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Karl D. Qualls  
*Dickinson College*

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# **From Niños to Soviets? Raising Spanish Refugee Children in House No. 1, 1937-1951**

**Karl D. Qualls**

*Dickinson College*

In 1937 and 1938, as the bombing of Guernica and northern Spain increased in frequency and intensity, thousands of children boarded ships to safer residences in foreign countries.<sup>1</sup> About 3,000 children, with teachers and caregivers, entered the hastily provisioned Houses for Spanish Children that became their schools, homes, and families. The evacuation from Spain's northern coast was far from systematic. Soviet authorities did not select the children or the adults that came with them for their political affiliations, cultural or intellectual development, or affinity with Soviet norms of behavior.<sup>2</sup> Parents had to make the excruciating choice to send their children away or to keep them in a deadly war zone. Because of the rather haphazard process of exile, Soviet officials had little idea what they were getting or how they should respond.

The Central Committee of the Soviet Union had been granting special and separate aid to Spanish children for months before the evacuations began, but a 22 September 1936 letter

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<sup>1</sup> I want to thank my mentor Richard Stites and his books on women, popular culture, and self entertainment (to name just a few) for showing me that there is great joy in researching understudied topics like this one. Thank you also to Dickinson College's Research and Development Committee for funding student bibliographic research assistants Evan Sparling, Andrea Domínguez, and Azul Mertnoff. The Howard Foundation also has provided much appreciated funding as I begin this new research. At this point, most of my findings are based on House No. 1, which was the largest house and remained open significantly longer than all the others.

<sup>2</sup> For the adults, who were mostly teachers and childcare workers, there was a vetting process by local Spanish organizations that tried to select people under fifty years old with republican leanings or service in the Popular Army. On this, see Enrique Zafra, Rosalía Crego and Carmen Heredia, *Los Niños Españoles Evacuados a la URSS, (1937)*, 1st ed. (Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre, 1989), pp. 39-40.

from the Comintern requesting that the USSR accept refugee children might have set evacuation planning in motion.<sup>3</sup> Although the first flotilla of *niños* was still months away, the International Organization for Aid to Revolutionary Fighters (MOPR) opened a house for foreign children in the autumn of 1936.<sup>4</sup> With an international house like this as precedent, it took little time to act on Voroshilov's request to Stalin to open a house for 80-100 Spanish children. Voroshilov's letter specified that one of Moscow's best orphanages should be used and that priority should be given to children of dead Spanish fighters.<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly given Voroshilov's status, the Politburo approved a decree on 2 January 1937 that placed the Red Army Intelligence Service in charge of the first set of boarding-school style houses for Spanish children.<sup>6</sup>

The children left behind everything they knew. Family and friends usually remained in war-ravaged Spain, leaving these children initially with nothing but hunger and tears. The voyages were arduous. Narrators remember the dark of the cargo hold where they bedded down on mats to the sounds of crying children all around. Retching was frequent as people tried to overcome loss and seasickness. The ocean was "as bad as the Germans," an evacuee recalled.<sup>7</sup> Many simply could not eat. One child remembered: "We, the children, were the

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<sup>3</sup> Letter from Dmitrii Manuilskii to Stalin, Rossiiski gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, Moscow -- hereafter, RGASPI) f. 17, op. 120, d. 266, l. 85.

<sup>4</sup> V. A. Talashova, "Sovetskii Komsomol: aktivnyi uchastnik dvizheniia solidarnosti s respublikanskoi Ispaniei v period natsional'no-revliutsionnoi voiny, 1936-1939," Ph.D. diss. (Vologda, 1972), p. 119. Cited in Daniel Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2004). <http://www.gutenberg-e.org/kod01/frames/fkodimg.html>, chapter 5.

<sup>5</sup> Voroshilov to Stalin, *Rossiiski gosudarstvennyi voenii arkhiv* (Russian State Military Archive, Moscow) f. 33987, op. 3, d. 853, l. 72. Cited in Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War*, ch. 5.

<sup>6</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 983, l. 67.

<sup>7</sup> Zafra *et al.*, *Los Niños Españoles*, p. 44.

ones who went through all the calamities of the Children's Houses during the war. They too [the eldest], the same as us, but it was a different thing. We missed everything: we missed our homeland, we missed our parents, we missed our religion, we missed a Spanish education, we missed everything because we were very little."<sup>8</sup> A few short years of relative normality followed before the children's lives were again thrown into chaos. As the Nazi forces moved in on Moscow the Spanish houses<sup>9</sup> evacuated, but many of their new locations had not been prepared for children. The sites generally lacked heating fuel, food, beds, and other necessities. Teaching materials were also in short supply. Children started growing their own food, hauling water from nearby rivers, and taking on more labor. Disease and death increased in these conditions.

Despite the horrors of war and multiple evacuations, oral historians have shown that overwhelmingly, although not exclusively, *niños'* memories of time spent in the USSR were quite positive.<sup>10</sup> It was "like reaching paradise after being in hell"<sup>11</sup> where the children lived

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<sup>8</sup> Marie Jose Devillard *et al.*, eds., *Los Niños Españoles en la URSS, 1937-1997: Narración y Memoria* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2001), p. 78.

