

INSURRECTION

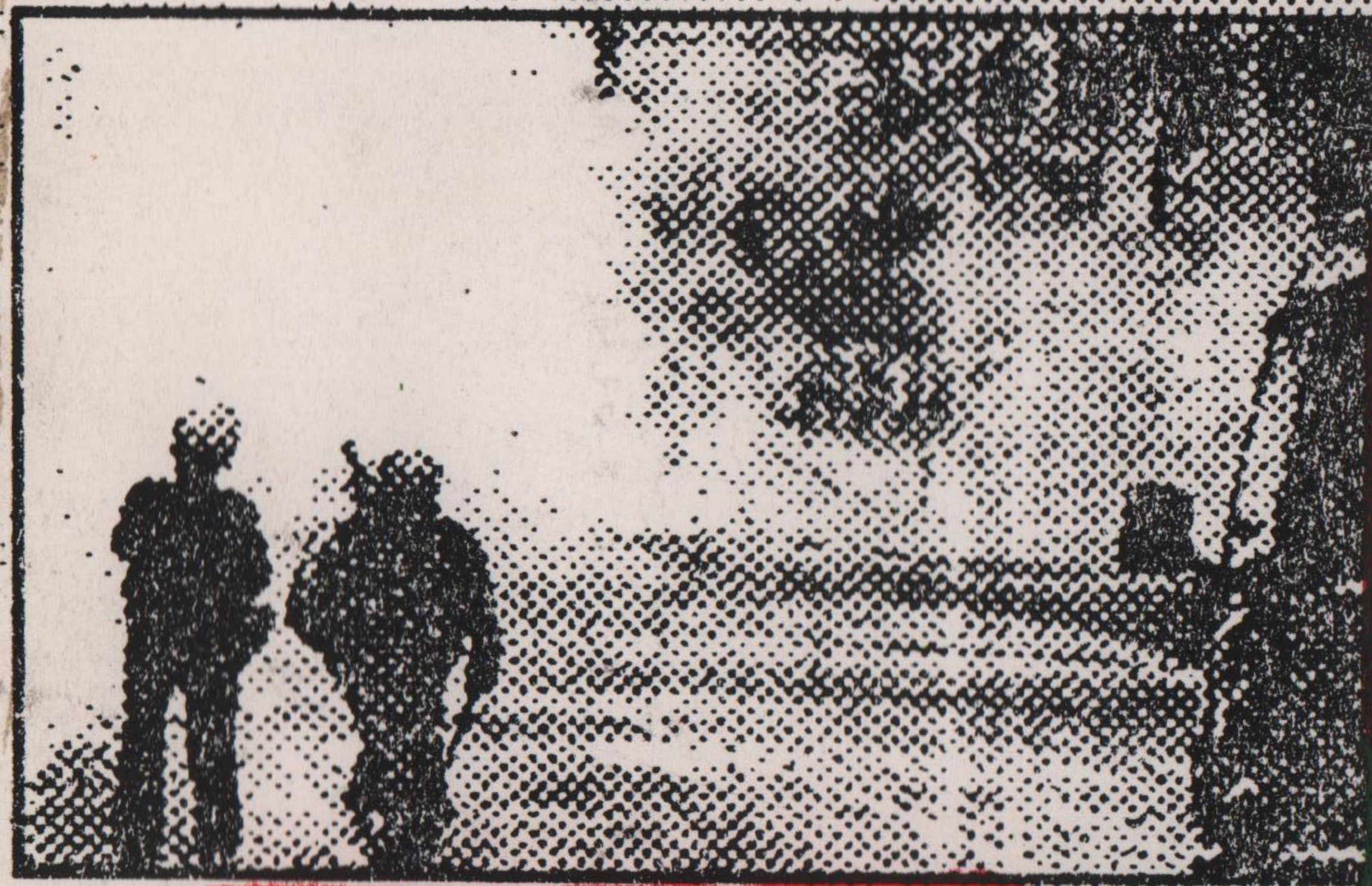
IN EUSKADI

Political struggles in the Basque Country

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Buzz Burrell



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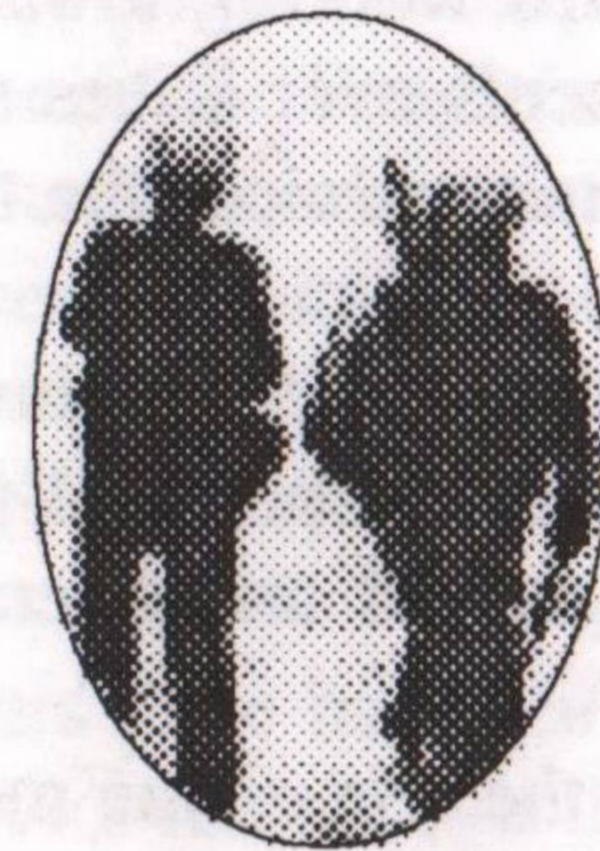
PARTISAN PRESS

This pamphlet is designed to give a general impression of recent political history and state repression in Euskadi (The Basque Country). After spending some time there over the years I started to realise that there was little knowledge over here about the country, and decided to try to get some information across. Prior to this publication the content of this pamphlet was given as a talk in both Edinburgh and Glasgow, the latter through the Free University Network. I know there are things I'll have left out but as a rough introduction it should give an idea of what's been going on.

B. Burrell.

INSURRECTION IN EUSKADI

Political struggles in the Basque country



After the bloody Civil War in the Spanish state in 1936-39, a People's Republic was finally defeated by the Fascist army of General Franco, who then went on to lead a tyrannous dictatorship up to his death in 1975.

During his reign political meetings were prohibited, with special attention given to those of a left-wing or nationalist tendency. The teaching of, and the publication of material in the three minority languages in the state was banned, with people being beaten for as much as a greeting in their native tongue.

The dictatorship's actions were designed to stamp out the Basque, Catalan and Galician languages but people continued to be brought up speaking their language at home and nationalist sentiments grew in all areas. In Euskadi the resistance developed into an active underground student movement which grew in an atmosphere of fear and repression.

By the 1960's it became clear that there were some in Euskadi who were able and willing to show some resistance. ETA formed in 1959 and during the 60's and 70's gained a great deal of popularity throughout the whole state as a force daring enough to take on the might of the dictatorship.

They had their first assembly in 1965 in which they defined themselves as a 'revolutionary Basque movement of national liberation', and from then up to the present day have stuck to the 'revolutionary war thesis' which has meant an unceasing guerrilla war of liberation against the Madrid government.

