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Ireland, the Basques and the Spanish Civil War

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ABSTRACT. *In late 1936, two Irishmen arrived in the Spanish Basque Country. One was General Eoin O'Duffy, signing the terms of agreement for an Irish Brigade to support the military uprising against the Second Spanish Republic. Meanwhile, socialist republican George Gilmore journeyed across the Pyrenees in search of a Basque nationalist priest he had met four years earlier. While O'Duffy was drawn into the conflict by traditionalist monarchists from Navarre, his leftist opponents in Ireland mounted a pro-republic propaganda campaign focused on the war effort of the rival Basque nationalists. In effect, a civil war between Basques became entangled with the legacy of the Irish Civil War, as old rivals such as O'Duffy and Gilmore constructed alliances on opposite sides of the conflict as it played out in this small corner of Spain. This article places a new emphasis on the Basque dimension of Ireland's engagement with the Spanish Civil War and illustrates how it was shaped by earlier Basque-Irish relations.*

The Spanish Civil War is well known for its international dimension. Ireland's involvement in the conflict is notable in that some 700 Irishmen fought for Francisco Franco in the rebellion against the Second Spanish Republic. Approximately another 250 Irishmen, headed by Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) veteran Frank Ryan, fought to defend the besieged republic and had little success in garnering sympathy from the Irish public. The propaganda campaign mounted by Irish socialist republicans featured Basque priest Ramón Laborda who, contrary to popular belief in Ireland, explained that the war was not simply a religious crusade against communism and atheism. The so-called Basque Republic established by the wartime government in Bilbao (Bilbo) remained loyal to the democratically-elected Spanish government. The Basque Country, ardently Catholic, with a distinct language and culture, and home to a strong nationalist movement, presented many parallels with Ireland that allies and detractors variably emphasised or dismissed.

While the Spanish Civil War was broadly perceived in Europe and beyond as a grand confrontation between the political left and right, Basque nationalists often framed their movement as a third way that transcended the left–right dichotomy. Their uneasy alliance with the progressive Second Spanish Republic was more pragmatic than it was ideological, and they expected that the Irish public would understand. However, the socio-religious climate of interwar Ireland was such that the war in Spain was seen as a battle between Christianity and communism rather than between the left and right, as Fearghal

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McGarry observes.[1] Consequently, the Catholic credentials of the Basque nationalist movement were overridden in Ireland by tales of churches desecrated and nuns murdered at the hands of their newfound allies. While Basque nationalists and their supporters sought to capitalise on the apparent Basque-Irish parallelism, they were largely dismissed — in the words of Fine Gael politician James Dillon — as an 'unfortunate people, carried away by their frantic devotion to this ideal of Basque independence'.[2]

Basque nationalists had studied and paid close attention to Ireland over the years, which nourished the idea that Ireland and the Basque Country were alike in some fundamental respects. Finding less solidarity than expected, Basque nationalists who approached Ireland in this period felt great disillusionment and frustration. This article examines the salient points in Basque-Irish relations prior to the Spanish Civil War to contextualise the interplay between domestic Irish politics and the particularities of the conflict in the Basque Country. Relationships old and new shaped this chapter in Irish history as revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces — largely old anti- and pro-Treaty foes respectively — fought not only for the future of Spain, but Ireland itself. As Hugh Thomas writes, 'for some the Spanish Civil War must have been pre-eminently a war within the Irish Republican Army'.[3] This article highlights the Basque dimension of the arguments on both sides, demonstrating how the legacy of Ireland's own civil war became entangled with a civil war between Basques, within the broader context of the Spanish Civil War.

I

Sabino Arana founded the Basque Nationalist Party in 1895, marking the relatively late arrival of Basque nationalism as an organised political movement on the European stage. Arana's native province of Biscay (Vizcaya/Bizkaia) experienced overwhelmingly rapid industrial development as part of Spain's nineteenth-century liberal state-building project. The conclusion of the Second Carlist War in 1876 brought an end to most political and economic home rule institutions in the provinces of Biscay, Guipúzcoa (Gipuzkoa), Álava (Araba), and Navarre (Navarra/Nafarroa) — the historically Basque territories of Spain.[4] This civil war pitted supporters of the established liberal and centralist Spanish throne against traditionalist insurgents known as Carlists, originating from their support of conservative pretender Carlos V during the First Carlist War. The ultra-religious Carlist movement was deeply rooted in the Basque Country, which historically had enjoyed unique charter rights under Spanish rule. These charters, called *fueros*, were threatened by the urban liberal elite that sought to develop a modern, centralised state free of internal customs borders and regional socio-economic privileges.

[1] Fearghal McGarry, 'Irish newspapers and the Spanish Civil War' in *I.H.S.* xxxiii, no. 129 (May 2002), p. 68.

[2] *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lxv, col. 691, 18 Feb. 1937.

[3] Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (London, 1977), p. 592.

[4] Many historians call this the Third Carlist War, though within Basque historiography the primarily-Catalan Carlist War of 1846–9 is often not counted.

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Basque nationalism was doubly a development and a rejection of Carlism. Similar to Patrick Pearse's lamentation at 'the failure of the last generation',[5] Sabino Arana and his followers had to contend with the political failure of their predecessors. While Carlism merely argued for the return to historical autonomy, Arana made the radical assertion that the Basques were not Spanish, nor did they ever legally relinquish their political sovereignty to Spain. Much of the ground eventually gained by Basque nationalism was at the expense of Carlism, though Arana did not live to see his movement gain momentum outside of a small circle in Biscay, dying in prison in 1903.

The Basque Nationalist Party continued to grow after its founder's death, albeit as a moderate regionalist party. Those who advocated for outright independence were relegated to a marginal presence within the movement. Tensions between the opposing camps boiled over in 1916, when the Easter Rising captured the attention of the more radical separatist Basque nationalists. One of the de facto leaders of the group, Eli Gallastegi, is apocryphally said to have begun organising a volunteer expedition to Dublin to fight the British, though the rising was over before arrangements could be formalised.[6] While a cohort of Basque separatists held Mass for Roger Casement, their moderate and staunchly anglophile counterparts criticised him as misguided, if not traitorous.[7] Similarly, Patrick Pearse was denounced as 'an almost demented fool'[8] in the pages of *Euzkadi*, the most widely-circulated Basque nationalist newspaper.

While the moderate Basque nationalists aligned themselves with the non-violent Irish home rule movement, Eli Gallastegi and his circle found inspiration in physical-force republicanism. After 1916, the small group of young radicals started their own weekly newspaper called *Aberri* (Fatherland) for which they became known as *aberrianos*. While Basque nationalists made sporadic references to Ireland prior to 1916, the Easter Rising marked the beginning of a consistent tendency to use Ireland 'as a symbolic prism through which events in the Basque Country were refracted', as Basque historian Cameron Watson explains.[9] The pages of *Aberri* carried frequent exaltations of martyred Irish republicans and introduced a generation of young Basque nationalists to Irish history and current events.