<sup>9</sup> Throughout I will use the word "house" to describe the living-learning institutions set up for the Spanish children. This is a direct translation of the Spanish, *casa*, but a poor translation for the Russian, *detskii dom*. The Russian term often is translated as "orphanage," but because many of these children were not orphans, the term seems misleading. I have also not used "boarding school" because, although it more accurately describes the living-learning environment in most cases, it can get cumbersome. Twenty-two houses were opened at various times in Russia and Ukraine.

<sup>10</sup> Such stories can be found throughout Zafra and Devillard. See also Alicia Alted *et al.*, eds., *Los Niños de la Guerra de España en la Unión Soviética: De la Evacuación al Retorno (1937-1999)* (Madrid: Fundación Francisco Largo Caballero, 1999); Immaculada Colomina, *Dos Patrias, Tres Mil Destinos: Vida y Exilio de los Niños de la Guerra de España Refugiados en la Unión Soviética* (Madrid: Cinca, 2010). See also Susana Castillo Rodríguez, "Memoria, Educación e Historia: El Caso de los Niños Españoles a la Unión Soviética durante la Guerra Civil Española," Ph.D. diss, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1999). The dissertation

“like princes and princesses, being educated in the best manner possible, like being in Paradise.”<sup>12</sup> Elena Martínez remembered her time in House No. 1:

In 1948 life was better, Stalin had made reforms, taken away the rationing notebooks for the products, prices went down, people were coming alive, crops had been harvested, there was bread without rationing, everything . . . everything was better, and us in Bolshevo, it was forty-five minutes from Moscow by the electric train, it was also a Children’s House in the woods, full of pine trees, very pretty . . . there was a river . . . , we had cows, two for us, they didn’t give us land for planting . . . , we ourselves planted, the potatoes, the cabbage. [. . .] we had everything . . . , everyone who was there studied well, we were preparing to go to institutes, that is, universities . . . , we were taken to Moscow on holidays, to the Moscow Bolshoi Theatre, to the ballet and the opera, we were taken on excursions, we had a good time. . . .<sup>13</sup>

Although the oral histories provide us with many remembrances from the Spaniards, the existing scholarship does not fully explore the Soviet documents to ascertain the intentions in creating and running the special Spanish schools and how they operated for the fifteen

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focuses much more on the discourse and rhetorical devices that the subjects used. Letters from the period show quite the same excitement from the children as the interviews given years later. For letters, see Zafra, *Los Niños Españoles*, pp. 100-28.

<sup>11</sup> Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain: The Experience of Civil War, 1936-1939* (London: Allen Lane, 1979), p. 434.

<sup>12</sup> Dorothy Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation: Basque Refugee Children of the Spanish Civil War* (Reno, NV: Univ. of Nevada Press, 1984), p. 166. Unfortunately, Legarreta gives us no clues about the people interviewed and quoted except to note that they were Basque.

<sup>13</sup> Interview cited in Alted, *Los Niños de la Guerra de España*, p. 163.

year experiment. A close reading of archival sources show that Soviet authorities removed “bad” influences from the children’s lives and provided a school curriculum and extracurricular activities that modeled proper Soviet behavior and thought. Without adults around who would provide a counter-narrative, Soviets were able to control the remaking of these children into Spanish-Soviet hybrids once it became clear that the children would not be returning to Spain.

### **Role Modeling in House No. 1**

As Franco eventually solidified control over Spain, the prospects of a quick return vanished, which changed how Soviet authorities understood the children’s place in the USSR. With the onset of World War II, and particularly with the Nazi invasion of the USSR in 1941, the Spanish children’s lives changed dramatically. Discussion of returning to Spain had virtually ceased because even the Republic’s ambassador had dissuaded his subordinates from devoting time to the problem,<sup>14</sup> and Soviet authorities had transitioned from a focus on preserving the children’s Spanish heritage to preparing the students for a long life in the Soviet Union. When it became increasingly clear that Franco would not be deposed anytime soon, and especially as militaries began to wreak havoc across Europe, Soviet authorities began to look to the long-term prospects of a sizeable Spanish contingent in the USSR. If these children were going to become productive and loyal members of Soviet society, they had to be educated and mentored properly. Acculturation became the norm and Soviet authorities began to require that Spanish children behave and learn like Soviet children. To this end, education, both in the classroom curriculum and extra-curricular activities, began to resemble more closely that of Soviet children, and the Spanish

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<sup>14</sup> See Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War*, ch. 5.

nature of education became secondary. In addition, the authorities sought to surround the children with proper role models of Soviet behavior and thought.