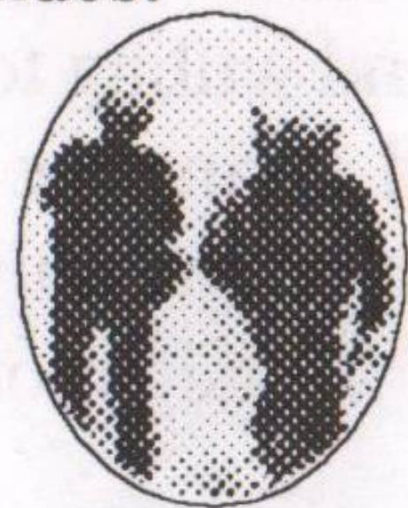
During the 70's with the end of the dictatorship in sight people had already started to come together to fight over certain issues ; local neighbourhood groups, workers' committees and groups working towards forming coherent and effective movements over issues such as conscientious objection to the military service (the first political objector was in 1975).

Although there were people involved in these groups who were also members of political parties or unions, the groups were self-organised and operated on an assembly basis.

Along with the rise of the more traditional and/or bourgeois parties and organisations (PCE, PSOE, PNV, CNT, etc.) came the appearance of new parties combining the social struggle with the Basque national struggle. Almost all these groups stemmed from ETA (MCE/EMK, LKI, EIA, LAIA, etc). Two principal groups formed within all these movements, one identifying with ETA (militar) and the other with ETA (politico militar).

In 1976 almost everyone on the left, including Leninists, social democrats, anarchists and autonomous groups were in favour of what was called the 'Rupture' which was the negation of the legitimacy of the 'Reform', i.e. the parliamentary monarchy which was to replace the Franco regime and which had the support of the bourgeoisie of the Spanish state.

The 'Rupture' failed and the reform still hasn't really taken place in Euskadi. There's been no normalisation in Euskadi and the Basque Problem remains. If anything the Basque Problem gets worse as the division between the bourgeois autonomy supporters and the more radical pro-independence left continues.



After Franco's death the state authorities' hopes that the so-called new democracy would see the end of ETA were shattered by a sharp increase in ETA activity along with protests on the streets. Though the Franco era had come to an end, repression continued in Euskadi with ultra right-wing police commanders taking the law into their own hands. In 1978 in the 'San Fermin' fiesta in Iruña one person was killed and forty wounded. Three days later a march by bank employees in Donostia was attacked, one person being killed and many wounded. A general strike followed in Euskadi.

Herri Batasuna (The People's Unity Coalition) was formed that year. It was the combination of revolutionary pro-independence movements and immediately became the second party to the right wing PNV (Basque Nationalist Party). Together HB and ETA were to fight for the total rejection of Spain and it's policies.

Over the years there has been the constant struggle between HB and EMK for control over the various movements in Euskadi, and for the movements to become part of their strategies. When HB have not been able to gain control over the movements they have divided them and created their own section.

