'no child was returned to Spain unless it was definitely going to a relation or official guardian'.⁷² According to a letter sent by trade unionist Vincent Tewson to Chloe Vulliamy, Ipswich and District Committee for Spanish Refugee Children committee in March 1938, 'out of the 1,200 children returned there are only two cases of doubt and these are subject to special enquiry'.⁷³ The number of cases which were disputed by individual colonies indicates, however, that these 'two cases of doubt' were not representative of the true situation and the number of children wrongly returned is likely to have been far higher. Even so, whilst the BCC was not always able to validate the repatriation requests from parents, its extensive efforts to ensure families were reunited did see that 'most repatriated children returned to their families',⁷⁴ even if those families' circumstances were less than ideal. This aspect of repatriation should be deemed a minor success in the scheme of things, since the BCC, despite mounting pressures, attempted to ensure that those returned at least had living family in Spain.

Whilst the BCC's priority was to ensure each child was returned to a safe family environment, evidence suggests that this was often not the case. On their return, many Basque children found their families living in tragic circumstances. In a study of twenty-six Basque children who were repatriated, eight found their fathers had been shot in prison, three found their fathers were in jail, two found their mothers had died, four found their mothers had been exiled, two found their brothers had died, and eight had been reclaimed without parental request.⁷⁵ It was not uncommon for parents of repatriated children to be later executed as enemies of the new regime. Legarreta writes that orphanages were opened 'for those children whose parents were dead, in prison, ill, or in exile. Again the price was political adherence to Franco'.⁷⁶ Given the level of Francoist repression and persecution in the Basque region, it can be reasonably argued that the BCC could not possibly guarantee the safety of every child repatriated.

⁶⁹ Letter from Walter Citrine to Duchess of Atholl, 28 October 1943, Archives of the Trades Union Congress, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (292/946/38/15).

⁷⁰ Letter from Chloe Vulliamy to G. T. Garrett, 13 March 1938, Archives of the Trades Union Congress, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (292/946/38/151).

⁷¹ Letter from G. T. Garrett to Chloe Vulliamy, 14 March 1938, Archives of the Trades Union Congress, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (292/946/38/151).

⁷² Report of National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, November 1941, Archives of the Trades Union Congress, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (292/946/38/24).

⁷³ Letter from Vincent Tewson to Chloe Vulliamy, 23 March 1938, Archives of the Trades Union Congress, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (292/946/38/151).

⁷⁴ Anderson, 'The Struggle over the Evacuation to the United Kingdom and Repatriation of Basque Refugee Children in the Spanish Civil War', p. 317.

⁷⁵ Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, p. 283.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

To conclude this chapter it is clear that the Basque Children's Committee played an essential role in ensuring the safe evacuation of the Basque children to Britain. The subsequent high level of support and care given to the children during their stay, as illustrated by the previous chapter, was undoubtedly an achievement, especially given the lack of financial support from the British government. Where the BCC was less successful was in its ability to oversee the repatriation of the refugees. Whilst the committee sought to ensure the children were returned safely to parents willing and able to care for them, evidence suggests this was not always the case. Francoist repression and a campaign of political indoctrination in Spain, combined with pressure for a speedy repatriation from the British government and dwindling support from the British Labour Movement, meant children were sometimes returned to less than favourable conditions. These factors will be examined in the following chapters. Many Basque children are likely to have returned to impoverished homes and to parents considered enemies of the state. Some undoubtedly returned as orphans, or soon to be orphans.

Chapter 3

The Shortcomings of the British Labour Movement

This chapter will assess the response of the British Labour Movement including the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to the ‘problem’ of the Basque children evacuated to Britain. The role of the Labour Movement in the evacuation and ongoing support of the refugees will be examined. Both Clement Attlee, the Labour Party leader, and Walter Citrine, General Secretary of the TUC, were sympathetic towards the Basque refugees but failed to generate popular support for the cause. As a result, their influence over the evacuation and ongoing care of the Basque refugees was limited. Tom Buchanan, however, argues that the role played by the Labour Movement in supporting the Basque children has been understated. This view will be considered alongside Jim Fyrth’s assertion that the fear of supporting communism limited the willingness of the British Labour Movement to provide aid for the Republicans, and meant that the movement failed to mobilise large scale support for the Spanish cause.⁷⁷ Instead, it was left to individuals such as Labour MPs Leah Manning and Ellen Wilkinson to take the initiative. These women helped to organise the evacuation in the face of hostility from both Labour politicians and the TUC. Humanitarian concerns over the Basque children within the Labour Movement did lead the TUC to support the initial evacuation in May 1937, but this chapter will argue that the financial aid provided by the movement was short-lived. It appears that the movement lost interest in providing further support for the refugees as their stay was prolonged.

Buchanan argues that the British Labour Movement played an essential role in aiding the Basque child refugees, asserting that humanitarian sympathies were prioritised over political motivations.⁷⁸ According to Buchanan the Spanish conflict was ‘an annoyance, because they [labour leaders] could be forced to challenge the British government over its policy of Non-Intervention’.⁷⁹ Taking action over Spain would potentially alienate the Labour Movement’s Catholic supporters and ‘it challenged the cohesion of the labour movement that had been established to deter the mass membership from engaging in independent political action’.⁸⁰ In spite of these implications, the movement endeavoured to support the Basque refugees: ‘since June 1937 a broad coalition had funded and run a Southampton Home for Basque children’.⁸¹ Even though there were differences of opinion on the Spanish conflict within the Labour Movement, political views were put aside in order to reach out and help the Basque children. Indeed, the Labour Movement set up the Save the Basque Children fund in 1937, and ‘by 9 June this appeal had brought in some £2840’.⁸² Joint circular leaflets were distributed by the TUC and Labour Party to their supporters. The following leaflet addressed ‘To Affiliated Trade Unions, Trades Councils, Constituency and Local Labour Parties, Women’s Sections and

⁷⁷ Jim Fyrth, ‘The Aid Spain Movement in Britain, 1936-39’, *History Workshop*, 35 (1993), pp. 153-164.

⁷⁸ Tom Buchanan, ‘The Role of the British Labour Movement in the Origins and Work of the Basque Children’s Committee’, *European History Quarterly*, 18(2) (1998), p. 157.

⁷⁹ Tom Buchanan, ‘Britain’s Popular Front?: Aid Spain and the British Labour Movement’, *History Workshop*, 31 (1991), p. 68.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁸² Buchanan, ‘The Role of the British Labour Movement’, p. 161.