By the end of the Irish War of Independence in 1921, the moderate sector of the Basque nationalist movement had become sympathetic to the plight of Irish republicans. Through their proto-diplomatic press agent in Madrid, Éamon de Valera's underground government of the Irish Republic contacted influential mainstream Basque nationalists and supplied them with various propaganda materials.[10] In turn, the Basque nationalist press enthusiastically reproduced translations of

[5] Pádraic Pearse, 'Ghosts' in *Political writings and speeches* (Dublin, 1962), p. 223.

[6] Jon Juaristi, *El bucle melancólico: historias de nacionalistas vascos* (Madrid, 1998), p. 211.

[7] Nicolás Ruiz Descamps, *Historia de las organizaciones juveniles del nacionalismo vasco (1893–1923)* (Bilbao, 2012), pp 84–9.

[8] *Euzkadi*, 9 May 1916.

[9] Cameron Watson, *Basque nationalism and political violence: the ideological and intellectual origins of ETA* (Reno, 2007), p. 119; see also X. M. Núñez Seixas, 'Ecos de Pascua, mitos rebeldes: el nacionalismo vasco e irlanda (1890–1939)' in *Historia Contemporánea*, lv (2017), pp 456–62.

[10] Máire O'Brien to Department of Publicity, 20 Sept. 1921 (N.A.I., DFA, early series 1/61/3).

republican propaganda for their readership, thereby fortifying the growing importance of Ireland in the Basque nationalist imagination.

Arguably the most significant moment for Basque-Irish relations in this period was the visit of a young Irish-Argentinian, Ambrose Martin, to Bilbao in 1922. Martin had grown up in rural Argentina, where he evidently became acquainted with the Basque diaspora that lived alongside the Irish. He gave a speech to the hibernophile *aberrianos* on his involvement in Sinn Féin and his deportation back to Argentina during the War of Independence. For these Basques, the visit of an ostensible republican war hero was significant. His hosts reported: 'For the space of an hour and a half he held us in suspense with his captivating words — ignited with love for his wretched Ireland — this young Irish patriot that has risen before us, vibrant and mysterious, to show our dispirited race the only path to salvation for peoples who aspire to their liberty.'[11] Martin would maintain a close friendship with Eli Gallastegi and other figures in the *aberriano* movement, providing a crucial Basque-Irish connection.

Ambrose Martin's return to Ireland was short-lived. He stayed loyal to de Valera in the split over the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, though the nature of his involvement in the civil war is unclear. Like many defeated republicans, Martin left Ireland, temporarily staying in the Basque Country in 1924 before ultimately returning to Argentina. The trauma of the Irish Civil War was taken seriously by some Basque nationalists, whose notions of Basque-Irish parallels led them to speculate about a future civil war of their own. Eli Gallastegi warned that he already saw an embryo of such a conflict in the existing division in the movement between moderate autonomists and orthodox separatists.[12]

II

Fianna Fáil convincingly won the 1932 general election, marking the ascendency of the old anti-Treatyites. A similar change in political climate occurred in Spain in 1931 with the establishment of the Second Spanish Republic following the death of dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera. It was a time of optimism for both Basque nationalists and Irish republicans, as the former began drafting an autonomy statute while the latter began to 'republicanise' the Irish Free State, juridically undoing the undesirable terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. However, the Basque nationalist aspiration for an autonomy statute was frustrated not only by politicians in Madrid, but by forces within what was to be the future Basque polity. Basque nationalism had broken little ground in Navarre — the largest province of the imagined Basque nation — where Carlism remained dominant. While the Navarrese Carlists desired a return to the autonomy afforded by the *fueros*, they still saw the Basque Country as an integral part of Spain.[13] Despite early signs of

[11] *Aberri*, 7 Apr. 1922.

[12] Eli Gallastegi, 'Pascua revolucionaria. ¡Y un día nos fusilarán…!' in *Aberri* (Apr. 1923), cited in Eli Gallastegi, *Por la libertad vasca*, ed. José María Lorenzo Espinosa (Tafalla, 1993), pp 204–05.

[13] Whether Navarre is considered Basque is a contentious and complex issue. Basque nationalists axiomatically view Navarre as part of the Basque nation. Many in Navarre, Basque speakers included, harbour a sense of historical and cultural difference, seeing Navarre and the Basque Country as distinct.

cooperation, the plan for an autonomy statute would ultimately exclude the intractable Navarre.[14]

As the Basque Country prepared to vote on the first autonomy statute in June 1932, Ambrose Martin triumphantly returned to Bilbao from his exile in Argentina. Martin gave lectures on the interconnectedness of the Basque and Irish struggles for independence in packed conference halls, Irish flags waving among the crowd.[15] It was also around this time that he and Eli Gallastegi jointly established a Basque-Irish trading company at the beginning of the Economic War between Ireland and Britain. Thanks to the Irish-Iberian Trading Company headquartered in Dublin, Ireland was able to find new markets for goods, and Basques might have enjoyed the new importation of Guinness.[16]

Martin's visit to the Basque Country coincided with two major events in Dublin which brought about one of the most substantial instances of contact between Basque and Irish nationalists. For the first time, Dublin was home to the annual Eucharistic Congress in June 1932. Preceding it by only a few days was the 1932 Tailteann Games, where the game of handball (or *pelota*) attracted some Basques, who shared an appreciation for the sport. A handful of Basques set off for Dublin, including Jesuit priest Ramón Laborda, two pelota players and the organiser of the voyage (who also served on an executive council of the Basque Nationalist Party). It was stated in an interview that the trip was intended to raise awareness of Basque nationalism in Ireland.[17]

The Basques' sojourn in Ireland was extraordinarily productive. They spoke about the Basque nationalist movement in interviews with Irish newspapers, delivered gifts to Mary MacSwiney and Cumann na mBan leader Eithne Coyle, and were received as special guests at a Dáil Éireann session.[18] They were invited to a céilí at the Mansion House where they spoke to a variety of political figures. A Basque Nationalist Party delegate in attendance scribbled brief notes on these meetings. Of de Valera he wrote: 'Completely serious and straightforward. He gave us a warm welcome … He wanted to know about our [Basque Autonomy] Statute … He asked us some very interested questions.'[19] It was also noted that de Valera personally expressed his support for their cause.[20] Their conversation with William T. Cosgrave went poorly: 'He did not seem very favourable to Basque nationalism. He received us very frankly and the interview consisted of him making jokes about the convenience of maintaining a strong and unified "Catholic Spain".'[21] By contrast, Garda Commissioner Eoin O'Duffy, the first to receive the visiting Basques

[14] See Martin Blinkhorn, '"The Basque Ulster": Navarre and the Basque autonomy question under the Spanish Second Republic' in *Historical Journal*, iiixx, no. 3 (Sept. 1974), pp 595–613.

[15] *Euzkadi*, 16, 25 Jun. 1932.

[16] Daniel Leach, *Fugitive Ireland: European minority nationalists and Irish political asylum, 1937–2008* (Dublin, 2009), p. 57; J. L. de Cortina to Leopold Kerney, 18 Oct. 1934 (N.A.I., DFA, embassy series 2/24).

