

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED, have read the report, "Information on the Situation of the Basque Provinces under Red-Separatist Rule", issued by the Commission appointed by the Rector of the University of Valladolid to investigate conditions in the Basque Country under the Government of Euzkadi.

The main conclusions of this report are that the Government of Euzkadi was anti-Catholic, anti-patriotic and inhuman.

We emphatically assert that these charges against the Government of Euzkadi are untrue and unjust, and offer below an account of the position based on our own observations and experience :-

In the first place, the conduct of the Government of Euzkadi cannot be designated as anti-Catholic. According to its constitution, the Government of Euzkadi is a lay authority, as is the Government of the Spanish Republic, by reason of its constitution.

His Excellency, the President of the Government of Euzkadi, Don José Antonio de Aguirre y Lekube, on taking office as President under the Tree of Guernica, swore the following traditional formula:-

"Jeungoikua'ren surrian epelik, Euzko-lutgenian sutinik eta Bizka'i'ko Areitza-azpijan eseben gomutez, nire aginbidia zintzornen betetia, zin degit". ("Humbly before God, on this Basque soil, and remembering our ancestors, I swear, under the Oak of Bizkays, to fulfil my duty with fidelity to the Basque people".)

Public worship in Euzkadi continued normally and without interruption, even in those parishes situated in the war zone and but a kilometer from the trenches, with no upset other than those which the exigencies of war imposed - such as the hour, public attendance, etc..

Not one Law against the liberty of the Church was passed by the Government of Euzkadi.

The great majority of the priests were to be seen in their cassocks passing freely in public.

An Ecclesiastical Seminary was established and operated in Bilbao.

All priest were exempted from military service.

A "Corps of Chaplains" was established, with a total of 104 priests, who gave service of spiritual assistance in the trenches and the hospitals.

More than 300 priests from the Dioceses of Santander and Asturias were taken into Biscay and were cared for with every attention. The Bishop of Santander, in a letter stated that "Basque influence has saved my Diocese".

The Basque authorities gave hospitality to their Excellencies, the Archbishop of Valladolid, and the Bishops of Santander and the Auxilier of Valencia, and facilitated their departure abroad.

Large congregations attended the Lenten missions and Holy Week religious ceremonies, and the public procession of the Easter Communion to invalids took place as usual.

The Vicar-General of Bilbao, Don Ramon Galbarriatu (R.I.F.) was officially authorized to make direct and secret communication on ecclesiastical affairs with the Holy See and the Bishop of the Diocese who was exiled by Franco's authorities.

At a short distance from the trenches in Eibar, there were hospitals where the clergy assisted the wounded, including both Anarchists and Communists.

There are many other details personally known to us, which can be substantiated by documented proof, and which serve to show the falsity of the accusation that the Government of Euzkedi was not Catholic.

We also deny from our experience the accusation that the Basque Government was anti-patriotic.

Its patriotism was not of the National-Syndicalist type of the Insurgents, nor of the "one Spain, great and free" of Franco's imperialism. It was patriotic; if only because of its formation in a country which had been, and was then involved, in a civil war resulting from military rebellion - a war which destroyed the normal services of public order and attacked the vital organisations of the State and the most sacred interests of the people.

In a civil war, there are neither frontiers nor limits, as in wars between States. In each village, and in each family, there was a contingency: a spy may be operating under the cover of a merchant, while, in a foreign war, the internal strength and unity of a country is intensified and the spirit of mutual collaboration is increased. From this report details the destruction of those villages, Amorebieta and Munguia, which it attributes to the Basques. Guernica will go down in history as the per-

The destruction in seventeen villages in Guipuzcoa, the responsibility for which has been attributed to the Government of Euzkadi, took place on October 8, 1936, before the formation of that Government. Apart from the burning of Irun, Guipuzcoa did not suffer, except for the necessary destruction of the bridges for strategical reasons.

This report does not mention the defence work in regard to churches, properties and private organisations, carried out by the Basques before the formation of the Government.

The only villages in Guipuzcoa defended by the Government of Euzkadi were Elguete and Eibar. They were completely destroyed by daily artillery bombardment, which lasted for nearly seven months, and by aerial bombardment, under the orders of General Franco, in the last few days of their defence.

The report details the destruction of Eibar, Durango, Guernica, Amorebieta and Munguia, which it attributes to the Basques. Guernica will go down in history as the per-

fect example of unrestricted modern aerial warfare as carried out by German aviators, which totally destroyed the village and left it in flames after three and a half hours continuous bombardment, causing more than two thousand deaths among the civil population. The remaining villages suffered intense aerial bombardments which almost entirely destroyed them.

