

# **HOSPITALITY TO THE BASQUE REFUGEE CHILDREN IN BELGIUM**

by

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Civil War in Spain, 1936-39, has been described as a "dress rehearsal" for the Second World War. In terms of the alignment of forces: Fascist, Socialist/Popular Front, and Democratic, the struggle of the Spanish Republic against Insurgent forces reinforced by German and Italian troops and armaments foreshadowed the conflict for World domination soon to begin. Thus, throughout the Civil War, the Western Powers — France and Great Britain — demonstrated their desperate attachment to neutrality by appeasing the Fascist Central Powers.

Several months after the Spanish Civil War began in Morocco and throughout the peninsula, the Insurgent generals' preoccupation to capture Madrid was put aside to achieve a quick victory in the North, and win the rich Basque provinces and contiguous areas still in Loyalist hands. The Northern Campaign began with the most terrible bombings of a civilian population in the history of warfare. Most important of these in Basque history and culture was their sacred city of Guernica, destroyed by the Nazi Condor Legion late in April of 1937. After a massive aerial bombardment, using newly developed incendiary bombs for the first time, the pilots returned to strafe the fleeing non-combatants, gathered there for the traditional Monday market day. The following afternoon, while the ruined city still smouldered, the autonomous Basque Government, part of the Spanish Republic, sent a plea to the world to save the Basque children by offering them refuge abroad. In addition to the air raids, which were by now hourly, a naval blockade by General Franco had reduced the food supply to little more than rice and some Mexican beans. The children were slowly starving. Seven countries: France,

Great Britain, Belgium, the USSR, Switzerland, Denmark and Mexico, offered to house, feed, and educate the Basque youngsters. The mass evacuation of some 20,000 children, aged from two years to fourteen, began at once. France, Spain's nearest neighbor, headed by Socialist Leon Blum, eventually accepted nearly 15,000 children, with about 6,000 of these sent on to Belgium, the USSR, or Switzerland after a quarantine period. Great Britain cared for nearly 4,000; the USSR, about 2,500. (1) In each of the host countries, excepting Mexico and the USSR, foster homes and funds for care came from private trade unions, political parties, and Catholic sources. The Non-Intervention Pact, proposed and signed by Great Britain and France in hopes of limiting the war to Spain alone, apparently precluded official governmental assistance. With the Pact, the Western Powers believed they could maintain the illusion of neutrality. However, neither Hitler or Mussolini ever signed the agreement, and immediately violated the arms embargo to Spain. Within each of the Western Powers, trade union and Popular Front groups attacked the Pact and its one-sided arms embargo. They quickly mobilized to provide humanitarian aid to the people of Spain.

As a result, in the non-Socialist countries, it was only in Belgium that some 3,100 Basque youngsters found actual government support in the form of the "Family Allowance". Moreover, only in Belgium, of the non-Socialist host countries, did they enjoy the fruits of close cooperation between the trade unions, the Socialist and Communist political organizations and the Catholic hierarchy. No doubt because of this, the young Basque refugees never became a political embarrassment to the Belgian government. In most of the other host countries, these young refugees served as symbols to confront the ruling regime by exposing its appeasement, or testing its professed neutrality, or its official stance of solidarity to a proletarian revolution. (2) Furthermore, only in Belgium was the initial reception for the refugees, their subsequent care, education, and the attention to maintaining Basque cultural values recalled unanimously as outstanding by those interviewed. Of the thirty who told of their experience in Belgium, all praised their boarding school or foster home

(1) These totals are from an analysis of two documents from the *Archives of the Basque Government in Exile*, Paris: *Emigracion Vasca*, March 18, 1938) pp. 5-6, and the more extensive *Colonias de Ninos Expatriados* (Bayonne, February 14, 1938) pp. 1-56.

(2) This is discussed in D; Legarreta's "Basque Refugee Children as Expatriates: Political Catalysts in Europe and America" in W. Douglass' *Basque Politics: A Case Study in Ethnic Nationalism*, Associated Faculty Press, Reno, 1985.

and the treatment they enjoyed during their years of exile.