By the beginning of 1939, a host of Russian and Spanish workers had left House No. 1. Most of those who left were “auxiliaries,” like cooks and cleaners. Others, however, had direct and extensive contact with children and therefore could threaten the harmonious and homogeneous message that the Soviets wanted to project in class and in extra-curricular activities. Many of the Russians auxiliaries who left House No. 1 had done nothing wrong; they simply were moving on to other things. For example, three left on their own wishes. One couple moved to Crimea, and two nurses left to continue their studies. Another nurse and an educator left for family reasons. Some left because of general staff reductions.

Other Russian workers were fired for personal or work-related behavior. Several were truant, one pilfered produce, another stole from Spanish comrades, two came to work drunk, another failed to return to work after leave, a nurse-maid (*niania*) stole children’s goods, and others were fired for “poor work.”<sup>15</sup> What is most striking about the Russian dismissals? None of them suggests political problems or gross misconduct with the students; the dismissals generally show a disregard for labor and personal discipline, which was certainly unacceptable. Theft of state property had become a growing concern in the 1930s, and even more so during the war years. Proper models of behavior were also a priority as the Great Purges were coming to an end. It does not appear as if the dismissals led to criminal proceedings or any other punishment other than sacking.

Details on the firing of Spanish workers at this time show a remarkably different set of issues that were more political and not merely lapses in labor discipline. As one former student remembered, “the Spanish [teachers] were more liberal, less disciplined, more

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<sup>15</sup> Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi federatsii (State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow -- hereafter, GARF) f. A-307, op. 2, d. 3, ll. 1-2.

happy-go-lucky [*más viva la pepa*] in every way.”<sup>16</sup> A lack of discipline was the least of the worries for some teachers. One investigator urged that a science and math teacher should not “remain in the children’s house because he was not providing a communist upbringing or devoting time to the principles of communist education. He prefers to discuss his travels and avoid work with the collective of other communists.” The author of the document feared the teacher’s ability to organize a “part of the Spanish collective which is less prepared and understands political questions poorly.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, the teacher not only refused to serve as a conduit of Soviet communist values, he also behaved as an individualist rather than working with others. Therefore, both his political values and his personal behavior challenged the Soviet norms being taught to the young Spanish charges. His example and influence threatened to undermine the ideals being inculcated in the students.

The political outlook of another Spaniard was less apparent, but no less suspect. The author of this report claimed that the suspect’s age (b. 1895) made it more likely that he was attached to his roots and traditions. The report deemed him conscientious in his educational work, but there was an “influence of a bourgeois scholastic school.” After all, he had had theological training. In Spain he had belonged to a party of “republican-federalists,” but it is unclear what his political attitudes were in the USSR, according to the author’s report. The Spanish left was so fractured that being a socialist or even a communist in no way guaranteed support for the Soviet Union. The teacher never refused to attend public events, nor did he eschew political speeches of a “deeper character.” But in his daily life he was often “insincere” and at times “two-faced.”<sup>18</sup> This was far from a ringing endorsement, but

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<sup>16</sup> Devillard, *Los Niños Españoles*, p. 107. The phrase “*viva la pepa*” also can suggest complete chaos, disorder, and incompetence. My thanks to Elise Bartosik-Velez with this translation.

<sup>17</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 2, d. 1384.

<sup>18</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 2, d. 1376, ll. 3-4.

was it enough to get him sacked? A subsequent document on workers for whom there were special investigations noted that the same teacher had an “unhealthy attitude.” House officials were suspicious of his “relations with older girls,” and his “dubious political physiognomy.”<sup>19</sup> Here we see elements of “masking” that was so prominent during the Great Purges.<sup>20</sup> The fear was that while at times the teacher appeared to be politically reliable, no one knew which of his two faces were real. He could be the conscientious pedagogue on the one hand and the lecherous teacher on the other. Because of this Janus-like demeanor, his character, behavior, and political leanings were all suspect or “dubious.”<sup>21</sup>

Administrators sacked some Spanish adults, or they were reported as sacked, in a group. One woman was removed because she was “politically completely illiterate” and refused to improve. Her “weak professional preparation” and deafness also stood out in the recommendation to move her to manufacturing work. Another woman refused her obligation to provide a “communist upbringing for the children.” She also was called “politically illiterate.” Another woman was deemed “partially literate,” and she had little regard for her work and little interest for the children. Moreover, her work was “undisciplined,” which led to a recommendation to send her into manufacturing in Kolomna where her husband lived. A fourth woman was evaluated as “illiterate” and “completely uninterested in receiving a minimal education.” She neither studied nor showed interest in “questions of political development,” and she was “uninterested in the children.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 2, d. 407.

<sup>20</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!: Identity and Imposture in Twentieth Century Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2005), part five.

<sup>21</sup> For many cases such as this we do not know the outcomes because personnel files are still private.

<sup>22</sup> All cases are noted in GARF, f. A-307, op. 2, d. 460.