[17] Archivo del Nacionalismo Vasco (henceforth A.N.V.) DP–1316–06, Azkoitiko Udala, 'Irlanda Euskadi, 1932–2002: 70 aniversario de un evento pelotazale histórico', 2002.

[18] Copy of *Historia vasca* sent to Eithne Coyle from Emakume Abertzale Batza (U.C.D.A., Eithne Coyle papers, P61/45); *Irish Independent,* 28 June 1932.

[19] A.N.V., P.N.V. 0219-03; I am grateful to Cameron Watson for a discussion on these Biscayan scribbles.

[20] 'Irlanda Euskadi, 1932–2002' (A.N.V., DP–1316–06).

[21] A.N.V., P.N.V. 0219–03.

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when they arrived in Dublin, 'attended to them solicitously and … they toasted to the Basque Country and to Ireland'.[22] The note-taker remarked that during their evening at the Mansion House 'they were with him several times'.[23]

The year 1932 also marked the creation of a new Basque nationalist organisation, led by Eli Gallastegi. *Jagi Jagi* (Arise Arise) was the most radical incarnation of Basque nationalism yet seen, and plainly displayed its Irish influences. Its associated publication regularly invoked Irish republicans, primarily the legendary socialist republican James Connolly. This separatist, abstentionist and explicitly Connollyite anti-capitalist organisation also frequently referenced Patrick Pearse and spoke of blood sacrifice and spiritual victory.[24] As European politics polarised further and saw increasingly bloody street violence, *Jagi Jagi* looked back to 1916 as they imagined an imminent war of national liberation.

Similarly in Ireland, the gulf between political fringes continued to deepen. In 1931, anti-Treaty veteran Peadar O'Donnell helped establish Saor Éire, a socialist offshoot of the I.R.A. Internal documentation from the group fell into the hands of pro-Treaty veteran Eoin O'Duffy, who saw Saor Éire as proof that the I.R.A. had become a communist organisation. O'Duffy was a driving force behind the red scare that swept Ireland in the 1930s, and he demanded that authorities take immediate action against the I.R.A.[25] Both Church and state, represented respectively by Joseph MacRory, primate of All Ireland, and William T. Cosgrave, came out strongly against what they saw as a plot to introduce Soviet communism into Ireland.[26]

O'Duffy began to prepare a coup that would install a military dictatorship in the event of an electoral victory for Fianna Fáil. His plot never came close to materialising, and in 1933 de Valera dismissed O'Duffy from his post as garda commissioner.[27] His dismissal arrived at a moment when the Army Comrades Association — a veterans' organisation comprising many pro-Treatyites hostile to their old civil war foes — sought new leadership.[28] O'Duffy assumed control, the group becoming known as the 'Blueshirts' for its standardised uniforms reminiscent of European fascist movements.[29]

In September 1933, Cumann na nGaedheal, the Blueshirts and the short-lived National Centre Party united to form Fine Gael, briefly led by O'Duffy himself. However, O'Duffy resigned a year later, and he subsequently left the Blueshirts. It was a time for rebranding on both ends of the political spectrum in Ireland. In 1934, Frank Ryan, Peadar O'Donnell and George Gilmore abandoned the I.R.A. and formed the Republican Congress. O'Duffy founded the 'openly fascist' National Corporate Party.[30]

[22] *Euzkadi*, 22 June 1932.
[23] A.N.V., PNV 0219–03.
[24] Antonio Elorza, *Ideologías del nacionalismo vasco 1876–1937: de los "euskaros" a Jagi Jagi* (San Sebastián, 1978), p. 447; *Jagi-Jagi*, 18 Mar. 1933.
[25] Richard English, *Radicals and the republic: socialist republicanism in the Irish Free State 1925–1937* (Oxford, 1994), p. 140; Jonathan Hammill, 'Saor Éire and the IRA: an exercise in deception?' in *Saothar*, xx (1995), p. 56.
[26] Fearghal McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy: a self-made hero* (Oxford, 2005), p. 184.
[27] Ibid., pp 189–90, 197.
[28] Maurice Manning, *The Blueshirts* (Toronto, 1971), pp 70–73.
[29] Mike Cronin, 'The Blueshirt movement, 1932–5: Ireland's Fascists?' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, xxx, no. 2 (Apr. 1995), p. 311.
[30] Ibid., p. 319.

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Meanwhile, in the Spanish Basque Country, the Basque Nationalist Party was still negotiating an autonomy statute with Madrid. The 1933 statute which had passed in a referendum in the three provinces was not approved by the Spanish parliament, ostensibly due to the high abstention rate in Álava, where many felt a closer relationship to Navarre. Faced with a critical Spanish national election in 1936, the Basque Nationalist Party was aligned with neither the liberal-left Popular Front coalition nor the broad reactionary bloc on the right.[31] The party's devoutly religious and conservative character led to a natural affinity with the political right, but the right's virulent opposition to any threat to Spain's territorial integrity rendered such an alliance exceedingly difficult.[32]

The Popular Front narrowly outperformed the coalition of right-wing challengers in the parliamentary elections, while the Basque Nationalist Party enjoyed a moderate victory in the provinces of Biscay and Guipúzcoa, but not in Álava. As rumours of a country-wide rebellion against the republican government abounded, some Basque nationalists entertained the overtures of the rightist conspirators. In July 1936, when the 'Rising' orchestrated by Brigadier General Emilio Mola commenced, Basque Nationalist Party branches in Álava and Navarre urged the central party leadership to support the coup.[33] The desperate Second Spanish Republic offered a statute of autonomy to the Basque government, securing their support as a civil war erupted. However, without control of Álava, the ephemeral 'Basque Republic' comprised only Biscay and Guipúzcoa.

In the lead-up to the summer of 1936, wary of the loyalty of some of its own military officers, the Spanish government had dispersed notable suspect officers in the farthest reaches of the country. For instance, the future dictator of the country, Francisco Franco, was sent to the Canary Islands. However, the government made the grave error of sending the architect of the coup, Brigadier General Emilio Mola, to Pamplona (Iruña), Navarre.[34] Far from being a quarantine, the Navarrese capital was the heart and soul of Spain's most dedicated reactionaries, the Carlists. The Carlist militia, known as the *Requeté*, was 'probably the most numerous paramilitary body on the Spanish right', according to historian Martin Blinkhorn.[35] Indeed, this traditionalist monarchist movement constituted a sizeable contingent of the military conspirators, which included fascists, Catholic nationalists and other monarchists.

At the beginning of August 1936, an army of *Requetés* advanced into Guipúzcoa from Navarre. By early September, they held the eastern part of the province, cutting off access by land to France. Behind the lines, Carlists carried out thousands of executions. While they primarily targetted anarchists and socialists, they were known to execute captured Basque nationalists in rarer cases.[36] One Basque nationalist remarked: 'It was absurd, tragic — we had more in common with the Carlists

[31] Stanley Payne, *Basque nationalism* (Reno, 1975), p. 145.

[32] J. L. de la Granja Sainz, *Nacionalismo y II República en el País Vasco: estatutos de autonomía, partidos y elecciones: historia de Acción Nacionalista Vasco* (Madrid, 2008), pp 586–7.