Leagues of Youth' in May 1937 requests support for the impending evacuation of the Basque children.⁸³

We feel we can rely on you to do everything you can to raise the money which is necessary to help the Labour Movement to take its full share in the carrying out of this most humane and praiseworthy duty. Contributions received for this purpose will be placed to the International Solidarity Fund, and will be earmarked to Save the Basque Children.⁸⁴

Walter Citrine, General Secretary of the TUC, highlights the contribution of the Labour Movement to the Republican struggle:

As you are aware, right from the beginning of the Spanish conflict, constant and steady help has been afforded by our Movement...to our comrades in Spain.

...it can be said with certainty that by far the largest and most regular consignments of commodities for meeting the humanitarian needs in Spain, have been sent by the organised Labour Movement.⁸⁵

This source demonstrates Citrine's belief that the Labour Movement was providing significant support for the anti-fascist campaign in Spain. The evidence, it will be argued, does not support this assertion. Whilst it is true that the Labour Movement did provide some aid to the Republicans during the conflict and did support the evacuation of the children, Citrine attributes far too much credit to the Labour Movement. As General Secretary of the TUC, Citrine cannot be seen as an objective observer of the situation.

The Labour Party generally adopted a neutral stance towards Spain which can largely be explained by its fears of associating with communism. Buchanan concedes that this fear made the movement reluctant to lend their support to the wider Republican cause in Spain, even to aid groups providing food and basic supplies. Since 'the Communist party had adopted the Spanish Republican cause enthusiastically',⁸⁶ the Labour Party was wary of providing aid to Spain. Following the lead of the Conservative government, the party adopted the non-interventionist stance towards the Spanish conflict and, on the whole, remained neutral to groups such as Spanish Medical Aid, the Voluntary Industrial Aid for Spain campaign, and the International Brigades.⁸⁷ Historically communists had played an active role in the Labour Party but by the late 1920s a crackdown on communist members meant 'in Britain Labour anticommunism operated within the mainstream of British politics'.⁸⁸ Since the mobilisation of a popular front against the Fascist uprising in Spain necessarily involved communists,⁸⁹ the Labour Party distanced itself from the conflict altogether. On the whole, 'Labour Party policy

⁸³ Save the Basque Children (circular), 7 May 1937, Archives of the Trades Union Congress, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (292/946/29/7).

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Buchanan, 'The Role of the British Labour Movement', p. 157.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 156.

⁸⁸ Jennifer Luff, 'Labour Anticommunism in the United States of America and the United Kingdom, 1920-1949', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 53(1) (2018), p. 111.

⁸⁹ C. Fleay, M. L. Sanders, 'The Labour Spain Committee: Labour Party and the Spanish Civil War', *The Historical Journal*, 28(1) (1985), p. 189.

toward the Spanish Civil War was as torpid and as ambivalent as that of the National government'.⁹⁰

The TUC showed the same reluctance to support a cause with communist involvement. In May 1937, when the 4,000 Basque children needed to be evacuated, the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief 'approached the TUC for co-operation but this was refused because that committee included Communists'.⁹¹ It was not until the formation of the Basque Children's Committee, specifically dedicated to this cause and free of communist members, that the TUC agreed to co-operate.⁹² The lack of action taken by both the Labour party and the TUC undermines Buchanan's argument that the Labour Movement made an essential contribution to the cause of the Basque children. Citrine's appraisal of the significant role played by the TUC is also called into question.

The most significant help for the Republicans came from individuals within the Labour movement who acted mostly upon their own initiative. Since aiding the Basque children was arguably an infringement of the non-intervention agreement, the Labour Movement was split over this issue. Fyrth argues that 'the credit' for the Labour Movement's support of the Aid Spain movement 'belongs to those activists and organizations, who were usually acting independently of their national leaders, and were often highly critical of them'.⁹³ Individuals included Leah Manning, a Labour MP, who travelled independently to the Basque region to help with the evacuation having been committed to the cause since the onset of the war. According to Hugo Garcia, the NJCSR 'was born as a result of the visit to Madrid of a parliamentary delegation organised by Manning'.⁹⁴ In May 1937 Manning was sent to the Basque region not as a Labour representative but on behalf of the NJCSR to assess the situation. A memorandum of an interview with Walter Citrine on 3 May 1937 on the 'Spanish Situation: Evacuation of Refugees – Bilbao' demonstrates the TUC's hostility towards the progress made by Manning:

It seemed to me singular that this request should come from an unofficial source when I myself had been in frequent negotiations with the Basque Government representatives in this country.⁹⁵

Citrine was evidently displeased by Manning who appeared to be taking independent action without guidance from the British government. Manning was, indeed, responding directly to the urgency of the situation in Bilbao and the Basque government's requests for aid. She helped to organise the evacuation with Basque President, Jose Antonio Aguirre.⁹⁶ Manning played an integral role in the organisation of the evacuation in the face of hostility from the TUC and a lack of co-operation from the British government.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 197.

⁹¹ Fyrth, 'The Aid Spain Movement in Britain', p. 147.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Hugo Garcia, 'Potemkin in Spain? British Unofficial Missions of Investigation to Spain during the Civil War', *European History Quarterly*, 40(2) (2010), p. 227.

⁹⁵ Memorandum of Interview with Walter Citrine, 3 May 1937, Archives of the Trades Union Congress, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (292/946/16a/40(i)).

⁹⁶ James Cable, *The Royal Navy and the Siege of Bilbao* (Edinburgh, 1979), p. 120.