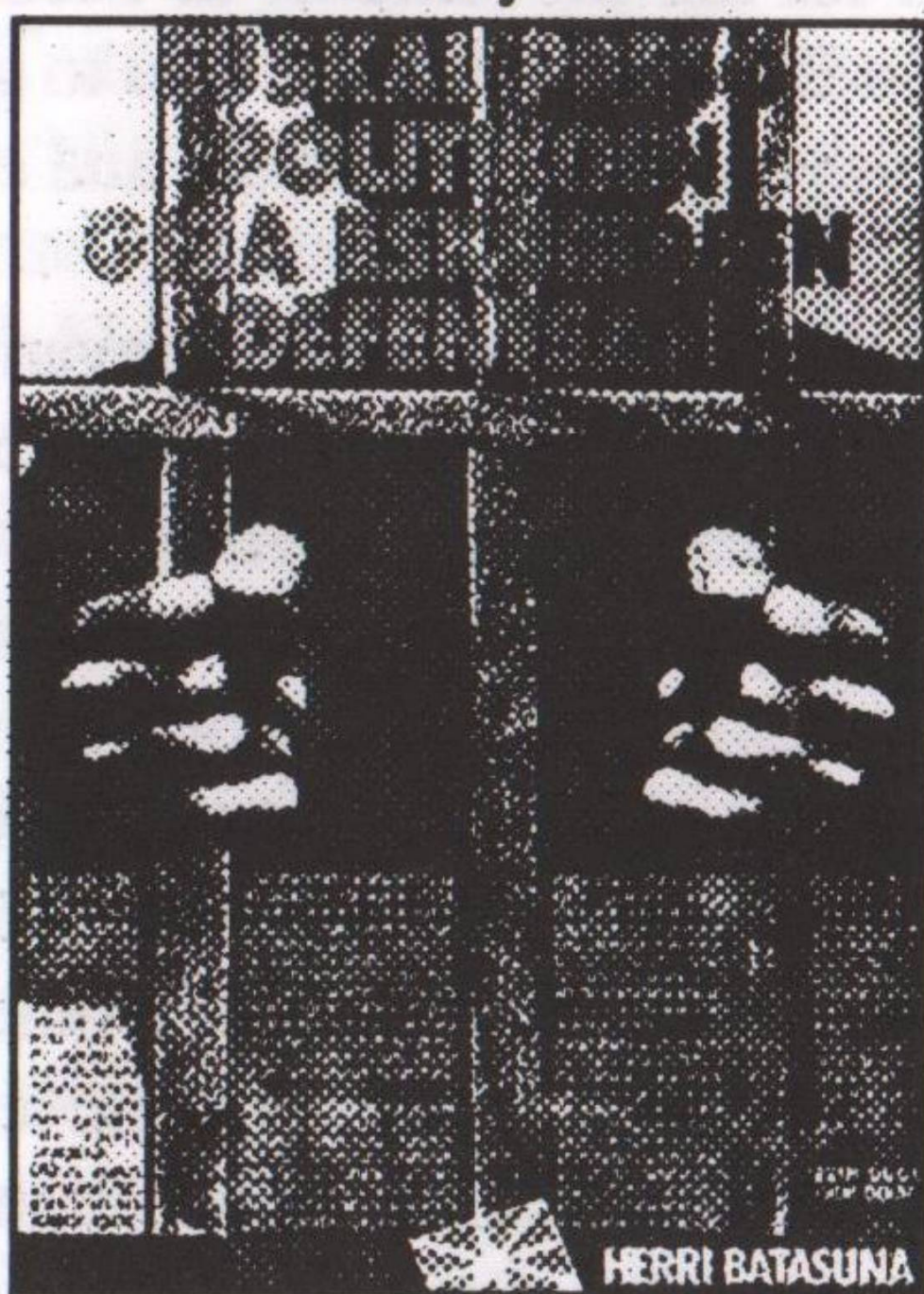
The anti-nuclear movement began as a genuinely grassroots collective of local and village committees with regular assemblies. This movement, which in one demonstration brought 150,000 onto the streets of Bilbo, brought to a standstill the construction of a massive nuclear plant near the city. The movement soon took two main strands, the communist EKI and the HB supporters Eguzki.

The Asambleas de Mujeres or 'Women's Assemblies' which, again, started as a non-party based movement throughout Euskadi was split as HB set up their own strand called Egizan. The Comites Internacionalistas, the strong and effective international solidarity group were divided with HB forming Askapena.

In the defence of the Basque language, Euskera, a group called AEK was set up and they continue fighting to save the language through protest and the setting up of courses. The ratio of Basque speakers is at around 20%. Though the group started as a mixture of HB and EMK supporters and anarchist/autonomous activists, the communists formed their own group IKA four years ago.

During the late seventies some people from these various groups took up arms and became the Comandos Autonomos Anticapitalistas. They criticised ETA's armed struggle, seeing it as elitist and party based and fought a relatively brief, insurrection struggle. They weren't a centralised organisation and sometimes lost communication amongst themselves. Now there are 14 Comandos Autonomos prisoners in Spanish prisons and many more exiled to France and South America.