[33] Santiago de Pablo and Ludger Mees, *El péndulo patriótico: historia del Partido Nacionalista Vasco, 1895–2005* (Barcelona, 2005), pp 167–71.

[34] Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: reaction, revolution and revenge* (London, 2006), p. 94.

[35] Martin Blinkhorn, *Carlism and crisis in Spain, 1931–1939* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 224.

[36] Paul Preston, *The Spanish holocaust: inquisition and extermination in twentieth-century Spain* (New York, 2012), pp 180–83, 428–32.

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who were attacking us than with the people we suddenly found ourselves in alliance with.'[37] Basque nationalists labelled the Carlists as fratricidal, lamenting at the current situation when only four years earlier Navarre had nearly signed onto a Basque autonomy statute.[38]

III

Behind the scenes, a clique of right-wing Spaniards in Britain was busy mobilising international support for the rebellion. London-based Carlist nobleman Count Ramírez de Arellano was in contact with Emilio Mola as he planned the rebellion in 1936. For reasons uncertain, Ramírez contacted Cardinal Joseph MacRory, who then put him in touch with Eoin O'Duffy. An under-the-table arrangement resulted in the leader of Ireland's National Corporate Party beginning recruiting for a so-called Irish Brigade to fight in Spain.[39] McGarry explains that beneath the rhetoric of defending the church against communists, this was an opportunity for political rehabilitation for the humiliated O'Duffy.[40]

There has been considerable historical debate about O'Duffy's personal politics. His penchant for the 'liturgical aspects of fascism (the uniforms, salutes, parades, and mass rallies)', apologism for Hitler and Mussolini, zealous nationalism, anti-communism, emphasis on national virility, and corporatist outlook all point to fascism.[41] Historians generally agree that during his prominent role in Fine Gael and subsequent leadership of the Blueshirts, his fascistic inclinations were reined in by the more politically respectable conservative elements within these groups. By leaving the Blueshirts to found the National Corporate Party, O'Duffy is seen as having acted upon his fascist instincts.[42]

However, the interesting point about Eoin O'Duffy's intervention in the Spanish Civil War is that it was at the behest of a traditionalist monarchist movement rather than a fascist organisation, such as the Falange led by *Jefe* José Antonio Primo de Rivera (whose members also wore blue shirts). Nonetheless, with crosses affixed to their uniforms and priests saying Mass in the trenches, the zealous religiosity of the Carlists might have been even more appealing to O'Duffy. He was brought to Pamplona in September 1936 to formalise the arrangements for his volunteer corps. The Irish general was warmly welcomed by Navarrese provincial officials and members of the Carlist high command, who accompanied him at a celebratory Mass at the cathedral.[43] Robert Stradling recounts how O'Duffy met the primate of Spain, Cardinal Isidro Gomá, from whom 'he received his first instruction concerning the Basques and the paradoxical nature of their resistance to the [Spanish] nationalist movement'.[44] While O'Duffy's understanding of the intricacies of Spanish politics is often deprecated, one must not forget that he had at least

[37] Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain: an oral history of the Spanish Civil War* (New York, 1979), p. 191.
[38] *Euzko Deya*, 8 Apr. 1937.
[39] Robert Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939: crusades in conflict* (Manchester, 1999), p. 7.
[40] McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy*, p. 286.
[41] Ibid., p. 244.
[42] Ibid., p. 269; Cronin, 'The Blueshirt Movement, 1932–5', pp 318–19.
[43] Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 19; McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy*, p. 287.
[44] Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 21.

some familiarity with Basque nationalism since his numerous chats with the visiting Basques in 1932.

It is fascinating how Eoin O'Duffy dealt with finding himself near the front of a war between Basques. After all, he did not hesitate to refer to Navarre as part of the Basque Country.[45] On 24 September, General Francisco Franco, who had risen to become the face of the rebellion, approved the terms of agreement for O'Duffy's Irish Brigade. In his published account of his time in Spain, O'Duffy cites the sixth clause of the agreement: 'The Irish Brigade may be employed on any front with the sole exception of the Basque front. General O'Duffy objects to the Irish troops being engaged against the Basque Nationalists for reasons of religion and traditional ties between the Basques and the Irish.'[46] However, O'Duffy must only have been recalling it from memory, because the original document reads: 'General O'Duffy points out that it would be preferable not to oppose the Irish to the Basque Nationalists, who are Catholics. With this sole exception, they may be employed on any other Front.'[47] While the original carries a less forceful tone, it also says nothing about traditional ties with the Basques, which O'Duffy may have omitted to downplay his affinity with them in front of his Francoist hosts.

O'Duffy's conception of traditional ties between Ireland and the Basque Country bears explaining. The notion of an ancient Basque-Irish relationship dates back to at least 1138, when Geoffrey of Monmouth claimed in *The history of the kings of Britain* that ancient Ireland was populated by a group of Basques banished from Iberia.[48] In 1189, Gerald of Wales similarly postulated that the people of Ireland originally came from Bayonne (Baiona), in the northern Basque Country.[49] A travel account from 1782 by an Irish nobleman remarked that 'the manners of the Biscayners, and the ancient Irish, are so similar on many occasions, as to encourage the notion of the Irish being descended from them … So many concurring circumstances support the idea of their having been originally one people.'[50] Innumerable racial and linguistic studies throughout the nineteenth century continued to reference a prehistoric Basque-Irish genetic link. One 1937 article noted that the 'tie of sympathy between Ireland and the Basque Country, it is hardly necessary to point out, is of no recent forging'.[51] Evidently, there was a long-standing theory of an ancient relationship that O'Duffy and his contemporaries were aware of. While the ardent Catholicism of the Basque nationalists posed a clear challenge to the optics of O'Duffy's crusade against atheistic Bolshevism in Spain, it is also worth considering the significance he attached to Basque-Irish relations in his refusal to fight on the Basque front, and whether his recent positive interactions with Basque nationalists influenced his decision.[52]

[45] Eoin O'Duffy, *Crusade in Spain* (Clonskeagh, 1938), pp 195–8.

[46] Ibid., p. 195.

[47] 'Agreement between H. E. General Franco and General Ean O'Duffy', 28 Nov. 1936 (N.L.I., Eoin O'Duffy papers, MS 48,292/4).

[48] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the kings of Britain*, ed. J. A. Giles, trans. Aaron Thompson (Cambridge [Ontario], 1999), p. 47.

[49] Frederick J. Furnivall (ed.), *The English conquest of Ireland, A.D. 1166–1185, mainly from the "*Expugnatio Hibernica*" of Giraldus Cambrensis* (London, 1896), p. 137.

[50] John Talbot Dillon, *Travels through Spain* (London, 1782), pp 167–18.

[51] *Irish Independent*, 4 June 1937.

[52] While O'Duffy claims that he later requested that this clause be withdrawn (see *Crusade in Spain*, p. 199), there is no evidence that this was ever formalised, and the Irish Brigade ultimately saw no combat on the Basque front.