Many of the reports of destruction are correct, but the information is not exact. The works of art and the archives in the war zone, for example, were transferred by the Minister of Education of the Government of Euzkadi to villages in the rearguard, some being transferred abroad, where they were guarded with every care. Some of these historical riches, however, disappeared in the burning of Guernica, where artistic and historic treasure depots had been established.

The capitals of San Sebastian and Bilbao were defended with great heroism against both the enemy and any possible interior disorders which might arise during the evacuation. Everything was left intact, except the bridges, which were blown up to protect the retreating troops.

The Government of Euzkadi respected and safeguarded private property. All industrial concerns and the Banks continued to be managed and controlled by their own Board of Directors, the greater number of whom were shareholders, with a minimum of interference by the Government and the employees.

We will not lengthen this document by describing the positive work accomplished by the Government of Euzkadi in, for example, the creation of the Basque University, the normalisation of labour and commerce, and the care of the civil population by means of distributing and rationing food and clothing. It must not be forgotten that the Government of Euzkadi came into existence in wartime and controlled its own territory for only nine months.

In answer to the third main charge we categorically deny that the Government of Euzkadi was inhuman in its conduct.

On its formation, the Government freed all the women prisoners. The rebel authorities, however, did not reciprocate by releasing the Basque women prisoners in the territory under their control, in spite of their promises and intervention by the International Red Cross and the Argentine Ambassador.

On the evacuation of Bilbao and Biscay, the Government of Euzkadi freed all prisoners incarcerated in territory under their jurisdiction, protecting them until the last minute.

Only nineteen executions took place during the whole period of the Government of Euzkadi's control of Basque territory, and in every case the accused were tried, with defending counsel, in public court, in accordance with the penal law, and in the presence of the international Press and foreign Consular representatives.

On January 4th. 1937, after a series of air-raids by the rebels, the prison of Bilbao were attacked by an infuriated mob. It was on that date that General Franco's acceptance of a plan for a general exchange of prisoners had been expected. The Basque Government did not attempt to withhold the news of these regrettable events; to the contrary, His Excellency, the President of Euzkadi, communicated full details to the British Consul at Bilbao and the Commander of the British Flotilla in the harbour at the time, and requested them to send a full report to their respective authorities. Foreign Press representatives were given every facility to send their own reports to their newspapers. The Minister of Justice of the Basque Government gave a full account of the incidents in "A Report on the Administration of Justice in the Basque Country during the Civil War; Paris, February 1938", which report was

translated into both French and English and was freely issued to those who desired to read it.

The work of the Exchange of Prisoners Committees was initiated and steadfastly supported by the Government of Euzkadi; whilst the Insurgent policy, on the contrary, was consistently against any exchange. This assertion can be verified by the International Red Cross and the Ambassadors of England and Argentine in Spain.

We will not consider in detail the un-Christian, unpatriotic and inhuman activities carried out by the rebels in the Basque Country. It is sufficient to point out that the bishop of the Diocese was exiled by the authorities of General Franco; that fifteen priests, exemplary according to the testimony of their own Bishop, were shot without trial by order of these same authorities; that more than four hundred priests have been imprisoned and exiled - suffering in prison inhuman treatment, hunger, insults, vexations, and being herded together seven in one cell; that to-day the churches in the Insurgent zone are centres where they talk and pray for the victory of the military rebellion.

The Insurgents provoked a civil war between brothers of the same nation. The patriotism which submits its own nation to humiliating and shameful foreign invasion has no advantage.

And, finally, the inhuman activities of the authorities of General Franco are well demonstrated by the ten thousand who have been executed in Navarre; the four hundred in Alava; the two thousand five hundred in Guipuzcos and the one thousand in Biscay.

In due course documental proof will no doubt be given village by village, and town by town, of executions, imprisonments, fines, and various forms of persecution inflicted on the Basques by General Franco's authorities. We will, however, draw attention to one or two cases known to us:

MONDRAGON

An industrial town of 16,000 inhabitants. The Basques arrested 38 people. They shot no one. In the same town, the rebels executed the parish priest and two priests from the locality, four women (one of them being five months pregnant) and forty-one men; all without trial.

OYARZUN

A village of 2,500 inhabitants. The Basque authorities did not imprison a single person here; on the contrary, they defended various Army officers and even the family of General Solchega, who was leading the enemy forces which were forcing their way into Euzkadi. In the same place, the authorities of General Franco executed nineteen people.

In conclusion we re-affirms that the charges made against the Government of Euzkadi in this Insurgent Report are false and unjust.