

The Basque Children - The end of the Spanish Civil War and the beginning of the exile for the Niños

Summary of a talk by Dr Peter Anderson (University of Leeds)

In May 1937, nearly 4,000 children were evacuated from the Basque Country to the United Kingdom to escape the bombing, behind-the-lines violence, poverty and food shortages that characterised the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939. The British government refused to pay for the upkeep of these children and a vast array of volunteers helped support the children.

After the conquest of Bilbao in June 1937, the Francoist authorities and their British supporters campaigned for the children's repatriation. In a significant number of cases, the volunteers caring for the children in the UK believed it was not safe for children to return because their parents were in exile, in prison, executed or too impoverished to care for their offspring. As a result, although the majority of the children returned to Spain, a significant minority remained in the UK for a number of years or permanently.

As we approach the eightieth anniversary of the end of the Spanish Civil War, Dr. Peter Anderson of the University of Leeds draws on a wide range of first-hand accounts and archival research to explore one of the most important aspects of British refugee history. He will analyse the reasons why the children were evacuated, the tensions between compassion and ideology that lay behind the repatriation dispute, and how the experience of evacuation affected some of the children who eventually returned to Spain.