## II. BASQUE REFUGEE CHILDREN IN BELGIUM: FLEMISH AND FRENCH HOSPITALITY

The politics of Belgium on the eve of the Spanish Civil War saw the formation of a stable coalition government which was dominated by the Socialists, with the Catholic party, and to a lesser extent, the Liberals as important components. Trade unions were strong, and social legislation was far-reaching. Though there was unemployment, due to the aftermath of the world-wide depression, the Benefit Fund for Family Allotments, dating from 1930, served as an economic cushion for the unemployed, those with small children, and those disabled, or otherwise unable to work. In Belgium, as well, Catholic Action, the great modern movement of lay Catholic progressivism, was well-nurtured and effective. Communists were a tiny minority, able to work collectively with the Socialists. (3)

Late in 1936, following the Italian invasion in Africa, the German reoccupation of the Rhineland, and the conclusion of the French-Soviet Pact, Belgium reasserted her traditional neutrality. She saw her future as best safeguarded by maintaining independence from the alignments of the power blocks in Europe: the German-Italian axis and the British-French alliance were moving toward a confrontation. However, when the Insurgent coup positioned the Right against the elected Spanish Republic, both trade unions and Catholic organizations strove to assist the civilian population, particularly those with allegiance to the Republic.

Of the very first expedition of Basque children evacuated from Spain just after Guernica, half, or 230 in all, were chosen to be sent on to Belgium with families waiting to care for them, under Socialist auspices.

### HELP FROM THE LEFT.

The Belgian Socialist press had reported on Basque President Aguirre's plea for help in evacuating women, children, and the old from Euzkadi (the Basque Republic) after the bombing of Guernica. On April 30 *Le Peuple* quoted Basque officials in Paris as stating that the civilian Basque People now could be evacuated in merchant ships already in the harbor. The officials urged the assistance of the French navy in this rescue work, noting that Britain was already

(3) Emile CAMMAERTS, *The Keystone of Europe* (London, 1939) pp. 192-97.

evacuating such people. By May 14, news of a more concrete, domestic nature appeared on page one: a lengthy appeal to the Socialist mothers of Belgium. The article said that, already some 630 homeless Basque children were en route from Oleron, in France, to Belgium. A home for each child had been promised by Belgian Socialists, but a serious problem had arisen. The majority of children even now on their way were boys, aged eight to twelve, but sixty-seven of eighty requests from adoptive families were for little girls:

Belgian women are saying it is more pleasurable to dress a little girl. But tragedy cannot serve to satisfy caprice or vanity. The lodging and care of a homeless child requires human solidarity beyond age or sex.

The lead article asked Belgian women to contact their regional Socialist committee that very day and state: "I admit my preference for a little girl. I am also disposed to take a boy of six to twelve years". By doing so, the article closed, "They would be assured of the kisses of thousands of small Basque children". (4)

The arrival of the first expedition was reported the following week, as well as news that more would arrive shortly. (5) In late May, some 230 children of the 450 who had left Euzkadi for Oleron now took buses from Oleron to Paris, where they were greeted with flags and music. All then went on to Belgium. After crossing the frontier, they were given lemonade, and a strange cheese, shaped like a squash. It was found to be very rich and good, though none of the children had ever seen anything like it before. (6) The children went to the shore at Ostend, fronting the North Sea, for another, shorter quarantine period, after yet another vaccination. (7) As other expeditions with children destined for Belgium left Bilbao, the press reported that M. Spaak, the Belgian Socialist Minister of Foreign Affairs, had agreed to participate at the cabinet level in the Basque evacuation. Though the form of collaboration was unclear, as Belgium had no fleet to assist in actual transport, financial help and the lodging of refugees was expected. (8)

Immediately, hundreds of children already in France were made ready to be sent on to Belgium. Cardinal Van Roey of Belgium, ru-

(4) *Le Peuple*, April 27, 1937, p. 1.

(5) *Ibid.*, May 14, 1937, p. 1.

(6) Luis DE CASTRESANA, *El Otro Arbol de Guernica* (Madrid, 1967), p. 83.

(7) *Ibid.*, p. 85.

(8) *Le Peuple*, May 20, 1937, p. 1.

mors said, was willing to take ten thousand into Catholic homes. The Socialists, Communists, the Committee for the Defense of the Spanish Republic, and the Belgian Red Cross would take others. In all, Belgium did care for nearly 3,200 children from Euzkadi, most remaining there until the outbreak of World War II. (9)