There is a certain degree of consistency in these cases. Adults who were in the position of nurturing the next generation of Spanish communists had to be willing to pass on the values of a good communist: education, political awareness, and proper behavior. Educational preparation among the dismissed employees was weak, and some combined this intellectual lethargy with political and personal behavior that did not model authority and correct Soviet behavior for the children.<sup>23</sup>

Some charges were far more explosive than simple illiteracy or lack of political knowledge. One Spanish woman was judged as completely unfit to work with children because she “admitted to sexual contact with individual pupils.” As if that were not enough, she was also uninterested in politics. A separate document from the chief of the division of children’s houses of special purpose (*spetsnaznachenie*), Dubrovskii, sheds more light on this case.<sup>24</sup> The person in question was a member of the Spanish Communist Party and was a milliner before becoming an educator in Children’s House No. 1. Dubrovskii’s short characterization requested removing her because she lacked the proper specialization. She worked as both an educator and cleaning woman, but she “displayed a dishonest attitude to work.” She had also been caught in “anti-Soviet conversations.”<sup>25</sup> It is unclear whether these charges preceded or followed the charge of sexual misconduct with students, but it suggests that the first recommendation to remove her was not heeded and the authorities were trying to build a stronger case against her. Whoever wrote the dismissed person’s characterizations

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<sup>23</sup> On the ideal classroom teacher, see E. Thomas Ewing, “A Stalinist Celebrity Teacher: Gender, Professional, and Political Identities in Soviet Culture of the 1930s,” *Journal of Women’s History* 16, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 92-118. Also Ewing, *The Teachers of Stalinism: Policy, Practice, and Power in Soviet Schools of the 1930s* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), chapters 5 and 6 detail the return to teacher-centered instruction with set curricula and the renewed importance of discipline in classrooms in the 1930s.

<sup>24</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 2, d. 409.

<sup>25</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 2, d. 409.

felt that two offenses were better than one when trying to oust someone from the children's house. It is clear that someone wanted her fired, and allegations of improper behavior in front of or with students likely sealed her fate.

Clearly the Spanish workers in the houses were more carefully monitored for their political attitudes. It is likely that most of the Soviet workers had learned how to mask their political attitudes and appear to be good Bolsheviks even if they were not ardent supporters of the party. The "Regulations Concerning the Children's Homes for Spanish Children" demanded that all Soviet employees of the houses had to have been from Komsomol organizations and approved by their regional committees.<sup>26</sup> Although this was an impossible mandate, and the records of employees show that most were not Komsomol members, it does attest to the USSR's desire to have only positive communist role models for the children. Therefore, it should not surprise us that Soviet citizens were fired less frequently for political reasons. Soviet staff had already been vetted and could therefore be trusted more to raise the Spanish children as Soviets. With the politically suspect Spanish adults increasingly culled from the houses, children had proper role models of Soviet behavior.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> GARF, f. A-2306, op. 70, d. 5987, l. 6.

<sup>27</sup> It is not yet clear how widespread such removals were or how aware Spaniards were of what was going on around them. Valentín González, known as the civil war hero "*El Campesino*," reported in his memoir that 60 percent of teachers who had come from Spain had been liquidated by the time he arrived in 1939. Jesús Hernández, former minister of education for the Republic, stated much the same that after the Spanish Civil War ended teachers were expelled and/or arrested and replaced with Russian teachers and textbooks, and the children were put to labor as well as schooling. Valentín González, *Vida y muerte en la URSS* (Buenos Aires: S.A. Editorial Bell, 1951), p. 190, quoted in Legarreta, *Guernica Generation*, p. 171, note 35; Hernández, *El país de la gran mentira* (Madrid: E.G. del Toro, 1974), pp. 222-23, cited in Legarreta, *Guernica Generation*, p. 171, note 36.

Behavior problems and uneven political education necessitated a review of the adult staff, but even with good role models, the children needed to be educated and raised to become good Soviets.

## **Education and Upbringing during WW II**

Although the Red Army had the initial responsibility for providing for the children, in November 1937 the People's Commissariat of Education (Narkompros) RSFSR was given full responsibility for the children's houses.<sup>28</sup> Narkompros directed twenty-two houses by the end of 1940 in the Russian and Ukrainian republics. These varied greatly in size and location. Some were in the center of Moscow or Leningrad, others were in wooded suburbs. The more rural houses typically had attached schools, whereas the urban schools often sent children to separate classrooms within a nearby Soviet school. In 1940, a new dimension was added with the two houses for Spanish youth (teenagers who had completed the seventh course and were often working during the day while continuing their education at night).<sup>29</sup> Three of the twenty-two houses were specifically for ill children.

During the war – and the food, heat, clothing, and living space shortages that came with it – the houses began to change. Few seemed to believe any more that the students would soon return to Spain as a fifth column to create a Soviet-style state; therefore, the school curriculum and staffing began to change accordingly. Russian teachers gradually began to replace the Spanish teachers who had come with the children from Spain. With the growing need for labor and soldiers, the curriculum turned to ensuring students' proficiency in

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<sup>28</sup> The files for the children's homes are in the State Archive of the Russian Federation: GARF, f. A-307. Narkompros files can be found in GARF, f. A-2306.

<sup>29</sup> This brief experiment ended as World War II started in the USSR.