The group who's autonomy from political parties is best conserved is the MOC (Conscientious Objection Movement) which is a co-ordination throughout the state of anti militarist groups. The movement has been able to develop relatively well over the years as it's only really recently that the HB/EMK Leninists have taken an anti militarist stance, always having said 'military service with ETA(m)'. The main problem that exists now between the original MOC and the HB/EMK tendency is that while the latter want a Basque State, the former are against a state of any kind.



1992 leaflet produced by Herri Batasuna for the support of political prisoners

The beginning of the 80's saw the flowering of a radical youth movement in Euskadi, with pirate radio stations, gatzetxes (youth squats), and independent youth groups setting up outside of the control of political parties. There was a mass of activity up until around 1988/9 with the youth creating a new musical and cultural aesthetic outlook. HB attempted to 'own' all of these movements, but as they were almost all anti-party, a bad relationship developed.

Principally they were groups of activists without enough political analysis, and attempts at the setting up of a co-ordinating group failed around the summer of 87. Their problems centred on their politics towards HB, the national problem and the constant quarrels between the more spontaneous and the more organising activists.



The Spanish state's repressive politics continue on all levels, the torture and isolation of prisoners, brutal repression on the streets, and the idea of dialogue with the government non-existent.

Between January and mid-November last year 535 Basques were arrested for political motives. Around 120 were kept in prison and in court 140 reported having been tortured. There are around 650 ETA and IK prisoners in Spain and France. A very small percentage are IK members. They are moved around from prison to prison on a regular basis and are constantly being beaten en route by the Civil Guard and then by screws in the prisons. All their human rights are limited; going for walks, receiving letters and packages and their studies. The Basque prisoners have a long history of being at the end of human rights abuses, though Amnesty International, as with the Irish political prisoners, have kept their hands clean.

Would-be defence lawyers don't even turn up for court cases of arrested Basques as they are not allowed contact with the prisoners so they can't prepare the defence. The state is happy with this of course, and in order that the court cases are not adjourned they appoint official lawyers that the prisoners reject.

It's the same story in the French state. In October last year 5 members of IK were on trial in a special tribunal in Paris. One denied any connection with the organisation, three were given sentences of between 6 - 15 years and Philippe Bidart, considered to be the leader of IK, was sentenced to life accused of killing a gendarme. All of this went through the courts without an ounce of proof to back it up. Bidart went on hunger strike in November protesting against being kept in isolation.

The screw is being well and truly tightened on the Basque resistance movement. As the mass arrests go on, the street control tightens. In March last year as a part of the police arrests the old sector of Bilbo was under siege, surrounded by the National Police for 6 consecutive days as arrests were made of 'suspected' activists. These actions also create an excuse for the wide scale intimidation of the local residents.

A typical example of state terrorism in Euskadi was the eviction of a one-parent family that took place last summer.

Having been evicted from their home and in desperation at the lack of housing in a run down suburb of Bilbo the family occupied a building in the area. An eviction date was soon set up and a handful of friends stayed overnight the previous evening to support the family.

The police reaction was to use the eviction as an excuse to attack the whole community shooting into the crowded streets and market and taking over the whole area for three or four hours. The eviction itself was also done in a violent way.

Frequently demonstrations in favour of amnesty for political prisoners aren't even allowed to begin as riot police fire rubber bullets and charge into stationary crowds. Sometimes when a demonstration is organised for, say, 8.00 pm the police will take over the town or city sometimes as

much as an hour beforehand, and with the demo not having been able to begin, the police begin on an evening spree of violence, moving in groups up narrow streets, beating people indiscriminately and randomly firing rubber bullets into bars.

Police often evict bars which they supposedly suspect to contain activists, beating people on their way out or as they huddle into a corner in desperation. Or the police, often well

oiled, drugged up (or both), will enter bars beating people up so that they leave and then demand drinks, threaten people, smash the place up - basically they can do whatever they like in these situations.