That Spring, the Belgian Communist press also published reports almost daily on the progress of the evacuation of Basque children. Within Belgium, the Committee to Aid the Children of Spain had been formed by a group of Socialist women at about the same time as its counterpart, Comité d'Accueil aux Enfants d'Espagne (CAEE) in France, in August of 1936. (10) Other groups were gradually added to the committee. Within weeks, the Secours Rouge? International, (SRI), the Friends of Nature, the International Friendship League, and the Brussels Federation of Unions became active members. Initially, money was collected after lectures and concerts to provide food and clothing for Spanish Children. Over 125,000 Belgian francs was raised in the first few months of the Committee's existence for Spain. (11) After the April appeal of President Aguirre for homes for Basque children, and entreaties from the Popular Fronts of first Euzkadi, and then Santander, the Committee turned its attention to the enlistment of adoptive families. Front page articles appealing for more adoptive homes appeared frequently, and one Belgian woman was lauded for taking in ten refugee children, certainly a heroic response. (12)

By the beginning of July, *La Voix du Peuple* commented that, although already thousands of Basque children had found adoptive homes in France and Belgium, additional thousands were on their way from the ports of Santander, and the transition centers of France were already overflowing. (13) The arrival of four hundred children was reported on July 1, with a distribution to waiting adoptive parents of a mere ten minutes. The young refugees were described as "very ill and tired, but well-disciplined and arriving singing the *Internationale*" (14)

After Bilbao fell, more basque children arrived, as did many adult refugees. They had come via Santander, or Asturias, and were reportedly a "pitiful spectacle":

(9) *Colonia de Niños Expatriados*, (Bayonne, February 14, 1938) p. 46.

(10) *La Voix du Peuple*, July 7, 1937, p. 1.

(11) *Ibid.*, July 1, 1937, p. 1.

(12) *Ibid.*

(13) *Ibid.*, July 8, 1937, p. 1.

(14) *Ibid.*, July 1, 1937, p. 1.

Ten carloads arrived July 2 in Belgium : children like hunted animals; skeleton nursing mothers, feeble old men and women, a long procession of misery. (15)

All the unaccompanied children were sent to adoptive homes, the older men and women to a former military sanatorium near Malines, and the others to a large chateau set in a park within Marchin, now renamed the "Belgian-Basque Home". The expedition was welcomed by a huge crowd of townsfolk, which included the Mayor of Marchin and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. One reporter wrote :

In these Basque refugees we see the profound grief of a people forced to leave their country, a people martyred by Fascist aggression. They greet us with the clenched fist, demonstrating their attachment to liberty. (16)

The nearly 2,000 children placed by the Socialists, Communists, and Committee for the Defense of the Republic were usually assigned singly to private homes. The majority were with working class families with children of their own to care for. One boy from Guernica found himself to be number thirteen in the family of a factory worker; a girl from San Sebastian was the eighth in a carpenter's home. Most lived in homes with at least two adoptive sisters and brothers :

My family was poor, but very affectionate. There were three sons, and I immediately became the "Princess", the mascot. Though the boys sat at table by age, I jumped into the chair next to "Father" and he let me stay. I spent all my allowance on sweets: what wonderful chocolates in Belgium.

The Socialists took responsibility for the largest number of children placed by secular organizations. Well over one thousand children were distributed all over Belgium and Luxembourg, with the majority housed around Brussels, and others in Mechelen, Antwerp, and Rixensart. The Communist Secours Rouge cared for 320 children; the Grupo de Defensa, 312; and the Belgian Red Cross, 192. Of this last group, many were placed in the Basque Refugee camp in Marchin. Over 1,200 children were placed under Catholic patronage. (17)

(15) *Le Peuple*, July 2, 1937, p. 1.

(16) *Ibid.*

(17) *Colonia de Niños Expatriados*, p. 46.

## CATHOLIC HELP : THE BASKISCHE KINDERWERK

In Southern France, provisional camps were being emptied of unaccompanied children as rapidly as possible, for by July, hundreds of new youngsters were arriving from the evacuation of Santander and Asturias. Those departing under sponsorship of the Basque Nationalist party were to be sent on to the Catholic homes and institutions being arranged by Cardinal Van Roey of Mechelen. They were to be accompanied by a number of Basque priests in voluntary exile from Spain. Already, delegates from the cardinal's new organization, Baskische Kinderwerk (Basque Childrens Project) had arrived in France to select children from the various quarantine colonies.

As with the prelatelated in Britain and France, the cardinal was responding to the appeal sent to him by the Basque Bishop Mujica. The cardinal had the letter printed in Flemish and French in diocesan newspapers throughout Belgium, adding, in his well-known handwriting :

I acknowledge a deeply moving appeal to help in this lamentable situation. Christian charity obliges us to do all possible to help the Basque children.(18)

The cardinal set three preconditions to his charitable offer :

1) that his project for care of Basque children work autonomously, without any official Basque intervention 2) that an entity be designated as responsible for the children's transport; and 3) that each child have a certificate of good health. The cardinal's personal secretary, Msgr. LeClef, was placed in charge of the administration of the project, with representatives from each of the three Belgian dioceses : Brussels, Antwerp, and Malines. (19)

The tradition of welcoming refugee children into Catholic homes in Belgium was frequently referred to in the Catholic press coverage of this new project, comparing it to similar help to the Armenian and Hungarian children in the Great War.