Russian language and increasingly their familiarity with politics and history rather than preserving their Spanish heritage.<sup>30</sup>

Soviet education had changed in fits and starts since the revolution, but by the late-1930s it sought to increase knowledge while also instilling discipline and Soviet values.<sup>31</sup> The curriculum at the children's house varied little from the regular Soviet classroom, except for the initial emphasis on Spanish. All children studied reading, writing, and mathematics. In the upper grades students pursued geography, hard sciences, and politics, too. Soviet textbooks, translated into Castilian, were the norm, and teachers followed the standard syllabi approved by Narkompros.

From the beginning, Soviet officials clearly understood that although Spain's republican government wanted to preserve the children's Spanish heritage, Soviet ideology was to be the mainstay in the classroom. Dolores Ibarruri, a leading member of the Spanish Communist Party in the Soviet Union, was quoted as saying:

We Spaniards considered ourselves always united, and our politics were Spanish and oriented toward maintaining the children so that they might not forget their language and

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<sup>30</sup> Daniel Kowalsky has suggested quite convincingly that Spanish officials intended for the children to maintain their culture, yet Soviet officials consistently ignored their pleas. See Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War*, chapter 5 in which he argues that, despite some accounts, the Politburo made no mention of the importance of maintaining Spanish culture in its first set of rules governing the schools (GARF, f. A-2306, op. 70, d. 5987, ll. 1-3).

<sup>31</sup> Richard Stites has shown how popular culture linked proper personal habits to correct ideological outlook. Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), p. 99. For a discussion of the return to teacher-centered instruction and the importance of discipline in the classroom, see Ewing, *The Teachers of Stalinism*; Larry Holmes, *Stalin's School: Moscow's Model School No. 25, 1931-1937* (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1999).

accustom themselves to think of their country, to which they would return and where their lives would continue. To this end, every help was given us by the Soviet authorities, including bringing Spanish teachers, organizing schools for the children – everything we needed.<sup>32</sup>

She was clearly mistaken. Even the literary and movie nights became dominated by Russian culture. While the emphasis on Russifying the houses increased in the war years, it seems like little more than an extension of the Russocentric curriculum that came into being in the late 1930s.<sup>33</sup> A director of one of the Spanish houses stated:

From these pupils, entrusted to us by the heroic Spanish people, we must forge not only strong and fearless fighters for the liberation of their compatriots, but faithful sons of their Fatherland, and loyal followers of the great teachers of humanity – Marx, Engels and Lenin. . . . A love and devotion to the Communist Party of Spain and the VKP (b) [Soviet Communist Party], and to Spain and the USSR – these must be the first priorities in our endeavor to raise them [the Spaniards] as our own children.<sup>34</sup>

The director understood that the children were to be transformed into Spanish-Soviet hybrids. The children routinely celebrated Soviet holidays, wrote letters to Stalin and Spanish communist leaders on their birthdays, and listened to lectures or watched newsreels on industrialization and tractor drivers. Thus schooling became almost exclusively Soviet,

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<sup>32</sup> Jaime Camino, *Intimas Conversaciones con la Pasionaria* (Barcelona: Dopesa, 1977), pp. 172-74, quoted in Legarreta, *Guernica Generation*, p. 165.

<sup>33</sup> David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002).

<sup>34</sup> GARF, f. A- 307, op. 1, d. 338, l. 88.

with some attention to Spanish Communist Party leaders and the Spanish language during World War II.

The annual report from House No. 1 in the 1941-42 school year shows the pervasiveness of the turn toward Russian/Soviet themes.<sup>35</sup> This year of evacuations, when the Spanish schools were sent further from the front lines, brought additional political education to the students. After laudatory phrases about Stalin and the party, the report notes that the “day-to-day work in the school” consisted of instructing the children about the merits of Leninism-Stalinism: “fortitude, courage, stoutness, without fear of the fight, preparedness to give one’s life for the great work of Lenin-Stalin.” The lessons were to encourage “love for studies, work, [and] careful, economical consumption of state resources.” One needed to be a disciplined student and laborer, but during the war one also had to conserve resources for the front. Although not mentioned directly in this passage, the underlying current of all these traits is discipline, a word that one sees repeatedly in reports. In fact, the school administrator noted the war created a “turnabout in the children’s psyche.” The trauma did not depress or frighten them; apparently, it merely steeled the children for greater effort, according to the report. They “strengthened their love for our [Soviet] homeland and willed to change their relation to studies, labor, discipline and many other responsibilities.” They studied Stalin’s writings; they engaged in socialist competitions with other houses in improving their “studies, discipline, labor, defense-physical culture work, [and] overcoming the existing difficulties arising from war.” Clearly we cannot accept the report as a factual representation of all *niños*’ behaviors and thinking, but oral histories corroborate many of these representations.

