

BASQUE INFORMATION SERVICE

Release No. 353

7 HOBART PLACE,
LONDON, S.W.1,
Tel.: SLOANE 4359.

26th April, 1948

BASED ON REPORTS FROM BASQUE AGENCY O.P.E.

GERNIKA

Eleventh Anniversary of destruction of symbolic Basque town

On 26th April 1937 German bombers of the Condor Legion, stationed in Spain, bombed and burnt Gernika, the political centre of the Basque Country, home of the age-old parliament and symbol of Basque democracy. The destruction was not only of houses and the people who lived in them. This stroke was aimed at the liberties of the Basques, at their free spirit, which Franco has tried unsuccessfully to stamp out by tyranny and oppression. Today, the eleventh anniversary, Basques in Spain and in exile will meet to commemorate it and to renew their oath to regain their freedom and thus redress the wrong done them on that terrible day.

The crime of Gernika has proved a curse upon its perpetrators, and the reckoning is already being paid at Nuremberg, where Marshall Hugo Sperrle and ten generals have been found guilty of the crime against humanity of using the Spanish war as a testing ground for German arms and aviation. Thus, in part, is justice done towards the Basque people, on whose behalf President Aguirre presented a statement for the prosecution, giving documentary evidence of the destruction of Gernika and Durango.

The deep impression made upon the Basque spirit by the attack on Gernika has been the source of an undying force which inspires the Basque people in their ever-increasing struggle to regain their liberties. The underground resistance movement is continuously active, and was behind the strike which took place on May Day last year in Bilbao, and which gained the admiration and support of democrats throughout the world. This year, on Easter Sunday the Basque National Day, they succeeded in interrupting the Franco Radio and broadcasting Basque propaganda. The successes of the Resistance are reflected in the increasing persecution by the Franco forces of oppression, upon which more than half the Spanish Budget is spent. Nine years after the end of the Civil War there are daily reports of arrests, tortures and court martials, such as that at the Loyola Barracks in San Sebastian, published in our last Bulletin, in which the prisoners' crime was service in the Basque Brigade which fought under the Allied forces in France.

The activities of the Basques in the resistance are co-ordinated with those of their compatriots in exile, who rally round the Basque Government in Paris and its delegations in Western Europe and America. These activities are not confined to politics, but embrace also the cultural aspect of their struggle for survival. There is an International Association for Basque Studies at Bayonne, which is to hold a congress next September. They publish the reviews "Gernika" and "Ikuski" dealing mainly with anthropology and philology respectively. There is in Buenos Aires a company which publishes books on Basque subjects which are distributed all over the world. Newspapers are published in Paris, Buenos Aires, Mexico, Santiago de Chile, Caracas, and by the underground resistance movement within the Basque Country.

The Basques are also active internationally, in the world Trade Union organisations and in the newly established international of the Christian Democratic Movement, "Nouvelles Equipes Internationales". In all these activities, they are struggling to bring about a change in Spain which would lead to free elections.

The Basques are a hard-working people whose industrial and economic influence in Spain covers almost 70 per cent of Spanish economy. In their way of life and their political and social ideals, they are the most European of the peoples of Spain. Being in the majority Catholics and democrats, they are in a privileged position to exert a beneficial influence upon the future of Spain.

A great deal is being talked about impending changes in Spain. Those who are attempting to bring about such a change must first obtain the agreement of the Basques. The new situation will need their collaboration and will require, as an indispensable and just factor, acceptance of the need to satisfy the will of the Basques for the return of their freedom, which would lead to a federal system in the Peninsula. No government or regime can achieve a peaceful and progressive rule in Spain if it ignores this all-important point.

Anniversary of Proclamation of Spanish Republic - Paris 14.4.48

The anniversary of the Proclamation of the Spanish Republic was marked by a diplomatic reception held by the President of the Republic in Paris, accompanied by the President of Catalonia, Sr. Irla, and of the Basque Government, Sr. Aguirre. The reception was attended by members of the diplomatic corps, a large number of French personalities and leaders of the various anti-Franco parties. It is interesting to note that among them were the ex-minister Sr. Trifon Gomez, the Secretary General of the Socialist Party, Sr. Llopis and of the U.G.T. Sr. Pascual Tomas, all of the Socialist Party of which Sr. Prieto is President.

Later, in a speech at a dinner given by the Republican Left Party, Sr. Albornoz said: "The disappearance of the Franco regime is an urgent necessity for the internal peace of Spain and for its incorporation in the international juridical organisation. An absent and proscribed Spain means a truncated Europe and an incomplete America. But the disappearance of that regime cannot be considered really attained, if recourse is had to substitutes which would mean only a change of name, nor to appeals to the reactionary forces upon which these substitutes rely for support and which would set up an analogous regime. The true disappearance of the Franco regime demands the restoration to the Spanish people of the national sovereignty of which they were despoiled in an iniquitous manner. National sovereignty is the title invoked by the Republican Institutions in exile. These Institutions are the only ones which, when the moment comes, can be the arbiters of the national destinies and the bridge between a new Spain and a new world."

Congress of Inter-Parliamentarian Union - Nice 7.4.48

The Congress of the Inter-Parliamentarian Union has recognised the right of the Spanish Republican Cortes to form part of the Inter-Parliamentarian Union, composed of representations from all countries. The Spanish Republican Deputies, Sres. Manuel de Irujo, Julio Alvarez del Vayo and Fernando Varela have therefore attended the meetings of the Council of this body and its various committees at Nice, and took an active part. In the Juridical Commission, dealing with International Law, the Spanish Republican Delegation raised the question of Non-Intervention and indirect aggression, through help with armed forces to rebels against the legitimate power of the State. After a long discussion the Commission unanimously decided to condemn the policy of Non-Intervention, and to affirm the duty of solidarity between States in support of one which is the object of aggression, either direct or through a rebel movement causing a civil war. Both these principles of international law will be put forward for the approval of the next Inter-Parliamentary Congress in Rome in September.