Meanwhile, Ellen Wilkinson, also a Labour MP, campaigned extensively for a united Labour front against fascism throughout the Spanish conflict, urging the Labour Party to mobilise a popular front. Wilkinson visited Spain several times throughout the 1930s and was horrified by the destruction caused by Franco's aerial raids. She pointed out time and time again in the House of Commons that these raids were perpetrated with the aid of Italy and Germany.⁹⁷ Matt Perry's analysis of Wilkinson in *'Red Ellen' Wilkinson: Her Idea, Movements and World* (2014) depicts her struggle to persuade the government to change its policy of non-intervention. Wilkinson condemned the bombing of Guernica and campaigned for the evacuation of the 4,000 Basque child refugees to Britain in 1937.⁹⁸ She worked with the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief to raise funds for the evacuation having befriended the Duchess of Atholl, chairman of the committee, and Eleanor Rathbone, vice-chairman, on a delegation to Spain in April 1937.⁹⁹ Wilkinson and a small group of Labour MPs, led by Labour leader Clement Attlee, visited Spain in 1937. On their return they produced a pamphlet titled 'We Saw in Spain' which urged the government to take a more proactive role in Spain. They argued that British inaction enabled the daily bombing of innocent citizens to continue. The section of the pamphlet written by Wilkinson draws attention to the children starving whilst the conflict raged on. Wilkinson believed that Britain had an obligation to at least supply food to victims:

The Spanish Republic will win through. How soon depends on us. The soldiers of the Republic are fighting the battle of democracy – our battle. It is our task to see that their children are fed.¹⁰⁰

In general, those who opposed the non-intervention agreement and held the belief that Britain should accept the Basque refugee children had usually travelled to Spain and had witnessed the destruction wrought by the conflict for themselves. However, 'traveling to Spain meant challenging the British authorities, and not many members of the establishment [government] were ready to take this step'.¹⁰¹ This reluctance to challenge the British authorities might explain the Labour Movement's failure to mobilise support for the Republicans. Attlee himself was unable to change the party's opinion on the non-intervention policy. In April 1937 he spoke in the House of Commons, questioning why nothing of significance had yet been done to help the Basque people:

The Basques, who are old friends of ours, are fighting for their liberty.

...The Basques stand for democracy.

...The Basque population are being driven out en masse by the rebels, and will any action be taken in regard to these victims?¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Matt Perry, *'Red Ellen' Wilkinson: Her Ideas, Movements and World* (Manchester, 2014), p. 324.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

¹⁰⁰ *We Saw in Spain* (pamphlet) issued by the Labour Party (Great Britain), 1937, Archives of the Trades Union Congress, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, (292/946/18a/69).

¹⁰¹ Garcia, 'Potemkin in Spain?' p. 228.

¹⁰² Parliamentary Archives, House of Commons, Mr Attlee, 'Situation at Bilbao', 14 April 1937 (332 cc10290145).

Even the party leader's urges for action could not sway the Labour Movement as a whole. Since the formation of a popular front in Spain necessitated communist involvement, humanitarian aid was the only form of aid sent.¹⁰³ The International Solidarity Fund and 'Milk for Spain' programmes were set up to provide relief for Republican victims of the conflict. Support in the form of military aid was non-existent.¹⁰⁴ As such, the movement's sympathies with the Republican cause were 'never translated into political aid for winning the war'.¹⁰⁵

Following the eventual evacuation of the Basque child refugees, the Labour Movement's support for the children gradually diminished. Correspondence between colonies across Britain and the Trades Union Congress is evidence of the TUC's unwillingness to continue to support the children as their stay in Britain extended indeterminately beyond the summer of 1937. In 1939 Trades Unionist Vincent Tewson explained, 'it is becoming increasingly difficult to secure funds' for the remaining Basque children.¹⁰⁶ Requests sent to Tewson for financial aid were rejected repeatedly from 1937 onwards. In response to an inquiry about a grant for one home, Rowley Lodge in Barnet, Tewson wrote:

The Spanish Fund was used to assist Basque children who came to this country during the Spanish war.

For eighteen months, however, the money raised has been used for Spanish seamen and has long since been exhausted.¹⁰⁷

This source demonstrates the TUC's growing disinterest in the Basque children. In response to an appeal in 1941 for funding made from a home housing twelve children in Plymouth, Tewson wrote:

I cannot promise any further assistance to Plymouth.

With the extraordinary responsibility we have had to face with the Spanish Seamen...we have not been able to assist the National Committee for Basque Children as we did when funds were available.¹⁰⁸

Dwindling funds were directed towards other causes, in this instance the Spanish Seamen. As the children's prolonged stay became a drain on funds and resources the TUC encouraged their speedy repatriation. This is particularly evident from 1939 onwards with the start of World War Two. For example, in response to concerns raised by guardians of children to be repatriated without thorough investigation, Tewson argued:

Personally I am entirely opposed to the suggestion that the batch of children whose cases have been verified and approved by the homes should be held up.

¹⁰³ Fleay, Sanders, 'The Labour Spain Committee', p. 189.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 192.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 197.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from Vincent Tewson to Will Maw, 17 October 1939, Archives of the Trade Unions Congress, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (292/946/38/72(i)).

¹⁰⁷ Letter from Vincent Tewson to Charles Dukes, 24 December 1940, Archives of the Trades Union Congress, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (292/946/38/38(i)).

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Vincent Tewson to E. J. Butler, 10 March 1941, Archives of the Trades Union Congress, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (292/946/38/34(i)).

...The financial position is very grave. Everyone who has come into contact with the children would like to keep them here until Spain is again in a peaceful state, but we have to be practical in our outlook.¹⁰⁹

The outbreak of war proved to be a turning point in the Labour Movement's willingness and ability to support the Basque children. Britain had now entered into an international crisis which meant funds were short. The needs of child refugees from Spain where the Civil War was now at an end were no longer seen to be a priority. From this point onwards, the financial support received by the BCC, including that from the Labour Party and the TUC, 'began to drop alarmingly'.¹¹⁰ According to Legarreta, 'with the beginning of World War Two...it was difficult to justify their continued expatriation within a country at war'.¹¹¹

Buchanan and Fyrth somewhat agree on the extent of the role played by the Labour Movement in sending aid to Spain. They both recognise that the fear of communism limited the movement's commitment to the mobilisation of a popular front to support the Republican cause. Whilst many Labour Politicians aligned ideologically with the Republican cause, fears over the rise of communism seemingly outweighed the desire to supply any meaningful form of aid: 'while the bulk of the Labour Party supported the Republicans, sensitivity about communist infiltration made the leadership reluctant to participate in any cross-party or 'popular' organisations'.¹¹² The movement did make an exception with its support of the Basque child victims but the credit for the evacuation lies mostly with individuals such as Leah Manning and Ellen Wilkinson, who acted independently of the movement. Whilst the movement eventually supported the evacuation, it offered limited financial aid for the refugees, and any aid it did offer was significantly reduced by the end of 1939. Whilst Buchanan asserts that the Labour Movement offered significant support for the initial evacuation, its support was, in fact, short-lived, which reduces its significance. After their evacuation to Britain, the Basque children remained reliant on donations from the general public and the continued support of the BCC. Whilst the Labour Movement was sympathetic to the Basque cause, it offered insufficient practical support.