Students took part in an increasing number of activities and classroom lessons that began their transformation into Soviet Spaniards. History courses seem to have been the most

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<sup>35</sup> This section is taken from GARF, f. A-307, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 1-14, unless otherwise indicated.

important part of the curriculum for inculcating new values in the Spanish students. Starting in the late 1930s, Soviet history courses had moved toward centralizing the role of heroism. In House No. 1, teacher N. G. Maksimova instructed history classes for grades 4-7. Her superior's report shows a woman who, despite working all but the last three months of the 1941-42 school year in the dark and cold, gave extra time and attention to students and raised them all up to passing level. The report notes that WW II was present in all her lectures, in which she incorporated contemporary news items in order to build patriotism and a love of their homeland, the Soviet Union (apparently forgetting that the students were Spanish). The goal, according to this report, was to instill a belief in victory of the Russian folk over Fascism.<sup>36</sup> History, then, was used primarily as a tool to project political values and to draw students closer to their new Russian homeland.

In the fourth grade, after completing the full syllabus for "History of the USSR," Maksimova and her students then reviewed the lives of pre-revolutionary Russian heroes Aleksandr Nevsky, Dmitrii Donskoi, Minin and Pozharsky, Aleksandr Suvorov, and Mikhail Kutuzov as well as the "historical exile" of comrade Joseph Stalin. All of the heroes are noted in the Russian and Soviet canon as defenders of the Motherland against outside invaders from the Mongols and Teutonic Knights in the early-thirteenth century through Napoleon's invasion in 1812. Thus, Maksimova linked comrade Stalin's exile by the imperial government and his work in building the USSR and protecting it against Fascism with a long history of Russian leaders who fought, often against great odds, to achieve final victory.<sup>37</sup> In the frighteningly bad days of 1941-42, one has to wonder how effective this

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<sup>36</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 1, d. 26, l. 10.

<sup>37</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 1, d. 26, l. 48. Note that the report on Maksimova also suggested that she fought against great odds to provide good education. This narrative device was quite common in the USSR, especially during the war.

palliative measure might have been. Regardless, Maksimova's work was so exemplary that on the occasion of the school's five-year anniversary she won a cash prize bonus.

Maksimova's suggestions for teaching history are instructive about what she and perhaps the regime valued most about history instruction.<sup>38</sup> By selecting her for an award, the regime was signaling that her teaching was an exemplary model for others to follow. Maksimova considered coursework on the Great Patriotic War the most fundamental material for students. They needed not only to feel the hardships of the war, but also to perceive their people as "legendary heroes." They needed to understand that the war's great goal was the liberation of countries suppressed by Nazism. She thought that the history of the USSR and vivid descriptions of Fascist plans to annihilate the Slavs would somehow be meaningful to Spanish children. She compared Peter the Great's defense of the Hanko Islands to the Soviets' "defense" of Finland in WW II.<sup>39</sup> She illustrated the barbarity of the Nazis by showing the damage German soldiers inflicted on writer Lev Tolstoy's estate and the brutality visited on Ukraine in 1918 and during the WW II occupation. What seemed to be missing, at least in the report, was complementary material about the destruction of the children's real home in northern Spain and its cultural landmarks.<sup>40</sup> All these approaches she thought would help the students understand the giant battle and strengthen "their love for their second motherland and its leader Stalin."

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<sup>38</sup> All of the following is taken from her report on the 1941-42 school years, GARF, f. A-307, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 48-49. Presumably each teacher had to file such a report, which the school administration then synthesized into quarterly and annual reports.

<sup>39</sup> Peter the Great had defeated Swedish naval forces in this city well West of Helsinki in 1714. In October 1939 the USSR demanded that Finland cede the naval base at Hanko, which the Finns refused. A month later the Soviet Union invaded and started the disastrous winter war of 1939-40.

<sup>40</sup> Maksimova clearly lacked proper teaching materials, because she stressed that newspapers helped her to illustrate every Russian war from the Mongols to the Civil War.

This partial Russification must have confused a number of the students, so she used her courses on ancient history and the Middle Ages to generalize about the power of peasant armies and the long history of brutal German invasions across Europe. In these ways, it seems, she sought to balance her Russocentric curriculum described above. In what she called “moments of nationalization of the curriculum,” Maksimova used examples from Spanish history to make the general Soviet syllabus more meaningful to the Spanish youths.<sup>41</sup> For example, in Roman history she discussed the Spanish people’s fight during Hannibal’s siege of Saguntum and for independence from Rome during the uprisings of Viriato and Sertorius. These examples, she said, were meant to strengthen the children’s hearts to be future fighters for the new Spain. She linked Spanish valor in the deep past to the present conflict against the Nazis and the children’s future in fighting against Franco. That “Spain” was far from unified during the period she taught does not seem to have entered her teaching. But training was not limited to history lectures.