In many cafes and bars as fighting is going on a matter of yards away, drinks are still served as people are determined to try and carry on their lives as usual and not be intimidated. On one occasion when I was in a situation like this the barman turned up the music on the cassette machine and offered lemon rings to the customers to counteract the effect of the teargas that filled the bar.

While the authorities claim that it's only a small amount of people who are 'causing the trouble' in Euskadi, the police tactics are to attack whole areas indiscriminately with the result being that everyone is affected - whether a demonstrator, shop worker or passer-by - the result is the same. Police action is designed to create maximum fear and intimidation.

April 1992 National police charging a crowd in Bilbo



One evening during the week of fiestas in Bilbo a few years ago I witnessed a massive police riot. They had taken over the centre of the city to stop a pro-amnesty demonstration taking place and at around 6.30 started to fire gas canisters and shoot into the mobile stands and up streets. There were hundreds of police and dozens of riot vans. Luckily, in all the teargas and mayhem, I met a local bloke who recognised me from the night before and, him knowing the city, we ran together. At first we were looking for any resistance taking place - but there wasn't any. The police attack was fierce and relentless and as we ran to escape one occupied area we found another, and another, until it became clear that the whole of central Bilbo was taken over by uniformed thugs charged up on violence.

Finally, at around midnight, they had orders to leave and en masse they did so leaving a stunned and furious town behind them. The fiesta started again with some stalls and bars reopening and people, as is usual in fiestas carried on throughout the night.

I don't know how many arrests were made that night, if any. There were a hell of a lot of people injured, some had even jumped into the river in fear of being on the receiving end of police brutality. The red cross caravan which was there for the fiestas was inundated with injured people and even that supposed safe-house was shot into by the police.

This police riot isn't an isolated incident. There have been countless similar and even worse incidents.



1992 pro-amnesty demonstration in Donostia

The Workers' Movement in Euskadi reached a high-point of grassroots self-control in the late 70's. By the beginning of 1976 the cost of living had risen by 30% and failing negotiations between the workers and bosses ended in a three month strike in Gasteiz, supported for some of the time in the rest of Euskadi.

It was a great achievement; a three month strike which was totally self-controlled, on an assembly basis and with the unions not being allowed a look-in. All the major industries in Gasteiz and a large number in the rest of the country were brought to a standstill. It was a violent conflict and, tragically, three workers were killed by the police at the door of the cathedral in Gasteiz on March the 3rd.

Though there are still autonomous workers' groups scattered around the Basque Country. the large syndicates have taken most of the workforce. Some of the autonomous activists have got together with some of the independent groups mentioned earlier on the publishing of the radical magazine 'Resiste'.



Unemployment is rising in the whole of the Spanish state. In Sevilla for example after the closing of the Expo 92 events (the 'grand' celebration of Spain's imperialist exploits in Latin America five centuries ago) there's been an increase in unemployment of 22%.

As the Madrid and Brussels governments continue with their policy of taking down the heavy industries in the Spanish state, of which Euskadi has a large proportion, Basque unemployment is at around 22%. Over the last couple of years the heavy industry's struggle for survival has become a big issue and last year a general strike was called for in Spain. Euskadi, as has become practice, had their own on the 27th, May the day before the Spanish one.

In Bilbo groups of pickets met at various points in the city at 6.30 in the morning to begin tours of their respective areas checking that nothing was opening - and, if there was, to get it shut. The groups all met at around 12.00 in a central place in the city for the traditional unofficial demo. This is normally attacked at a very early stage (before reaching the business sector) by the National Police but this time went without incident though there were enough police in the backstreets to defeat the whole city.

That demonstration of a few hundred was really impressive in numbers considering the danger involved, one example among many of a deep-felt resolve and determination. The official demo in the evening was massive with the different unions splitting up at the end of the march for their own rallies.

More recently was the decision to close the historical smelting works Altos Hornos near Bilbo. In October there was a 20 day march of around a hundred workers from Bilbo to Madrid ending in a demonstration of 25,000 people (many from Asturias, also on the north coast, and from Euskadi) which ended up in a rally outside the Ministry of Employment.