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Vincent Tewson to Chloe Vulliamy, 23 March 1938, Archives of the Trades Union Congress, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (292/946/38/151(ii)).

¹¹⁰ Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, p. 128.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

¹¹² Pederson, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience*, p. 281.

Chapter 4

The British Government: Non-Intervention and the Rejection of the Basque Child Refugees

The British government, having advocated European non-intervention in Spain in 1936, maintained this policy throughout the course of the war. Neville Chamberlain's Conservative government held its position on Spain in spite of arguments against non-intervention in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords throughout the 1930s. News of civilian suffering in the Basque region sparked fierce debate which did eventually lead to the acceptance of 4,000 Basque refugees in May 1937. It has been argued, however, that this was only a small act of kindness in the midst of the terrible destruction and repression during the Spanish conflict. This chapter will consider the reasons behind the British government's unwillingness to intervene in the conflict in Spain and its reluctance to accept even a small number of refugees. It will be argued that the British government's fear of the spread of communism outweighed its fear of the rise of fascism. This fear led Britain to stand aside whilst Franco destroyed the Spanish Republic.

The British government believed that the acceptance of the refugees would be of international significance. As Anderson writes, 'the youngsters grew into symbols of Francoist violence'.¹¹³ He draws attention to the political implications of the evacuation for the Nationalists: 'the Francoists felt the evacuation brought unwelcome attention and propaganda to both atrocities and efforts to capture the children's souls taking place behind their lines'.¹¹⁴ Franco condemned those countries which accepted refugees. As the British Conservative government was determined to remain neutral to the Spanish conflict, politicians who prioritised peace were anxious about the implications of accepting these refugees. Indeed, Alpert writes, 'it looked as though the Spanish war really could be isolated if nobody rocked the boat'.¹¹⁵ The government feared that the acceptance of the refugees would be seen as a political manoeuvre against Franco, and a breach of the non-intervention agreement.

It is important to view the Basque crisis in the context of a growing fear of communism. Conservative politicians were more concerned over the rise of communism than the fascist threat in Spain. According to Buchanan, 'the Civil War gave rise to a mass movement of solidarity in Britain, that has been given the umbrella title of the 'Aid Spain Movement', in which the Communist Party played a leading role'.¹¹⁶ The Aid Spain Movement, which relied on communist input was 'based on hundreds of ad-hoc committees...it mainly organised the sending of humanitarian aid through the widespread raising of funds in streets, workplaces, and local labour movement organisations'.¹¹⁷ Consequently it was feared that communists were becoming more involved throughout these organisations across Britain. The right-wing government worried that their acceptance of the refugees would signify support for the communist cause both within Britain and internationally.

¹¹³ Anderson, 'The Struggle over the Evacuation to the United Kingdom and Repatriation of Basque Refugee Children in the Spanish Civil War', p. 298.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 306.

¹¹⁵ Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, p. 126.

¹¹⁶ Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement*, p. 5.

¹¹⁷ Andy Durgan, *The Spanish Civil War* (Hampshire, 2007), p. 72.

Communism appeared to be on the rise in Spain which fuelled the Nationalist argument that their rebellion was an act of defiance against the communist conspiracy in Spain. The Insurgents maintained that the coup of July 1936 was a necessary act to save Spain from this conspiracy.¹¹⁸ Nationalist propaganda, which portrayed the government as succumbing to communist upheaval from within, damaged the image of the Spanish Second Republic. The February 1936 elections in Spain did signify success for the communists: ‘the Popular Front gained 60 percent of the parliamentary seats’ and ‘seventeen of the twenty-two Communist candidates were elected’.¹¹⁹ Bolloben’s book, *The Grand Camouflage* (1961), explores the suggestion of a communist conspiracy in Spain in the late 1930s. He writes that the rise of Juan Negrin to Prime Minister of the Second Republic in May 1937, in the midst of the conflict, represented the counter-revolution of the communists’¹²⁰. This event, according to Bolloben, ‘marked the Communists’ greatest triumph in their rise to power’¹²¹. Bolloben’s assertion that a communist conspiracy in Spain represented a very real threat to the Republic and, furthermore, to European democracy, has been widely criticised by his contemporaries. For instance, the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) did win more seats in 1936 than they ever had historically, but they were still a minority group. Nevertheless, the perceived threat at the time was powerful enough to fuel Britain’s reluctance to support the Republican cause. It was feared that a united front in Britain against Fascist Spain would encourage the rise of communism: ‘there was a general fear, at official British level, of a left-wing subversion. People often compared Popular Front Spain and France with the Kerensky period in pre-Bolshevik Russia’.¹²²

There was concern amongst the general public, particularly amongst conservative supporters, that the Basque children were part of the wider left wing communist cause. For example, in May 1937, a member of the general public, John Hunt, wrote to Walter Citrine enclosing a donation for the Basque children. The letter states that Hunt’s donation should be used only for the children, not for the support for Spain:

I have instructed my bankers to send my “poor mite” of 10/- a week to you on the understanding that this amount is only to be used in the interests of the Basque children landed in England this weekend.

If there is a general fund which provides not only for this but for propaganda or any other political support for the communists or socialists in Spain, I am not in the slightest bit interested. My desire is simply to help these children to have a comfortable and happy time in England.¹²³

This letter illustrates the general concern that the rescue of the Basque children was linked to the socialist or communist cause. The letter is an acknowledgement that the British left wing,

¹¹⁸ Raymond Carr, *The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective* (London, 1993), p. 243.

¹¹⁹ Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven, 2004), p. 82.

¹²⁰ Burnett Bolloten, *The Grand Camouflage* (London, 1961), p. 17.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, p. 16.

¹²³ Hartley Library, University of Southampton, MS 404 Basque refugee children archives A4164 1/1, letter from John G. P Hunt to Sir Walter Citrine, May 1937.

and indeed the Communist Party, did send aid to the Republic, and the writer is anxious to separate the Basque children from the political situation in Spain.