As O'Duffy waited for his volunteers to arrive he was able to tour the rebel-held parts of the Basque Country. He remarked in his journal on 30 November that he stopped in the capital of Álava, Vitoria (Gasteiz) and the recently-captured capital of Guipúzcoa, San Sebastián (Donostia), en route to Saint-Jean-de-Luz (Donibane Lohizune), presumably to meet with Leopold Kerney, Ireland's first official diplomat in Spain.[53] Kerney, who himself had personal ties with Basque nationalists including Eli Gallastegi going back to the mid-1920s, carried out diplomatic activities in this French Basque town until the end of the war.[54]

Eoin O'Duffy's troops served alongside the Carlists for much of their short-lived crusade, which came to an inglorious end in the spring of 1937. One volunteer recounted how their Navarrese comrades 'were the finest soldiers anyone could meet, and treated the members of the Brigade as brothers … Carlist troops did duty in the front line during the day, and members of the Irish Brigade relieved them at night.'[55] They admired the Carlists so much that some officers sought to formally integrate the Irish Brigade, then in the Spanish Foreign Legion, with the *Requeté*.[56] Some of the men returned home with an iconic red Carlist beret — a Basque souvenir — which they might have worn on the front instead of their forage caps issued by Nazi Germany.[57]

IV

Eoin O'Duffy was not the only Irishman who found himself in the Basque Country upon the outbreak of the war. The 'virtually defunct' Republican Congress was revitalised by the Spanish Civil War.[58] It was faced with the impossible task of convincing the Irish public to support the Second Spanish Republic, against the powerful current of the red scare. As McGarry observes, the Irish perception of the Spanish Civil War was inextricably entangled with politics at home, 'still poisoned by the legacy of its own civil war'.[59] The republic-aligned and profoundly Catholic Basque Country presented an obvious counter-argument to the pervasive view that the war was one 'between the forces of God and the forces of anti-Christ'.[60] Republican Congress co-founder

[53] Eoin O'Duffy, *Diary: Irish Brigade in Spain* (N.L.I. MS 48, 292/2); Leopold Kerney was then serving as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Second Spanish Republic.

[54] Leopold Kerney to Department of External Affairs, 6 Dec. 1937 (N.A.I., D.F.A., 3/115/236); Barry Whelan, *Ireland's revolutionary diplomat: a biography of Leopold Kerney* (Notre Dame, 2019), p. 118.

[55] *Irish Times*, 22 June 1937.

[56] Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 83.

[57] *Irish Times*, 22 June 1937; *Documents on Irish foreign policy* V, no. 26, John Dulanty to Joseph Walshe, 26 Feb. 1937.

[58] Brian Hanley, 'Fighting the fascists: Ireland in the 1930s' in *Gernika then & now: 80 years of Basque-Irish anti-fascist struggles* (Dublin, 2017), p. 25.

[59] Fearghal McGarry, 'Ireland and the Spanish Civil War' in Declan Downey and Julio Crespo MacLennan (eds), *Spanish-Irish relations through the ages: new historical perspectives* (Dublin, 2008), p. 220.

[60] According to independent T.D. Richard Anthony, this was the view held by 'the majority of professing Christians in Ireland': see *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lxv, cols 702–03, 19 Feb. 1937.

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George Gilmore was, therefore, sent to Biscay to search for a Basque Catholic who had made a good impression in Ireland four years earlier — Father Ramón Laborda.

Gilmore had a literally rocky start to his journey, crash-landing in the stormy weather typical to Bilbao in August 1936. He escaped from the plane crash with only a broken leg, but required a stay in hospital.[61] Gilmore had a private audience with *Lehendakari* (president) Jose Antonio Agirre in his presidential office, where the young leader of the Basque Nationalist Party reported news of rebel atrocities in occupied areas of the Basque Country. The Basque government furnished Gilmore with a list of reported atrocities to bring back to Ireland. Gilmore reported: 'I was entertained by President Aguirre and members of his United Front Government. A crucifix occupies the most prominent place in his office. He is intensely Nationalist, but is Catholic as well. Priests and nuns walk about the streets of Bilbao, as they have always done.'[62] While the conservative Basque Nationalist Party did not ideologically align with Gilmore's Republican Congress, they recognised the value of their supposed position as the '"only argument" that there was any tolerance in the Republican zone toward Catholics'.[63] Agirre recommended that Gilmore search for Father Laborda in Bayonne, just across the Franco-Spanish border, where many had sought refuge from the war.[64] Gilmore made it to the French Basque Country where he found Laborda, who agreed to come to Ireland in early 1937.

Back in Ireland, a propaganda battle raged between rival supporters of the two sides in the Spanish Civil War. Behind the Francoist rebels was the full weight of the *Irish Independent*, a new organisation called the Irish Christian Front and prominent outspoken Catholic clergymen, who all found a receptive audience in the Irish public. The *Irish Independent* had long been a pro-Treaty and rabidly anti-communist paper, which the Basque nationalist visitors of 1932 had recognised as being aligned with Cosgrave.[65] Its influence was significant considering it was 'the most widely-circulated daily in the country'.[66] Stradling also suggests that the chairman of the *Irish Independent*, William Lombard Murphy, and its editor Frank Geary, had a hand in covertly financing O'Duffy's Irish Brigade.[67] The Irish Christian Front was an anti-communist activist organisation founded in August 1936, led by Fine Gael T.D., former Blueshirt and vitriolic anti-Semite Patrick Belton, who called upon de Valera to officially recognise the provisional government of Francisco Franco.[68]

Tense debates raged in the Dáil over de Valera's policy of non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War. Patrick Belton lambasted the leader of the government, calling

[61] Pere Soler Parício, 'Irlanda y la guerra civil española: nuevas perspectivas de estudio' (Ph.D. thesis, Universitat de Barcelona, 2013), p. 511. According to Seán Cronin, Gilmore's broken leg was the reason why Frank Ryan ultimately led the group of socialist volunteers known as the 'Connolly Column' rather than him. Thus, one might say that the notorious Basque weather changed the course of Ireland's involvement in the Spanish Civil War: see *Frank Ryan: the search for the republic* (Dublin, 1980), p. 83.

[62] *The Worker*, 21 Nov. 1936.

[63] Payne, *Basque nationalism*, p. 180.

[64] Cronin, *Frank Ryan*, p. 81.

[65] McGarry, 'Irish newspapers and the Spanish Civil War', p. 69; A.N.V., PNV 0219–03.

[66] Dermot Keogh, *Ireland and Europe: 1919–1948* (Dublin, 1988), p. 66.

[67] Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 7.

[68] Donal Fallon, 'Saint Patrick, Animal Gang and Blueshirts: anti-communism in 1930s Dublin' in *Dublin Historical Record*, lxvii, no. 2 (autumn/winter 2014), p. 76.