During the discussion on the subject of peoples, nations or countries which, living within a State, aspire to recognition of their sovereignty or independence, the Republican Delegation gave an explana-

tion of the policy followed by the Spanish Republic in this respect. On its suggestion, it was resolved to add to the declaration of the right to liberty of all peoples, the mission of the International Community to intervene, mediating in conflicts which may arise when the country which aspires to its freedom and the State within which it lives, do not reach a peaceful agreement.

Arrests for Basque National Day demonstrations. San Sebastian 2.4.48

A large number of persons continue in prison as a result of the interruption of the transmission of the Franco Radio San Sebastian by the Basque Resistance on Easter Sunday, the Basque National Day, as reported in our last Bulletin.

Practically all the persons arrested are Basque Nationalists, who have previously been in prison for several years and are now on provisional liberty. None of them took part in the daring coup of the Basque Resistance, and this is known to the Franco Police, but the authorities have begun to apply in San Sebastian also the system of arresting hostages, persons who had nothing whatever to do with the occurrence, who are arrested as a reprisal when the real authors cannot be traced. This policy was adopted in Bilbao two months ago as a reprisal for activities by the Resistance.

The footballer Manuel Perez has also been arrested. Until two months ago he lived in exile in France, playing in a French first division team. He had been sentenced to 30 years imprisonment for having deserted the Franco Army during the civil war, but as a result of negotiations and guarantees given by the San Sebastian Royal Society he was given an amnesty and crossed the frontier to join that team. The official pretext given by the Franco authorities for the arrest is that he attempted to reorganise the communist party and arranged the secret passage to France of left elements. According to the official report, Manuel Perez was surprised by the police when he was passing into France five anti-Francoists from Zaragoza.

Court Martial in Barcelona, Barcelona 5.3.48

Eighty anti-Franco prisoners belonging to several Resistance organisations are to appear before a Court Martial to be held shortly in the Model Prison of Barcelona. They were arrested at various times, and although the indictment calls them "authors or accomplices of acts of banditry and terrorism", they are also accused of having taken part in the attack on the offices of "Solidaridad Nacional" the falangist journal of Barcelona and of having placed a bomb there, which caused great damage but no casualties. This occurred about a year ago.

A number of the accused, at the time of the crimes attributed to them, were already in prison, and others can prove that when the Catalan Resistance made this coup, they were outside Catalan territory. In spite of this, the Barcelona Military Court No.2 makes the same accusation against all the eighty prisoners. For twelve of them the prosecution demands the death penalty, including Angel Carrero, Pedro Valverde, Joaquin Puigdomest, Estaban Arias, and even more monstrous, for two of the three young students, Norman Mestre and Wilson Battle, who have been already tried and condemned to death recently for "having taken part in attacks and sabotage", and against whose sentence many foreign organisations have energetically protested.

Statement by Barcelona Political Prisoners - 8.4.48

The political prisoners of the Barcelona Model Prison have recently sent a statement to the Latin-American consulates in that town, denouncing the bad treatment inflicted there. They give, among others, the following examples of brutality:-

On the night of 15-16 February 1947, the prisoner Francisco Gordo died from a congestion of the lungs, after having been put in a bath of icy water, and then left for 24 hours in a filthy cell, clad only in mechanic's overalls.

A few months ago, the prisoner Antonio Serafin died from a beating administered by the prison officer Lopez Perceim. The reason for the punishment was that Serafin had lent a pair of slippers to a prisoner who was barefoot.

On the 20th January 1948, in the sixth gallery, the prison officer Macaya, barbarously beat three political prisoners, without having any reason whatever for such brutality.

At the end of last November, on the night of the bomb explosion in the offices of the falangist newspaper "Solidaridad Nacional", the director of the prison, accompanied by various officers, revolver in hand, entered the ally called "correctional right", waking the prisoners with kicks and making them form ranks, naked and barefoot, for more than an hour, doubtless as a reprisal for the attack, although it was obvious that no prisoner could have had any part in it.

As a result of blows administered because he was not quick enough in falling in, one prisoner is now crippled and another blind, and both were afterwards put in the punishment cells.

The document describes all the annoyances and brutality to which the political prisoners are subjected, and ends by asking that this prison regime should be brought to an end, being a disgrace to humanity.

Members of Basque Brigade decorated - Bayonne 12.4.48

At the commemoration of the battle of Pointe de Grave, in which the Basque Brigade of the French Army won distinction in the action against the Germans resisting on the Atlantic coast, the French Croix de Guerre was awarded to several ex-combatants of the Gernika Battalion of that unit. Those who received decorations were the Commander, Pedro de Ordoki, the lieutenant, Salvador Hierro, the sergeants Fernando Olmo and Ricardo Nalda, and the soldiers Juan Guinca and Eusebio Mendizabal, all of them Basque refugees.

From the Private Diaries of
Dr. Gobbols

1st February, 1942:

Franco, a bigoted churchgoer, permits Spain today to be practically governed not by himself but by his wife and her father confessor.

THAT'S A NICE REVOLUTIONARY WE PLACED
ON THE THRONE.