In addition to the fears of supporting the rise of communism, many British politicians believed that the government should prioritise its domestic concerns. Britain's wellbeing required peace in Europe and there was a general belief that the best way to maintain peace was through the containment of fascism. Therefore, a policy of non-intervention in Spain was followed. In a House of Commons debate on Spain, Conservative MP Mr Hamilton Kerr, stated, 'I am persuaded that a policy of neutrality will serve not only our interests best but will serve the cause of European peace'.¹²⁴ It was argued that the health and wellbeing of British children should be prioritised over that of foreign children. The preservation of peace was essential for this, particularly since the economic climate in Britain in the 1930s meant that many people were left impoverished. Conservative MP Vice-Admiral Taylor commented in July 1937, 'it would be better to give a public grant to provide sufficient milk for our own school-children...before providing for children from other countries'.¹²⁵

Conservative politicians failed to realise that the Basque refugees needed urgent support, particularly as Franco offered assurances that Basque families who had lost their homes could take refuge in a neutral zone.¹²⁶ Since Franco had embarked on a campaign of repression and persecution of those believed to be enemies of his regime, these assurances could not be guaranteed. Nevertheless, conservative politicians questioned the delay in repatriating the children from the very moment of their arrival. Robert Bower, for example, declared in the House of Commons in June 1937, 'now that the tide of war has swept, past Bilbao, does not common humanity dictate that these children should be restored to their parents?'.¹²⁷ Some left-wing politicians tried to draw attention to the precarious situation in Spain. Labour MP Noel Baker asked, 'are not the homes of many of these children destroyed and their parents refugees?'.¹²⁸

After the fall of Bilbao and the halt to the fighting in the Basque region in July 1937, tensions over the delay in repatriation heightened. According to Anderson, 'once General Franco's supporters conquered the whole of the Basque Country in early July 1937, a battle developed over the repatriation of the children'.¹²⁹ The British government now believed the children would no longer be in physical danger in Spain so there was no need for them to remain in Britain. Not everyone shared the government's view. At a House of Lords debate in November 1937, the Earl of Listowel, speaking as a member of the Basque Children's Committee and the National Joint committee for Spanish Relief, explained why a large number of children had not been returned home:

¹²⁴ Parliamentary Archives, House of Commons, Mr Hamilton Kerr, 'Spain', 6 May 1937 (323 cc1332-61).

¹²⁵ Parliamentary Archives, House of Commons, Vice-Admiral Taylor, 'Spain', 6 May 1937 (326 cc3-11).

¹²⁶ Parliamentary Archives, House of Commons, Mr Crowder, 'Spain', 18 June 1937 (325 c726W).

¹²⁷ Parliamentary Archives, House of Commons, Commander Bower, 'Spanish Refugee Children', 28 June 1937 (325 cc1624-5).

¹²⁸ Parliamentary Archives, House of Commons, Noel Baker, 'Spanish Refugee Children', 28 June 1937 (325 cc1624-5).

¹²⁹ Peter Anderson, 'The Struggle over the Evacuation to the United Kingdom and Repatriation of Basque Refugee Children in the Spanish Civil War', p. 297.

What we were afraid of was that the children might go back to Bilbao and find themselves not in the hands of their parents but of other people, or that they might find their parents no longer there and that they had not anywhere to go at all.¹³⁰

Since the fall of Bilbao many more families of the Basque evacuees were believed to be in further danger. The BCC was concerned that the children might be sent back to parents who had been imprisoned, exiled, or killed. The refugees were ‘children who would probably have been maimed or killed by aerial bombs had we not evacuated them’.¹³¹ Many parents still living in the Basque country would be unable to care for their children if they were returned as the region had been devastated after months of heavy bombing. Survivors were barely able to feed themselves. A letter, sent by ‘a Bilbao boy, who remained in Spain with his father when his brothers came as refugees to Southampton on the S.S. Habana’,¹³² wrote in 1937 to a friend in Southampton advising his brothers not to return to Spain’:

It is said that now all the children who are in England are coming back to Bilbao and if it is true and my brothers come they will die by hunger here because my father has lost his employ (he was a professor) and I can’t find employ either. So that we have not a penny. And, for that, we don’t want to bring them.¹³³

In spite of emotive pleas for the children to remain in Britain, the British government continued to place pressure on the BCC to speed up the pace of repatriation. In November 1937, impatient to see the children returned to the Basque country, Conservative Lord Newton argued in the House of Lords that there should be a final date set for repatriation, enabling Britain to relinquish responsibility for the children. Newton stated, ‘these children are, to put it plainly, no good to anybody but their parents’.¹³⁴ He warned, ‘here we are faced with the prospect of having these refugees indefinitely quartered upon us’.¹³⁵ Another Conservative, Viscount Fitzalan of Derwent, agreed with Newton’s stance, arguing, ‘I think it was a very great pity and mistake [bringing the children to England]. It has caused a great deal of ill-feeling in this country. Many of us believe that these children would have been very much better left where they were in Spain, and that the sooner they get back the better’.¹³⁶ British conservative politicians underestimated the level of repression and persecution being inflicted in the Basque region. The government prioritised its own political strategy over the plight of the Basque people and regarded the refugees as a nuisance. Critics of the Basque children remaining in Britain drew attention to ‘a petition, signed by hundreds of Basque parents of children now in

¹³⁰ Parliamentary Archives, House of Lords, Earl of Listowel, ‘Refugee Children from Spain’, 2 November 1937 (107 cc35-50).

¹³¹ Parliamentary Archives, House of Lords, Earl of Kinnoull, ‘Refugee Children from Spain’ 8 July 1937 (106 cc223-34).

¹³² Hartley Library, University of Southampton, MS 370 Basque refugee children archives A4010/1, Artefact, scrapbook, May-Septmeber 1937.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Parliamentary Archives, House of Lords, Lord Newton, ‘Refugee Children from Spain’, 2 November 1937 (107 cc35-50).

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Parliamentary Archives, House of Lords, Viscount Fitzalan of Derwent, ‘Refugee Children From Spain’, 2 November 1937 (107 cc35-50).

this country asking for the return of their children to Spain'.¹³⁷ As it was likely that these parents had signed under duress, the petition should not have been taken at face value.