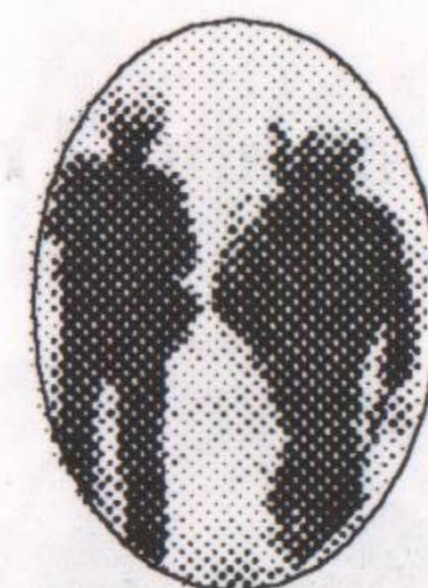


April 1993, steelworkers fighting back in Bilbo

A tragic event of last year was the eviction of the Gaztetxe in Bilbo. A gaztetxe is a squatted location run by and for the youth of a town or city. The one in Bilbo put on regular concerts, theatre groups, political meetings, workshops and classes, and was a bar all week for people to meet at.

After about 6 or 7 years of existence and resistance it was evicted. On 10 November at 6.30 in the morning the National Police surrounded the old part of Bilbo and with a helicopter overhead the area was well and truly sealed off. At 7.00 a convoy of 15 vehicles of the Municipal and Autonomous (Hertzantza) riot squads entered the area. They wrenched out the door with the use of a truck and gutted the place taking everything away in three lorries. Afterwards thirty workers covered up all the doors and windows with bricks, concrete and cement. In total 100 police took part in the operation and luckily there was no-one in the building at the time. All demonstrations and even meetings against the eviction were prohibited and after the 15th the old quarter was surrounded by riot police for seven days.

On 29th of November there was a day of action against the eviction. The main event, a demo, brought together 5000 people from all over Euskadi, though police control wasn't too provocative. The demo was followed by a popular meal and concert in a square in the area, and in a press release organisers said that they'd continue to fight until another place was occupied.



A great achievement last year was the opening of the Felix Likiniano Centre (La Liki) in Bilbo. Likiniano was a popular Basque anarchist of the early part of the century and the place opened up in his name is a centre for various radical left-wing, feminist and regionalist groups as a co-ordination point of information including a library, cafe and book/record shop.

Today, the individuals and groups who have struggled not only over specific issues but also for their autonomy and self-determination, have gradually found themselves moving closer to HB. As the party have made positive changes over the years, other groups have increasingly found it necessary to collaborate over certain issues that they have in common.

As HB have proved to be the only force on the left strong enough to change certain things, others have started to try more to influence their ideas and to force them to work for grassroots socialism. It's a difficult route to take but in a climate of ever-growing repression there's no other choice.

Abbreviations and Translations



ETA (Euskadi ta askatasuna) - Euskadi and Freedom
PCE - Communist Party of Spain
PSOE - Spanish Socialist Workers Party
PNV - Basque Nationalist Party
CNT - National Confederation of Workers
MCE/EMK - Basque Communist Movement
LAIA - Patriotic Revolutionary Workers Party
EIA - Basque Revolutionary Party



Donostia - San Sebastian
Gasteiz - Vitoria
Iruña - Pamplona
Bilbo - Bilbao



CONTROLLED EXPLOSIONS

Controlled Explosions are a new pamphlet series developed to contribute ideas and information to the ongoing struggle against State oppression and repression. The ruling classes with their constant erosion of society; through the many State sanctioned organisations and Government agencies combined with, among others, the misinformation and distortion of the media and the lies and bigotry of so called 'opposition' political parties; are destroying human dignity, equality and liberty.

"...UNDERMINE THE STATE IN
REBUILDING THE FUTURE..."



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