Most of the children quickly selected by Cardinal Van Roey's emissaries left their camps with little regret :

We were happy to leave our austere, unfriendly camp. Our welco-

(18) This document from the Archives of the Archbishop of Mechelen was made available by Martin Aguirre of Mortsel. It is undated.

(19) Alberto de Onaindia, *Experiencias del Exilio* (Buenos Aires, 1974), p. 287.

me in Belgium was warm and happy. They brought us mountains of new clothes, cakes and candy. It was like a honeymoon to go to Belgium.

It was over sever weeks after the Socialist and Communist Basque children were settled in Belgium before the first contingent of children to be cared for by the cardinal arrived. They had left the transition camp in Capbreton the day before, accompanied by two Basque priests. Their arrival was described in the Catholic press as, "From a spot in Hell to a place in Paradise". (20)

The first four hundred children were dispersed, with 160 around Brussels, 90 in Mechelen, and 150 in the Antwerp. The magnanimity noted in Antwerp was displayed throughout Belgium in caring for the 1,265 Catholic-sponsored children. Some 134 families took two children from the same family, and three families took three children each. Nearly a third of the Catholic adoptive families took more than one child, trying to keep brothers and sisters together in exile.

In parish halls, train stations, and minicipal reception rooms, the distribution of refugee children went on through May, June, July, and August. Many of the older boys, the most difficult to place in each host country, were sent to live in Catholic parish houses in groups of a half dozen. Some were placed in boarding schools and orphanages in groups of ten to thirty, becoming a small minority among Belgians there. Over fifty different Catholic institutes, boarding schools, covents, pensions, and parish rectories were put to this use. (22) Those twenty-five children for example, in Duffel, in Brussels, the forty in Koningshof in Antwerp, those who lived with parish priests had very positive memories of their stay in Belgium.

Our handful of Basque boys lived with a phenomenal parish priest. He always carried his breviary and a French-basque dictionary; sometimes he mixed them up and prayed from the dictionary. Besides his work, he was carpenter, mason and painter to maintain our rooms — how he would sweat! He began by buying enough silk to make us, himself, an *ikurrifia* (Basque flag), which hung from his balcony until we left. Until his death in the Belgian Congo over 20 years later, he wrote to me. A saint.

The labors of the thirtythree Basque priests under the cardinal's auspices there were fruitful. This group included young ardent Basque Nationalists, many of whose colleagues had been imprisoned or

(20) *Gazet van Antwerpen*, June 30, 1937, p. 1.



shot for their championing of Basque autonomy. This cadre of priests had talented musicians; linguists who prepared Basque-Flemish-French catechisms and dictionaries. Other priests were experts in Basque folklore, who would teach and demonstrate the songs, dances and tales of the region, play the Basque flute and drum, and advise on the proper costumes for presentations. There were highly trained educators in the cadre of priests as well, and others renowned for their work with youth in Euzkadi.

A chorus of ninety trained voices was formed by these men to tour Belgium; smaller choral ensembles were formed in each diocese. Many parish events were soon graced with a demonstration of traditional Basque music. The cardinal himself arranged programs for the children under his patronage, bringing many small groups in each diocese together for a day of singing, dancing and music. These young priests were also active in promoting athletic teams and events, particularly soccer. (21)

Nor did the spiritual field lack emphasis. One priest interviewed recalled giving religion classes to over three hundred children in the Brussels area. In a letter written in 1937, he described the system of Catholic boarding schools in each diocese, attended by Basque priests, with other priests visiting the diverse centers of refugee children, each caring for the spiritual needs of about forty children. From this, many hundreds of First Communion rites resulted, including "many from those under Socialist or other auspices". (22)

As part of the cardinal's Basque project, some two dozen young Basque women, trained as teachers, were placed throughout Belgium. One woman, in charge of those working in Brussels, recalls that all were volunteers who received no salary beyond board, room, and small expenses. They visited all the children in adoptive Catholic families. The group under Srta. Carmela's direction visited each family weekly, to teach the children Basque, Spanish, some catechism, while also monitoring each child's adjustment. In spite of these informal lessons, some of the youngest refugees forgot their native language, exposed as they were all day to French or Flemish. There were no books or texts in mother tongues, except for the dictionaries and catechisms. Another assistant in this auxiliary of young women noted the important role of safeguarding each child's happiness in the adoptive family. In a few rare cases, it became ne-

(21) This is based upon interview material with two of the Basque priests sent into exile in Belgium, Don Jesus Orbe and Don Dionisio Oartete, as well as the periodical of the Basque clergy, *Anayah* (St. Jean de Luz, April 1-15, 1939, p. 24).