Whilst the British government had been reluctant to accept the refugees in the first instance and continued to press for a speedy repatriation from the very beginning, there were politicians, and generally left-wing politicians, who viewed the government's policy on the refugees and Spain in general as unacceptable. By 1938 a growing number were openly critical of the continued policy of non-intervention. Eleanor Rathbone's criticisms of the government's policy on Spain have since been analysed in Susan Pederson's *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (1959). Rathbone viewed Britain's efforts to rescue the 4,000 Basque child refugees as a meagre humanitarian attempt in comparison to France's acceptance of 100,000 Spanish refugees.¹³⁸ Rathbone, an independent MP, vocally expressed her disgust at Britain's non-intervention policy on Spain in parliament throughout the course of the 1930s. According to Pederson she viewed non-intervention as 'a rhetorical smokescreen justifying French and British inaction, while German and Italian aid to the insurgent forces proceeded apace'.¹³⁹ In late 1936 Rathbone became vice-chairman of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief and played a huge role in helping to organise and support the evacuation of the 4,000 Basque children to Britain.¹⁴⁰ Rathbone regarded the government's policy on Spain as cowardly and urged Chamberlain to reverse the policy. She condemned the government's pacifism: 'Rathbone thought Chamberlain bore a measure of blame'¹⁴¹ for the deaths in the Basque region and wider Spain.

In March 1939, in the House of Commons, Rathbone's rant-like speech was interrupted on several occasions by the Chairman for 'going beyond the boundaries':

We were the initiators of the Nonintervention Agreement...and it cannot be denied, that the tragedy and appalling suffering that are falling upon the defeated Republican Government just now, and the crowding into France of nearly half a million refugees -- [cut off]

-- [continues] Is the right hon. Gentleman's conscience haunted by the thought of the children and mothers who might now be exulting in the sunshine and looking forward to Spring, but who are rotting in their graves?¹⁴²

Rathbone failed to persuade the government to change its policy on Spain, but her criticisms highlight the fact that the government's inaction enabled Franco, aided by Germany and Italy, to carry out a campaign of repression and persecution.

Welsh Labour Party politician Morgan Jones also condemned the government's neutrality towards Spain and the Basque region in the House of Commons in July 1938:

¹³⁷ Parliamentary Archives, House of Lords, Lord Newton, 'Refugee Children from Spain', 2 November 1937 (107 cc35-70).

¹³⁸ Parliamentary Archives, House of Commons, Miss Eleanor Rathbone, 'Diplomatic and consular Services', 7 March 1939 (334 cc1945-2006).

¹³⁹ Pederson, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience*, p. 280

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 285

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

¹⁴² Parliamentary Archives, House of Commons, Miss Eleanor Rathbone, 'Diplomatic and consular Services', 7 March 1939 (334 cc1945-2006).

I suggest we cannot purchase peace at the price of silence in the sight of those endless iniquities perpetrated in Spain day after day...we have abandoned the Basques who only 20 years ago in the Great War sacrificed hundreds, if not more, of their people in an effort to save us. Now 20 years later we have withheld from them the means of defending their own liberty.¹⁴³

Whilst Britain and the rest of Europe maintained their policy of neutrality towards Spain, Germany and Italy supplied the Nationalists with military aid including bombers, ground troops and transport planes.¹⁴⁴ Britain's lack of support for the Spanish Republicans left the Republic weakened and unable to resist Franco's forces. Indeed, 'non-intervention allowed Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany to aid Franco in covert, though highly effective, ways'.¹⁴⁵

The Conservative government's fears over the threat of communism appear to have outweighed its desire to support the Republican government in Spain. The rise of fascism was regarded as less of a threat to peace in Europe than communism. Hence Britain and most of Europe maintained a policy of non-intervention towards Spain whilst Germany and Italy continued to supply aid to the Nationalists which undoubtedly helped Franco to victory. Conservative politicians in particular believed that Britain should look after its own interests and not those of a foreign nation. The harsh economic climate of the 1930s added weight to the argument that Britain should make the wellbeing of its own citizens its main priority. Humanitarian concerns over the plight of the Basque child refugees did force the government to reluctantly accept a small number of evacuees. This was a half-hearted gesture, however, as the government refused to support the refugees during their stay and pushed for their speedy repatriation in spite of concerns over the uncertain political situation in Spain. The Conservative government was dismissive of the serious nature of the situation in Spain in its determination to return the refugees to their homeland.

¹⁴³ Parliamentary Archives, House of Commons, Mr Morgan Jones, 'Air Estimates, 1938', 26 July 1938 (338 cc2937-3044).

¹⁴⁴ Sebastian Balfour, 'Spain from 1931 to the Present', p. 255.

¹⁴⁵ Mary Vincent, *Spain 1833-2002: people and state* (Oxford, 2017), p. 149.

Conclusion

The end of the Spanish Civil War on 1 April 1939 did not mark the beginning of peace. Franco's ruthlessness extended beyond his victory and he endeavoured to punish all those regarded as enemies of his regime. Indeed, this post-war repression can be seen as 'the continuation of the war'.¹⁴⁶ Those who had supported the Republic during the conflict were rounded up and placed in overcrowded prisons. Between 1939 and 1945 an estimated 100,000 people were executed and a further 250,000 were imprisoned.¹⁴⁷ What followed the war was a period of 'silence' during which Franco's enemies were punished and victims were afraid to speak out about their experiences. Franco's totalitarian rule was to last until his death in 1975.

The period of repression in the Basque region was harsh. Not only were the Basques living in extreme poverty, but they faced political annihilation and a policy of 'cultural repression'.¹⁴⁸ Basque traditions, including its 'music, dancing and folk songs' were prohibited.¹⁴⁹ In spite of the strong Catholic tradition in the region, there had been general support for the Republic during the war. Franco felt betrayed by the Basque people and severely punished them following the fall of the region.¹⁵⁰ Consequently, many of the evacuated children in Britain had little to return to in Spain. Legarraeta writes, 'of the 1,020 Basque children remaining in England in mid-1939, the Basque Children's Committee (BCC) expected that more than half (577) would stay on indefinitely. Their parents were known to be dead, in prison, abroad, or missing'.¹⁵¹ This estimate was fairly accurate; the Association for the UK Basque Children suggests that over 400 children remained in Britain in the long-term.¹⁵² Those children who did return found their homes and way of life destroyed. Their lives throughout next thirty-five years of Francoist rule were haunted by the 1937 evacuation since their identity papers indicated that 'they had been repatriated from abroad, thus signalling prospective employers that they could be considered as having had parents of questionable loyalty to the cause of Franco during the Civil War'.¹⁵³ Those children given the choice mostly elected to remain in Britain, 'a decision prompted by reports of repression'¹⁵⁴ throughout the Basque region. For those who stayed, their lives were shaped by the impending Second World War. Most worked at factories 'which were gearing up for full wartime production', and many joined Socialist youth groups.¹⁵⁵ The BCC continued its efforts to help the children build lives for themselves in Britain, arranging 'apprenticeships or night school classes in agricultural or technical subjects for boys of working age'.¹⁵⁶ Many found it difficult to adjust as they were passed

¹⁴⁶ Sheelagh Ellwood, *Franco* (New York, 1994), p. 109.