Education had its complement in lessons and activities outside the academic curriculum that were designed to mold the character and values of the pupil. Part of the “training” program at the children’s house included labor both as a form of self-discipline, but also to create some self-sufficiency.<sup>42</sup> Soviet youth had long been directed to perform tasks that

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<sup>41</sup> This should not surprise us. Richard Stites noted that the new patriotism of wartime propaganda sought to make the heart of each Russian “beat the rhythms of love, hate, anger, and ridicule.” It was little different for the Spaniards. Richard Stites, ed., *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1995), p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Although not as radical, the Spanish houses during the war years sound similar to Richard Stites’ description of the 1920s communes: “the communards were drawn together by material need, the housing shortage in the towns, the chance to secure better meals, the desire for family-like companionship and the warmth of intimacy with friends, and an enthusiasm for the experimental remaking of man.” Of course, there was nothing voluntary about the Spaniards’ arrangements. But house directors may have experienced the commune

aided society, but farm labor was not merely a way to achieve class consciousness during the war. Child farm labor was an attempt to alleviate food shortages in the distribution process. From the first day at their new Volga River children's house, students and workers at House No. 1 formed into groups to sanitize the complex against sickness and disease, to guard harvests, and to prevent the encroachment of flood waters.<sup>43</sup>

Protecting the children also meant training them to protect themselves and their schools, but ideal and practice often were at odds. Children devoted a significant portion of their time to the new wartime needs. They heard lectures, and some students passed classes to prepare themselves for attack by air or chemical warfare. Older students took 110 hours of military preparedness courses, and sixth and seventh graders studied civil defense. A group of sixteen female Komsomol members voluntarily formed a group to study modern weaponry.<sup>44</sup> But firefighting equipment was considered just barely adequate, and training in artificial resuscitation and treatment of chemical injuries was completely absent. Although authorities improved civil defense training, the shortages of a crisis economy limited their ability to achieve all their goals.

Because of staffing limitations and the absence of material goods, many of the afterschool study circles (e.g., orchestra, radio, sewing, and more) were canceled during the first evacuation year, but disciplined, socially and politically engaged learning continued. The fifth anniversary of their arrival in the USSR was a "sports holiday," yet, it was an event that allowed the children to "demonstrate their preparation for labor and defense."<sup>45</sup>

Students took part in team sports like volleyball, soccer, and gymnastics to condition their

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movement that followed the Civil War. Quote from Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Visions and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford, UK and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), p. 213.

<sup>43</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 1, d. 26, l. 14.

<sup>44</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 14-15.

<sup>45</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 12, 19.

bodies in a collectivist manner. When not learning to protect themselves and their bodies, they prepared gifts and letters for the troops. They wrote individual and collective letters to frontline soldiers, made and sent gifts to the front, and even staged an exhibition about the Great Patriotic War. Thirty-three of the older kids left school in February 1942 to attend factory training schools as a way to aid the war effort. Younger students, led by Komsomol members, raised funds for the war effort and the house. The staff and students met their “responsibility before the Motherland and the glorious Red Army.”<sup>46</sup> Upon the death of Jose Diaz, leader of the Communist Party of Spain, the children produced lectures, newspaper articles, and more about his life. As malnutrition took hold, the students tended the fields in a nearby village and thereby learned the value of labor and saved themselves from hunger. Despite all the cold and hardships, the report concludes, the “period of the Great Patriotic War significantly raised the discipline and organization of the Spanish children.”<sup>47</sup> We should not fool ourselves into believing that all of the children accepted the indoctrination unquestioningly,<sup>48</sup> but it is clear that their lives and education changed dramatically from the start of the war.

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<sup>46</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 1, d. 26, l. 14.

<sup>47</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 1, d. 26, l. 14.

<sup>48</sup> José Fernández Sánchez, *Mi infancia en Moscú: Estampas de una nostalgia* (Madrid: Ediciones El Museo Universal, 1988), p. 41-42. Although Soviets attempted to change behaviors and had many notable successes, occasional reports to Narkompros from Children’s House No. 1 show children who “walk[ed] around frightfully filthy” and who ate “like swine.” Many also displayed “unhealthy attitudes: anti-Semitic character, [and a] hostile relation to Jews” in addition to their limited understanding of political questions. Officials also reported “mass theft.” GARF, f. A-307, op. 1, d. 40, ll. 3ob, 8-8ob. The paucity of material goods during the war likely made theft a necessity for some children. Others simply could not or would not comply with Soviet norms of conduct.

## Postwar Priorities in House No. 1

Postwar education, with House No. 1 now in the Moscow suburb of Bolshevo, clearly shifted from viewing the students as refugees to instead rearing them fully as Soviet children. Reports from the early postwar years show a clear priority. Whereas Spanish language and culture were taught seriously, if not as much as the embassy would have liked, between 1937 and 1939, the war and especially the early postwar years emphasized patriotism and ideological training. The six main tasks for the 1947-48 school year in House No. 1 included:

1. “to ensure a high-quality knowledge of the students and their ideological-political orientation”
2. to strengthen the teaching of “Soviet patriotism...both in the schools and houses”
3. to create a “united, friendly family” out of the new and old students
4. to strengthen “labor discipline” and “cultured behavior”
5. to further the students’ Russian language skills and “cultured speech”
6. to coordinate the work of teachers and caregivers in the rearing of “literate, cultured, healthy” students<sup>49</sup>

The focus turned to modeling behaviors and raising the children as Russian-speaking Soviets. There is no mention of maintaining the students’ Spanish heritage. In fact, the subtext of these points is an attempt to take Spain out of the Spanish children and homogenize an increasingly heterogeneous group.