(22) Don Jesus Orbe, interview, Bilbao, 1979.

cessary to change a child to another, more suitable adoptive home.

### THE FAMILY ALLOWANCE

An advantage enjoyed by the Basque children living in Belgium was that most of their adoptive parents were eligible for a national family allowance dating from 1930. The Socialist Belgian government was unique in providing the subsidy to most of the families caring for a Basque child. Though the official regulations were clear that only when the natural parents were dead, ill, or had "truly abandoned" their child was the allowance to be available, this was interpreted so broadly that funds were disbursed to host families. The Minister of Labor had a letter distributed in January, 1938, stating :

Families who care for basque children have asked me concerning the Family Allowance. I have answered that families can receive benefit for children who are really abandoned or where their natural parents are absolutely incapable of exercising parental responsibilities. It is probable that the Minister of Social planning may extend the 1930 requirements, given the present troubled situation in Spain. Either the Belgian consul or Spanish authorities can attest to the natural parent's abandonment due to these circumstances. It is thus desirable that the Pay Officer for the allowance expedite this in each area. (23)

Overall then, the experiences of the Basque youngsters in Belgium were quite uniformly positive. This fact was highlighted in interviews with refugees who, as children, spent weeks or months in France prior to going to Belgium, or by those who left Belgium to rejoin parents who had fled to France. In every case, the Belgian years were those remembered with the most pleasure.

### BELGIAN REPATRIATION

Repatriation of Basque children from Belgium did not become the intense political issue characteristic of other host countries, as Great Britain, Denmark, Mexico, and to some extent, France. The Belgian Government left the process of repatriation of its over three thousand young guests entirely in the hands of the five organizations responsible for them. Cardinal Van Roey was the first to begin sending children back to Spain. He responded to the very strong pressure placed by the Pope through Msgr. Antoniutti on the European

(23) Quoted in a letter written by Cardinal Van Roey on November 11, 1938. *Archives of the Archbishop of Malines.*

Catholic hierarchy to return the refugee children to Franco's Spain, but he did so in a careful manner. He quietly named a Repatriation Commission, headed by Msgr. Janssens. He sent Janssens to Bilbao to confer directly with Msgr. Antoniutti. Near the end of August, 1937, a few weeks after Bilbao fell, Antoniutti and Janssens met to plan the project. In Belgium, shortly after this, the first article appeared in *Le Metropole*, urging immediate repatriation of all Basque children. Heading the article was a poignant drawing pressing for this immediate repatriation. (24)

In Bilbao, Msgr. Janssens brought with him a packet of letters written by children living under Catholic auspices, as well as the list of the 1,265 youngsters in their care, with the names and addresses of their adoptive family or school. He announced to the press that parents should write him if they had lost contact with their children, and suspected they might be in Belgium. (25) The response to this offer was very minimal — few parents wrote or visited him in the new office of Msgr. Antoniutti. Next, Msgr. Janssens gave his list of names to the press, and lists of twenty-five children each were published daily, with instructions to parents to come in and sign reclamation forms for their return. When parents did not come in, the text was changed to read, "These expatriate children are begging for news of their parents". (26) Still, parents did not come in. Three contingents of children, totalling just over one hundred repatriations, did arrive over the next few months, but by now the campaign for repatriation had lost its credibility. This was due in large part to a spurious list carried to Belgium by an emissary of Msgr. Antoniutti. Purported to be a list of parental requests for reclamation, it contained countless inaccuracies. The most obvious was a request from the Basque secretary of the Catholic Committee in Mechelen. Her children were with her in Mechelen, and she clearly had not sent a reclamation request from Bilbao. This incident was widely published in the press, appearing even in South America. After this, Cardinal Van Roey required absolute proof in any further requests for repatriation. By the time the war in Spain ended, in the Spring of 1939, only another hundred children had rejoined their parents in Franco's Spain. (27)

In mid-1939, after the fall of the Spanish Republic, as the threat of the hostilities which became the Second World War intensified,

(24) *La Metropole*. August 25, 1937, p. 1.