¹⁴⁷ Francisco Romero Salvado, *Twentieth-Century Spain: politics and society in Spain, 1898-1998* (Basingstoke and New York, 1999), p. 127.

¹⁴⁸ Ellwood, *Franco*, p. 117.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Daniel Schweimler, 'Analysis: Basque History', (1999) at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/548545.stm> (viewed 10 March 2018).

¹⁵¹ Legarraeta, *The Guernica Generation*, p. 251.

¹⁵² 'History of the Colonies', The Association for the UK Basque Children, <https://www.basquechildren.org/colonies/history> (viewed 4 March 2018).

¹⁵³ Legarraeta, *The Guernica Generation*, p. 287.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 257-258.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

around foster homes once most of the colonies were shut down by late 1939. Many were separated from their siblings.¹⁵⁷ One refugee wrote,

We all became assimilated into the British way of life...As the years passed, many married young British men and women, but quite a number, well over half, married within the group.¹⁵⁸

This dissertation has analysed the experience of the 4,000 Basque children evacuated to Britain from the Spanish Civil War in May 1937. The reluctance of the British government to support the relatively small number of refugees meant their stay in Britain was entirely dependent on the generosity of volunteers. With the help of the Basque Children's Committee and individuals such as Leah Manning and Ellen Wilkinson, the initial evacuation can certainly be deemed a success. The evacuation was somewhat rushed since it took place in war conditions, but the staff involved made the most of limited resources to care for the refugees. All children were registered and medically screened in order to ensure their safe transfer to Southampton. Whilst the organisation of the camp at North Stoneham was initially haphazard, it is clear that the local community pulled together to enable the children to live in Southampton safely between May and September of 1937. Gas and water companies offered up their services for free, local people donated clothes and food, Girl Guides and Boy Scouts dedicated their time to help organise the children, and medically trained volunteers ensured the health and wellbeing of the large number of young children throughout their stay. Credit for the organisation of this early evacuation lies, on the whole, with the BCC, which successfully evacuated and accommodated the refugees without any form of aid from the British government.

As the children were dispersed to colonies across Britain, the BCC remained responsible for overseeing their care and safety. Meanwhile the programme of gradual repatriation began. Once it became apparent, however, that many children would remain in Britain for longer than the anticipated few months, the government intensified its pressure on the BCC to speed up the pace of repatriation. The Conservative government's commitment to a policy of neutrality towards Spain, combined with its fear of supporting the communist cause, led it to seek the repatriation of all the Basque children. The BCC was also put under pressure by Spain as Franco demanded the return of the children. After the fall of Bilbao in July 1937, the British government deemed it safe for the children to be returned. Franco's assurances that the evacuees could return to a neutral zone, coupled with the supposed demands of Basque parents for the return of their children, added weight to the government's argument that the children should be returned as soon as possible. The pressure placed on the BCC by the government and by Franco was added to by the lack of practical support from the British Labour Movement. Although humanitarian concerns had initially motivated the movement to help the cause, it failed to mobilise a united front against fascism. Meanwhile, funds set up to help the Basque children shortly dwindled or were directed towards other issues. Since the BCC relied on donations, the diminishing support from the Labour Movement limited the committee's ability to cope with the pressures placed on it.

Under these difficult circumstances, the BCC was forced to speed up the rate of repatriation and it became impossible for the committee to fully validate every repatriation request it received from parents. Many requests are likely to have been signed under pressure from

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 252.

¹⁵⁸ Amandor Diaz-Campillo, 'When 4,000 Basques Landed at Southampton', (n.d.), p. 2 in Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, p. 263.

Francoist forces, and the fate of parents deemed to be enemies of the state was uncertain, meaning many children were not returned to safe, stable homes. The BCC's programme of repatriation was, on the whole, unsuccessful in its task to return children only to families able and willing to care for them. The British government must share the responsibility for the shortcomings of the repatriation programme since it placed the BCC under pressure in its haste to relinquish responsibility for the Basque children.

The fates of many of the Basque children returned to Spain is not entirely known. They returned to a repressive regime dominated by Franco until his death in 1975. Anderson writes that the true repatriation conditions of children returned to Spain has not been extensively examined by historians.¹⁵⁹ It is likely, nevertheless, given the nature of the policy of persecution throughout the Basque region, that many returned to poverty, homelessness, as orphans, or were sent to Francoist orphanages for political indoctrination. Indeed, 'historians now know that the Francoists took at least 30,000 children from political enemies and brought them up to oppose their parents' ideas'.¹⁶⁰ Those children who remained in Britain usually spent their lives as production workers, having received little education throughout their childhoods.¹⁶¹ Their lives were profoundly marked by their dislocation from their homeland in the summer of 1937.

¹⁵⁹ Anderson, 'The Struggle over the Evacuation to the United Kingdom and Repatriation of Basque Refugee Children in the Spanish Civil War', p. 299.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 310.

¹⁶¹ Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, p. 258.

Bibliography

Manuscript (unpublished) primary Sources

Hartley Library, University of Southampton, Basque refugee children archives

MS 370 A4010/1, Artefact, scrapbook: 'A concise history of the Basque Children's Camp, Southampton, 1937 compiled by Richard James Sillence and John Henry Sillence, Coxford, Southampton, volunteer workers at the camp', May-September 1937.

MS 404 A4164 1/1, letter from John G. P Hunt to Sir Walter Citrine, May 1937.

Archives of the Trades Union Congress, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick

We Saw in Spain (pamphlet) issued by the Labour Party (Great Britain), 1937 (292/946/18a/69).

Memorandum of Interview with Walter Citrine, 3 May 1937 (292/946/16a/40(i)).

Save the Basque Children (circular), 7 May 1937 (292/946/29/7).

Letter from Chloe Vulliamy to G. T. Garrett, 13 March 1938 (292/946/38/151).

Letter from G. T. Garrett to Chloe Vulliamy, 14 March 1938 (292/946/38/151).

Letter from Vincent Tewson to Chloe Vulliamy, 23 March 1938 (292/946/38/151).