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Fianna Fáil a 'red' party and demanding: 'We have got to say whether we stand for Christ or anti-Christ. That is the issue, nothing else.'[69] From the other side of the political spectrum, the general secretary of the Communist Party of Ireland, Seán Murray, denounced de Valera as a traitor to republicanism and a supporter of the fascists in Spain.[70] De Valera announced: 'I am anxious that we should play our part in trying to shorten this conflict in Spain by preventing the export of arms to the combatants and also by preventing recruitment for the various sides who are fighting out in Spain, a fight which, for most of them, at any rate, is not the sort of fight that we think it is, but is a fight for one "ism" against another.'[71] Unsurprisingly, the *Irish Press*, founded and controlled by de Valera, 'walked a non-intervention tightrope' throughout the war.[72] This line of thought was generally supported by the *Irish Times*, which emphasised the legal legitimacy of the republic and offered a nuanced treatment of events in Spain.[73]

In early November, the Republican Congress organised anti-Franco events around Dublin, now focused on the plight of the Basque nationalists. A crowded meeting in November presided over by anti-Treaty veterans Ernie O'Malley and Peadar O'Donnell also featured the enigmatic veteran of Basque-Irish affairs, Ambrose Martin. Martin's old connections in the Basque nationalist community and his fluency in Spanish proved to be instrumental in the publicity campaign mounted by his comrades.[74] Martin recited a statement supplied by the propaganda department of the Basque Nationalist Party, which gave thanks to 'the intention and works of this meeting in Ireland to make known the real cause for which [the Basque Country] stands, and we see with emotion the sympathy of Republican Ireland for us'. George Gilmore also sent a message from Bilbao read by Martin: 'Basque people, fighting for national liberty against Fascist invasion, expect sympathy of Republican Ireland. Territory held by Basque government peaceful and like normal. Bilbao has 60,000 refugees from Fascist terror in San Sebastian.' The meeting closed with a reciprocal message to the Basque Nationalist Party: 'Republicans assembled in Dublin preparing to launch campaign to make known the truth of your struggle. Repudiate Irish Christian Front and new Fascist bodies, who have misrepresented Irish sentiment. Received your message with enthusiasm and send cordial greetings.'[75] An article in the *Irish Independent* the next day attacked the Republican Congress. Editor Frank Geary wrote that Peadar O'Donnell and his ilk 'insulted the name of decent Irish republicanism by their vile suggestion that Irish republicans have any sympathy with the murderers of priests and the destroyers of churches'.[76]

Ramón Laborda arrived in Dublin in January, giving his first lecture at a packed theatre in Dublin. Unable to speak English well, a translation of his speech was read by Ambrose Martin. It challenged the red scare/holy war narrative on several different levels. Basque nationalists were not communists simply by virtue of being

[69] *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lxv, col. 629, 18 Feb. 1937.
[70] Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War*, pp 132–3.
[71] *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lxv, col. 605, 18 Feb. 1937.
[72] Mark O'Brien, '"In war torn Spain": the politics of Irish press coverage of the Spanish civil war' in *Media, War & Conflict*, x, no. 3 (2017), p. 356.
[73] McGarry, 'Irish newspapers and the Spanish Civil War', p. 72.
[74] Alexander Ugalde Zubiri, *La acción exterior del nacionalismo vasco (1890–1939): historia, pensamiento y relaciones internacionales* (Bilbao, 1996), pp 653–4.
[75] *Irish Times,* 6 Nov. 1936.
[76] *Irish Independent*, 7 Nov. 1936.

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opposed to Franco, Laborda insisted. He covered the religious angle by telling how Francoist rebels carried out extrajudicial executions of Basque priests in captured territory, and how several of the leaders of the military coup were themselves not even religious. As for the claims that the Spanish republican government was communist, only fifteen of 475 seats in parliament were held by communists, he explained.[77] 'When I read recently that the Catholics of Ireland were offering men and money to Fascist Franco — the personification of the most brutal imperialism, I exclaimed: It is impossible. Ireland could not do that unless she has been miserably deceived.'[78] For a Basque nationalist exposed to many years of enthusiastic coverage of Ireland and so warmly received in 1932, such news must have been bitterly disappointing and difficult to understand.

The Dublin conference spawned a heated exchange in the press via letters to the editor between Laborda and an Irish priest, Father Philip Gannon. 'No one ever accused the Basques of the countryside of being Communists', Gannon wrote, but 'through exaggerated local patriotism, they have forgotten the larger interests of the Kingdom of God in their attachment to their petty Fueros'.[79] He charged them with 'an insane and criminal act' for having extended 'a friendly hand to Communism on the battlefield, and, above all, on Spain and on the Christian soil of Biscay and Navarre'. Of course, 'friendly' would be a mischaracterisation of the relationship between the Basque Nationalist Party and the Popular Front government, but the finer points of politics escaped Father Gannon. He concluded:

> Hence, however much we admire and like the little ethnic group which has maintained itself since pre-history in its picturesque surroundings, we cannot lend them our sympathy as long as they are united in arms with their present allies. Our sense of proportion forces us to set all Spain before a part and the cause of Christ before the Fueros even of Father Laborda's romantic highlands.[80]

Laborda responded, drawing a parallel between Ireland and the Basque Country to highlight Gannon's hypocrisy:

> Father Gannon will excuse me if I do not take him seriously as a judge of the Catholic people and priests of [the Basque Country]. But Basque nationalists readily admit their opposition to the unity of Spain, which is to us as the unity of the British Empire is to Irish Republicans.

He asserted again that the Irish people had been misled, and some of them had been recruited by Fascists 'to join Franco in a war on our small nation'.[81] However, it would have been more accurate and painful to admit that they had been recruited by Navarrese Carlists rather than fascists.

[77] *Irish Times*, 18 Jan. 1937. While the Spanish Communist Party (P.C.E.) had fifteen seats in the Spanish parliament, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (P.S.O.E.) held ninety-nine and the Republican Left (I.R.) held eighty-seven. Both parties, among others that constituted the Popular Front, might have been distasteful to those whose opinion he sought to sway.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 23 Jan. 1937.
[80] Ibid., 26 Jan. 1937.
[81] Ibid., 25 Jan. 1937.

Laborda continued to give speeches in Dublin, accompanied by Ambrose Martin and a small entourage of socialist republicans. He and Martin sought to demonstrate the similarity of the Basque and Irish struggles for independence. Laborda concluded one overview of the conflict with:

> 'This is something of what is happening in the Basque country, whose history shows so many close parallels with Irish history, and which is now fighting as Ireland has done for its freedom from an alien race. Let us hope for the happiness of both in their longed-for liberty. Amen.'[82] Ambrose Martin appealed to audiences with exaggerated stories of how Basque nationalists 'helped the Irish people in their struggle for liberty'.[83]

Laborda and his entourage travelled to Belfast to speak at Queen's University in March 1937. The lecture did not go well. Speakers were interrupted by cries from the audience of 'Up Franco!' and 'What about the murder of nuns?'[84] Some thirty police officers at the event physically ejected the furious hecklers, but O'Donnell and Laborda were banned from speaking again at the university.[85] As Seán Cronin notes, 'it was difficult to put the case against Franco in any part of Ireland in the spring of 1937'.[86]

Laborda's visit to Ireland had little tangible effect on Irish public opinion. Laborda expressed his disappointment and was evidently frustrated by the difficulty of making the case for the Basque government in a country he expected would readily understand. He called the Irish clergy 'partisans of Fascism'[87] and likely cared little for the politics of his far-left acolytes. Apparently, however, his visit generated enough controversy to warrant a response from O'Duffy, with a Basque-Irish parallel of his own:

> That the Basques — Catholics for the most part — allied themselves with the avowed destroyers of their religion and all the traditions held most sacred by them, has caused much confused thinking in Ireland and has been seized as a weapon to use against the Nationalist cause. It has been said that the Basques are as much entitled to complete independence from Spain as the Irish are to independence from England. But there is no similarity. The Basques are no more entitled to partition from Spain than six counties of Ulster are to partition from Ireland. Their claim is equally absurd.[88]

De Valera and his cabinet followed news of rebel persecution of Basque nationalists with interest and were well aware that the Spanish Civil War was not a battle between crusaders and forces of the antichrist.[89] Moreover, de Valera was familiar with Basque nationalism, and had already previously voiced his sympathies.