(25) *Gaceta del Norte*. September 1, 1937, p. 1.

(26) *Ibid.*, September 21, 1937, p. 1.

(27) *Memoria*, Junta de Protección de Menores (Bilbao, 1937) Archives de la Diputación de Bilbao, pp. 118-122.

the Belgian government began to consider the future safety of the more than twenty-seven hundred children who had been there for most of two years. A neutral government commission was set up to activate the repatriation process by alerting adoptive parents throughout Belgium of the urgency of the situation. Parents still living in Spain were notified, and invited to request return of their children. The Spanish consul in Brussels was enlisted, and a series of expeditions was planned and organized. (28)

The first group in 1939 was scheduled to leave the port of Antwerp by the end of April, with expenses paid by the Belgian government. The International Red Cross facilitated the process by arranging the notification of parents in Spain of the arrival day of their children. Those whose parents were themselves refugees in France were provided with the requisite temporary visas. (29) It appears from interviews that some children were returned to Spain who had no parents to receive them, and that the French government gave no cooperation in assisting those children whose parents had gone on to South America after stays in France. When The Second World War began, in November of 1939, some seven hundred Basque children still remained in Belgium.

An interesting historical footnote is that President-in Exile Jose Antonio Aguirre arrived clandestinely in Brussels as the last of the expeditions of children were leaving, in mid-1940. He was fleeing the Nazi occupation of France which has caught the Basque Government by surprise. According to several Basques interviewed, he was hidden in a Jesuit school, which had earlier housed Basque children. Later, he was sent on to Antwerp, where he was able to arrange false papers and to alter his appearance with a mustache and glasses. He and his family found eventual sanctuary in South America.

To sum up, the Basque children sent to Belgium enjoyed a generally halcyonic expatriation. Fewer than one-sixth had returned before mid-1939, so that most had at least two years of peace and good care. The granting of the Family Allowance to adoptive parents prevented the extended stays of the refugees from becoming an economic burden. The quiet political pressure the cardinal used for the refugee's welfare was augmented by the leftist political parties. This cooperation was unique to Belgium.

After the Second World War, more refugee children were repatriated. Others, now old enough to leave as adults, emigrated to Mexico,

(28) According to a letter from the Belgian Foreign Minister to President José Antonio Aguirre, March 23, 1939. Basque Government in Exile Archives.

Venezuela, or Argentina to join relatives already there. Fewer than one hundred stayed on in Belgium. Of this small group, several were young girls, who were virtually adopted by the adults in their foster homes, where they had been cared for for several years. In most cases, these adoptive parents were childless themselves, and were able to provide a very comfortable life for the child, certainly when compared to that of the real parents in Spain. By now, also, a number of the Basque children who had been twelve or older when they arrived had married Belgian men and women. All their schooling they had in the state or Catholic schools, side by side with Belgians.

One family of nine children, three of whom were evacuated to Belgium in 1937, is illustrative of the common experience of those who stayed on in their host country. By 1950, the father had completed his prison sentence in Spain, and the parents and younger children rejoined their three sons, by now in their mid-twenties, in Belgium. Simply by dint of hard work and taking advantage of whatever education they could manage while working, all the children have achieved success. The boys are now university professors, administrators of Catholic education, engineers, and legal heads of important corporations. Some have married Belgian women, yet most of their children have Basque names. The eldest son of this family has kept up a relationship with all the Basque refugee children who stayed on, perhaps fifty at this point.

In sharp contrast, many of the children returned to Spain came home to trauma. Three of the twenty-one interviewed noted that their fathers had been shot in prison, as had the uncle of another, or killed in battle. Another four had fathers in prison; one had a brother in a concentration camp. Two others had either a father or mother in exile. In all, nine of the twenty-one came home to find a parent dead, in prison, or in exile. In many cases, their homes and farms had been confiscated by the new government of General Franco. They were discriminated against in their education for having been expatriates, and some kinds of employment were closed to them, as many fell under Franco's "Decree of Responsibility", with "criminal responsibility" for having impeded the Insurgent cause. Many described their return from Belgium as "going from Paradise to an Inferno".

Overall, what came through clearly in the interviews with over one hundred Basques who had been refugees as children was that those sent into Belgium had enjoyed the finest care and treatment. This fact was widely known among the international community of refugees. Even in Mexico, refugees interviewed were familiar with

**the warm friendship shown by the ordinary citizens of Belgium to the young Basque expatriates.**