Letter from Vincent Tewson to Chloe Vulliamy, 23 March 1938 (292/946/38/151(ii)).

Letter from Vincent Tewson to Will Maw, 17 October 1939 (292/946/38/72(i)).

Letter from Vincent Tewson to A. Hooper, 30 October 1939 (292/946/38/62).

Letter from Vincent Tewson to Charles Dukes, 24 December 1940 (292/946/38/38(i)).

Letter from Vincent Tewson to E. J. Butler, 10 March 1941 (292/946/38/34(i)).

Report of National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, November 1941 (292/946/38/24).

Letter from Walter Citrine to Duchess of Atholl, 28 October 1943 (292/946/38/15).

Parliamentary Archives, House of Commons

‘Situation at Bilbao’, 14 April 1937 (332 cc10290145).
‘Spain’, 6 May 1937 (323 cc1332-61).
‘Spain’, 6 May 1937 (326 cc3-11).
‘Spain’, 18 June 1937 (325 c726W).
‘Spanish Refugee Children’, 28 June 1937 (325 cc1624-5).
‘Spanish Refugee Children’, 28 June 1937 (325 cc1624-5).
‘Refugee Children from Spain’, 2 November 1937 (107 cc35-50).
‘Air Estimates, 1938’, 26 July 1938 (338 cc2937-3044).
‘Diplomatic and consular Services’, 7 March 1939 (334 cc1945-2006).

Parliamentary Archives, House of Lords

‘Refugee Children from Spain’ 8 July 1937 (106 cc223-34).
‘Refugee Children from Spain’, 2 November 1937 (107 cc35-50).
‘Refugee Children from Spain’, 2 November 1937 (107 cc35-70).

Printed primary sources

Gibson, Robert, ‘Four Thousand Basque Children: The Refugee Camp at North Stoneham’, *The Lancet* (6 November 1937).

Moore, Aileen, ‘The Exodus of the Basque Children’, *Nursing Mirror and Midwives’ Journal* 29 (19 May 1937).

Taylor, Richard, ‘Typhoid Fever in the Basque Refugee Camp’, *The British Medical Journal* (16 October 1937).

Williams, Maurice, ‘The arrival of the Basque children at Southampton’, *The Boston Medical Journal* (12 June 1937).

‘New Home Enchants Basque Refugees’, *Montrose Review* (24 September 1937).

‘The Basque Children’, *The Scotsman* (8 December 1937).

Secondary sources: books

- Alpert, Michael, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War* (Hampshire, 1994).
- Balfour, Sebastian, 'Spain from 1931 to the present', in Raymond Carr (ed.), *Spain: A History* (New York, 2000).
- Bolloten, Burnett, *The Grand Camouflage* (London, 1961).
- Bolloten, Burnett, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (North Carolina, 1990).
- Buchanan, Tom, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement* (Cambridge, 1991).
- Cable, James, *The Royal Navy and the Siege of Bilbao* (Edinburgh, 1979).
- Carr, Raymond, *The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective* (London, 1993).
- Durgan, Andy, *The Spanish Civil War* (Hampshire, 2007).
- Ellwood, Sheelagh, *Franco* (New York, 1994).
- Guske, Iris, *Trauma and Attachment in the Kindertransport Context: German-Jewish Child Refugees' Accounts of Displacement and Acculturation in Britain* (Newcastle, 2009).
- Legarraeta, Dorothy, *The Guernica Generation* (Nevada, 1984).
- Malet, David, *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identities in Civic Conflict* (New York, 2013).
- Minchom, Martin, *Spain's Martyred Cities: From the Battle of Madrid to Picasso's Guernica* (Eastbourne, 2015).
- Patterson, Ian, *Guernica and Total War* (London, 2007).
- Payne, Stanley, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven, 2004).
- Pederson, Susan, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (Cambridge, 2004).
- Perry, Matt, *'Red Ellen' Wilkinson: Her Ideas, Movements and World* (Manchester, 2014).
- Preston, Paul, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (London, 2012).
- Salvado, Francisco Romero, *Twentieth-Century Spain: politics and society in Spain, 1898-1998* (Basingstoke and New York, 1999).
- Vincent, Mary, *Spain 1833-2002: people and state* (Oxford, 2017)

Secondary sources: articles

Anderson, Peter, '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) (2016), pp. 297-318.

Buchanan, Tom, 'The Role of the British Labour Movement in the Origins and Work of the Basque Children's Committee', *European History Quarterly*, 18(2) (1998), pp. 155-174.

Buchanan, Tom, 'Britain's Popular Front?: Aid Spain and the British Labour Movement', *History Workshop*, 31 (1991), pp. 60-72.

Fleay, C., Sanders, M. L., 'The Labour Spain Committee: Labour Party and the Spanish Civil War', *The Historical Journal*, 28(1) (1985), pp. 187-197.

Fyrth, Jim, 'The Aid Spain Movement in Britain, 1936-39', *History Workshop*, 35 (1993), pp. 153-164.

Garcia, Hugo, 'Potemkin in Spain? British Unofficial Missions of Investigation to Spain during the Civil War', *European History Quarterly*, 40(2) (2010), pp. 217-239.

Luff, Jennifer, 'Labour Anticommunism in the United States of America and the United Kingdom, 1920-1949', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 53(1) (2018), pp. 109-133.

Secondary sources: websites

Anderson, Peter, 'Spain's Lost Children' (2017), at <https://www.britac.ac.uk/blog/spains-lost-children>.

Jahangir, Rumeana, 'Spanish Civil War: The child refugees Britain didn't want', (2016) at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-35532286>.

Schweimler, Daniel, 'Analysis: Basque History', (1999) at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/548545.stm> (viewed 10 March 2018).

Steer, George, 'Bombing of Guernica: original Times report from 1937', (2006) at <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/bombing-of-guernica-original-times-report-from-1937-5j7x3z2k5bv>.

'Overview of the Colonies', The Association for the UK Basque Children at <https://www.basquechildren.org/colonies/history>.

A directory of the colonies across Britain can be found at 'The Colonies', The Association for the UK Basque Children, <https://www.basquechildren.org/colonies/directory>.

'History of the Colonies', The Association for the UK Basque Children, <https://www.basquechildren.org/colonies/history>.

‘The Association: Who we are’, The Association for the UK Basque Children,
<https://www.basquechildren.org/colonies/history>.