[82] Ramon Laborda, 'Rebellion in Spain and the Basque Country' in *The National Student* (n.d.), quoted in *Euzko Deya*, 21 Mar. 1937.
[83] *Irish Independent*, 4 Dec., 6 Nov. 1936.
[84] *Irish Press*, 25 Mar. 1937.
[85] John Bowyer Bell, 'Ireland and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939' in *Studia Hibernica*, ix (1969), p. 156.
[86] Cronin, *Frank Ryan*, p. 87.
[87] *Irish Press*, 25 Mar. 1937.
[88] O'Duffy, *Crusade in Spain*, p. 195.
[89] Keogh, *Ireland and Europe*, pp 79–80.

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However, Laborda's presence in Ireland made the administration uncomfortable considering its neutral stance. Due to a diplomatic oversight and dishonesty on Laborda's part, his visa application for entry into Ireland, ostensibly for the purpose of 'giving lectures on Basque music', was approved. The embassy that issued the visa was chastised, as Laborda's activities 'caused embarrassment to the Government', and they noted 'it may be necessary to request him to leave Saorstát Eireann'.[90]

Overall, the socialist republican concentration on the Basque nationalists was logical, even if mostly ineffective. The plight of the irrefutably Catholic Basque nationalists demonstrated that the war in Spain was not as straightforward as the pro-Franco forces within Ireland sought to portray it. However, their primary aim was not to generate support for the Basque nationalist war effort, but for that of the Second Spanish Republic more broadly. It was, thus, ironic that the example they anticipated would resonate most with the Irish public was the republic's least enthusiastic ally. Their coverage of this front was disingenuous in two ways. First, Irish socialist republicans ignored the conservative character of mainstream Basque nationalism and the fact that the Basque Nationalist Party had run in an electoral alliance with the political right against their current allies only a few years earlier. For the purpose of their propaganda it suited them not to report that the Basque government waged an internal war against radical leftist elements in its own territory which included dissident socialist militiamen and anarcho-syndicalists, who vandalised churches and carried out extrajudicial executions.[91] Second, the so-called "Basque oasis" which they used to cast doubt on the reports of atrocities in Spain was exceptionally stable socio-politically, thus making any extrapolations suspect.[92] For instance, one audience member asked Ambrose Martin to talk about 'the Catholic element in Madrid and other parts of Spain', to which he replied 'that it was difficult for him to deal with anything that was happening outside the Basque Country'.[93] To be sure, Franco supporters overstated and misrepresented atrocities behind republican lines, but anticlerical violence was still common, even if it was not institutionally sanctioned. Paul Preston notes that '[c]hurches and convents were sacked and burned everywhere in the Republican zone except the Basque Country'.[94]

V

According to McGarry, enthusiasm for Franco in Ireland did not truly begin to wane until the bombing of Guernica (Gernika).[95] Guernica was historically significant as the site at which Spanish monarchs had historically sworn to uphold the *fueros* of Biscay. Naturally, it held a deep significance to Basque nationalists and equally to their Carlist enemies. This small Basque town, incinerated by the German Luftwaffe on 26 April 1937, was the first in history to be totally destroyed

[90] Sean Murphy to Irish legation in Paris, 6 Mar. 1937 (N.A.I., D.F.A., 3/102/43).
[91] Helen Graham, *The Spanish Republic at war, 1936–1939* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 242; de Pablo and Mees, *El péndulo patriótico*, pp 176–7; Payne, *Basque nationalism*, p. 180. For example, the conservative and pro-Franco *Cork Examiner* reported, on 12 Jan. 1937, that 'over two hundred were killed in a fight between Basques and anarchists in Bilbao'.
[92] de Pablo and Mees, *El péndulo patriótico*, p. 176.
[93] *Irish Independent*, 6 Nov. 1936.
[94] Preston, *The Spanish holocaust*, p. 235.
[95] McGarry, 'Ireland and the Spanish Civil War', p. 227.

by aerial bombardment and quickly became an icon of the Spanish Civil War, immortalised in Pablo Picasso's famous painting.[96] The reasoning behind the infamous attack has been much debated by historians. The choice to use incendiary bombs, to strike on the weekly market day when the civilian population swelled, and above all to target Guernica, the symbolic heart of Basque nationalism, indicate to many that it was an attack intended to maximise civilian casualties and demoralise the besieged Basque nationalists as Franco's forces prepared for the final push into Bilbao.[97]

The reaction in the Irish media was predictable. The *Irish Independent* reported that it was not bombarded, but if it were, hypothetically, it would be justifiable because it was a legitimate military target. The true culprits, it argued, were Soviet-ordered arsonists.[98] It later promoted the claim that it was a false flag attack perpetrated by the Basque government, who destroyed the town with dynamite.[99] The *Irish Press*, quoting journalists who witnessed the event first-hand, reported that German bombers had killed over 800 civilians in 'the most appalling air raid in the history of modern warfare'.[100] The *Irish Times* stated:

> After the events of the last few weeks in Northern Spain it has become exceedingly difficult to maintain the thesis that General Franco is fighting a holy war. The destruction of Guernica has horrified the world. This town was the ancient capital of the Basques, hallowed by a thousand years of national and religious memories, and it was wiped out of existence in a few hours by the most ruthless air raid in the history of warfare.[101]

Such realisations must have come as a bitter vindication for Laborda and others who earlier sought to refute this narrative.[102]

The Basque government evacuated some 30,000 children,[103] most of whom would be sent to countries such as France, Belgium, Great Britain and the Soviet Union. As Bilbao fell to the rebels, tens of thousands of refugees poured out of the city under the protection of the British navy. Nearly 4,000 Basque children were brought to England, while Ireland 'did not feel it had the Basques on its conscience'.[104] Among the refugees was the veteran hibernophile Eli Gallastegi, along with his wife and five children, who eventually immigrated to Ireland with the help

[96] Preston, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. 270.

