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FRANCO AT BILBAO

The defeat of Basque separatism signifies the decline of English influence in Spain.

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BILBAO, 19th June.

Important political significance, both from the nationalist point of view in Spain and the international point of view, attaches to the present stay of Franco in Bilbao, in Biscay, the ex-spiritual and economic centre of Basque separatism.

Bilbao was in fact the moral capital of Basque separatism. It was the leading centre of British influence in Spain and of the systematic interference of London in Spanish internal politics, and was also one of the great strongholds of social Communism in Spain, the personal "fief" of the famous Indalecio Prieto, and the no less famous President Aguirre, whose names occupy an unforgettable place in the dramatic story of modern Spain, because their names are dripping with blood. Prieto and Aguirre have on their conscience the assassination of no less than twenty thousand people.

For fifty years Basque separatism has been the great tentacle of Great Britain in Spain, just as Catalan separatism was the great tentacle of France. The former was controlled by the bankers of the City and the second by the Grand Orient in Paris. By means of these two separatist movements, London and Paris constantly held up the Madrid Government to ransom and imposed their will by provoking local disturbances, strikes,

political crises each time Madrid attempted to resist the suffocating pressure of the two hegemonic capitals.

Bilbao is the greatest industrial centre of Spain, and is even greater than Barcelona. It is the centre of the heavy industry. Its blast furnaces, its steel works, its shipyards, its huge cement and glass works, constitute an important industrial oasis in the predominantly agricultural and pastoral panorama of Spain. The metallurgical industry of Bilbao is based on the extremely important iron mines of Biscay. In the past, the iron was partly consumed in the blast furnaces of Biscay and partly exported to England.

The English heavy industry has need of Biscayan iron and particularly the so-called blende type for the production of many special steels required for the English naval and aeronautical industries. Biscay iron and its copper pyrites represented in the past the two main British interests in Spain. English influence in Bilbao was enormous, so much so that all the sons of the best families in Biscay, and particularly the industrialists, were educated in England, and returned to their country to act as the agents of British influence on affairs, both in the institutes and in political life. The Bilbao Exchange was a mere reflection of the London Exchange.

During the Civil War England unceasingly sustained and assisted the famous Basque Republic of Euzkadi to such an extent as constantly to maintain before Bilbao an actual squadron. The English cruisers openly protected against Franco's fleet vessels of any flag which were loading iron for the British industry in Bilbao. The British Consul in Bilbao was l'eminence grise of the Basque Republic. He dined daily with President Aguirre. English puritanism closed its eyes to the infamies of Aguirre and the crimes of Indalecio Prieto, in order that the Basque Republic might continue to ship blended ore from Biscay to England and continue to burn British coal from Cardiff and Newcastle in the Bilbao blast furnaces. Such was the influence of England that, after the liberation of Bilbao, President Aguirre, compelled to take flight, had the effrontery to announce to his co-nationalists over the Radio his imminent return to Bilbao at the head of the British Fleet.

In Bilbao is located the British cable through which, freed from any control by Madrid, the financial relations between London and Biscay were maintained. Basque separatism,