[97] For a summary of this debate see Herbert Rutledge Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica! a study of journalism, diplomacy, propaganda, and history* (Berkeley, 1977), pp 371–86. For a recent, meticulously-researched account that effectively settles the debate regarding the supposed strategic value of the bombing of Gernika, see chapter 4 of Xabier Irujo, *Gernika, 1937: the market day massacre* (Reno, 2015).

[98] *Irish Independent*, 4 May 1937.

[99] Ibid., 21 Mar. 1938.

[100] *Irish Press*, 28 Apr. 1937.

[101] *Irish Times*, 3 May 1937.

[102] Recent work by William Burton explores the reaction of Irish newspapers to the bombing of Guernica in more depth: see 'The Spanish Civil War, Irish newspapers, journals, and periodicals – a thematic examination, 1936–39' (Ph.D. thesis, Ulster University, 2019), pp 90–126.

[103] Peter Anderson, 'The struggle over the evacuation to the United Kingdom and repatriation of Basque refugee children in the Spanish Civil War: symbols and souls' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, lii, no. 2. (2017), p. 303.

[104] Cronin, *Frank Ryan*, p. 118.

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of Ambrose Martin. The Gallastegi family settled in the Meath Gaeltacht, where they remained for the next twenty-one years.

Throughout the war, even after their defeat, the Basque government maintained a strong presence abroad. From London and Paris, it published *Euzko Deya* (Basque Cry), a bi-weekly publication with many articles aimed explicitly at the Irish public. Its first issue on 29 November 1936 featured a lengthy article in English aimed at Irish Catholics. Reporting on Francoist executions of Basque priests, it addressed the Irish public: 'As Basque Nationalists, as defenders of God in democracy and liberty, we want the world to know of such crimes. We once more appeal to the Catholics of the world, and to you, —most specially —, Irish patriot, as there exists some similarity between you and us.' It also directly addressed Eoin O'Duffy: 'Never mix up politics and religion. And never allow anybody to do so. Do you hear us, O'Duffy? … Beware O'Duffy!! Mind your steps, Christian Front!!'[105] Many issues followed the events of Laborda's tour in Ireland, ultimately remarking: 'The Basque and Catholic propagandist had to leave Ireland, leaving sensible people with the conviction that his people were right, and leaving right-wing circles a bad memory'.[106] The writers' frustration, like Laborda's, was palpable: 'To tell the truth, [there is] nobody more painfully experienced than an Irishman to talk about civil wars, and nobody would seem better disposed than an Irish Catholic to understand the Basque Catholics. But Father Gannon says not a word about all that.'[107]

The editors of *Euzko Deya* had one assistant particularly relevant to this subject. A young Dubliner named Jack Prendergast heard stories of Basque nationalists, likely those propagated by the Irish Republican Congress, which inspired him to travel to the Basque Country in 1936. He enlisted directly in the republic-aligned Basque army. He was the only Irishman, and in fact the only foreigner to do so. Prendergast received military training, learned enough Basque to sing songs with his comrades, and was deployed as a captain in an artillery battalion.[108] Fighting, as he claimed, 'until the last inch of Basque territory had been taken,' the young Irishman was captured by Italian forces west of Biscay in 1937.[109] His release was diplomatically secured, though rather than returning to Ireland, Prendergast went to Paris to assist the Basque nationalists in their propaganda campaign targeting the British and Irish public.

Prendergast had been able to contact the Basque Nationalist Party through its delegate in London, José Ignacio Lizaso, who coordinated his peculiar enlistment as an Irish-Basque soldier and role as a translator for the so-called Basque Information Service in Paris.[110] However, Lizaso had the following to say about Ireland in an interview with a journalist from the *Irish Times*:

> Oh! Ireland! Ireland! What a disappointment you have been to the Basque people! … Had we been asked what country in the whole world we might depend on for sympathy and understanding, I should have at once placed Ireland as the first who would give us courage and hope. And then comes the news that an Irish regiment has arrived to fight against us.[111]

[105] *Euzko Deya*, 29 Nov. 1936.
[106] Ibid., 18 July 1937.
[107] Ibid., 5 Dec. 1937.
[108] F. M. Vargas Alonso, 'El Partido Nacionalista Vasco en guerra: Euzko Gudarostea (1936–1937)' in *Vasconia*, xxxi (2001), p. 308.
[109] *Evening Herald*, 16 Mar. 1939.
[110] *Deia*, 23 July 2017.
[111] *Irish Times*, 15 June 1937.

This sentiment was echoed by the vice president of the Basque government in exile, Xabier Landaburu, many years later. He bitterly recalled Ireland as 'a nation that has defrauded us', writing:

> We Basques were sincere admirers of the Irish … That admiration lasted until our war. It seemed therefore that the Irish would have effortlessly understood the Basque situation. That was not the case. Ireland was one of the first countries to offer assistance to our enemies, sending a Legion to fight in its ranks.[112]

Basque disappointment in Ireland highlights the naivete of the assumption that the Irish people would see the same affinity with the Basques as vice versa. Most sympathy with the Basque nationalist cause was overridden by the distaste for the Second Spanish Republic, and the general public in Ireland was more interested in the imagined broader war between Christ and antichrist than they were in the particularities of the civil war in the Basque Country. Basque nationalist propaganda sought to make their small nation more relatable by drawing parallels with Ireland and portraying their cause as fighting for freedom just as the Irish had done against the British. However, it took the destruction of their historic cultural capital to have any notable effect on Irish public opinion. De Valera, while sympathetic to the Basque nationalist cause, could not see it as sufficient reason to alter his cautious stance of neutrality.

VI

Basque nationalists — who had paid close attention to events in Ireland since 1916, studied Connolly and Pearse, made pilgrimage-like visits to Dublin over the years, and drew many parallels between the Basque and Irish struggles for independence — expected Ireland to readily extend its sympathy for their cause. While they were not without supporters, comments such as those by Lizaso and Landaburu suggest that O'Duffy's Irish Brigade was more readily recalled in the Basque nationalist memory of Ireland during these years than was the solidarity of the Republican Congress.

In hindsight, the notes penned during the 1932 visit to Dublin were prescient. The anonymous Basque source wrote of an argument about Basque nationalism with William T. Cosgrave and referred to him as a 'friend of Spain' — not high praise coming from a Basque nationalist.[113] Cosgrave's uncomfortable joke about his desire for a strong and unified Catholic Spain was indicative of how conservative elements in Irish society would react in 1936. At the same time, the Basque nationalists got along well with Commissioner Eoin O'Duffy, with whom they allegedly spent much of their night at the Mansion House. It was an interesting turn of fate that O'Duffy would later arrive in the Basque Country, invited by Carlists, and refuse to fight on the Basque front. The good impression

[112] Xabier Landaburu, 'La república irlandesa' in *Obras completas de F. Javier de Landaburu* (Bilbao, 1984), pp 219–20.
[113] A.N.V., P.N.V. 0219–03.

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that Father Ramón Laborda made in 1932 proved significant when George Gilmore trekked through the Basque Country to find him during the war. Similarly, the relationships forged earlier by the roving Ambrose Martin were strategically important to the Republican Congress in its noble but futile effort to demonstrate the complexity of the Spanish Civil War to the Irish public.

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