As students grew older and moved into the work force some houses closed with the younger students increasingly transferred to House No. 1. This posed new challenges for

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<sup>49</sup> This is an excerpted list from the July report on the end of the 1947-48 school year in House No. 1. GARF, f. A-307, op. 1, d. 82. Quotations from ll. 6-6ob.

administrators.<sup>50</sup> The early postwar years brought Basque and Asturian children together in large numbers, whereas previously they mostly had been separate. The “new students” in point three above were more likely than not the Basque children who were viewed as less disciplined and cultured. As one Basque interviewee recalled, “We [Basque children] arrived in Russia more savage than civilized. After all, our families were all large and poor. We were totally uncultured, without any academic preparation.”<sup>51</sup> Another, betraying his class distinction as the son of a Basque Republican pilot noted: “After us, the sons of miners and workers came from the north, foul-mouthed, badly behaved, destroying the toilets, making extra work for our teachers.”<sup>52</sup> Discipline, cultured behavior, and a friendly family were becoming increasingly difficult.

Spain was not completely absent from the postwar education in House No. 1, but it was increasingly playing a secondary role. The same report from the 1947-48 school year showed that political education included some Spanish. Of forty-eight reports, eighteen were on unspecified Spanish topics and the remaining thirty were Soviet. *Mundo Obrero*, the newspaper of the Spanish Communist Party, could be found in the library together with numerous Soviet periodicals. However, the report tellingly notes that there were twelve copies each of *Komsomolskaia Pravda* (the organ of the Soviet Communist Youth League) and *Moskovskii Bol'shevik*. Why twelve copies? One copy was placed in each of the twelve sleeping quarters to afford greater access, whereas the single Spanish periodical languished in the library.<sup>53</sup> Soviet themes also dominated Spaniards' access to classical literature, contemporary theatre, cinema, and songs. There were two successful evenings of Spanish

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<sup>50</sup> The medical report from this school year notes that the children who arrived from the Spanish homes in Evpatoriia and Nakhabino were particularly unhealthy. GARF, f. A-307, op. 1, d. 82, l. 14.

<sup>51</sup> Legarreta, *Guernica Generation*, p. 167.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>53</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 1, d. 82, l. 8.

poetry of note – one dedicated to the Republican poet Antonio Machado and another devoted to the memory of José Díaz – but the report noted that to organize more was difficult because of the lack of Spanish literature available.<sup>54</sup>

In their reports to Narkompros, house directors often complained about language problems. Not only did the directors note that many students struggled with Russian language classes, but it also seems that Spanish language and culture were among the lowest priorities in the war years and after. In the reports that discuss literature courses, there is rarely any fiction by Spanish authors. School libraries had numerous books and newspapers, but Spanish authors were nearly absent. The report on the first postwar school year, when life had greatly improved for House No. 1 in its new location in the Moscow suburb of Bolshevo, shows a library with complete collections of Gorky, Chekhov, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Twain, Shakespeare, Chukovskii, and Nekrasov, along with selections from Jules Verne, Jack London, and Dostoevsky. But not one of the reading assignments discussed Spanish literature. One telling report on activities in the summer of 1948 noted that while usage of the library and reading rooms was high, the plan to have weekly oral readings of Spanish literature was canceled because teachers “could not get the appropriate materials.”<sup>55</sup> This suggests two things: Spanish literature was hard to find even in the privileged Moscow suburbs and many of the kids apparently could not understand Spanish well enough. The report is clear that officials had intended to organize readings of Spanish literature to the children. But even before officials realized that they could not find the necessary books, they seem to have realized that the literature would have been too difficult for many of the students to read on their own either because of age or low Spanish-language skills.

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<sup>54</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 1, d. 82, l. 9.

<sup>55</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 1, d. 82, l. 41.

Work and study made for restless children, so entertainment was also a regular part of the school week. Not surprisingly, it seems that movie nights were the most popular form of entertainment. Again, Spanish themes rarely appeared. In the late-1940s and 1950, reports show greater attention to, or greater reporting of, culture and entertainment. A 1948-49 report on summer activities reported twice-a-week viewings of mostly Soviet and captured German films. Sports and games provided one respite for the students. Many students apparently enjoyed volleyball and the popular Russian game *gorodki*. Likely most important to the students, however, was that the Spanish children's soccer team "systematically defeated" the Russian Bolshevo school team.<sup>56</sup> As material conditions improved in the postwar period, House No. 1 offered a full complement of extra-curricular activities. Even more expensive *kruzhki* like theater and orchestra filled children's afternoons.<sup>57</sup>

The proximity of House No. 1 to the Moscow region after the return from evacuation provided access to rich cultural resources beyond Bolshevo. Teachers led several excursions each year to theaters, museums, concerts, and the zoo. In the summer of the 1948-49 school years, students took excursions to the Tretyakov Gallery, the Museum of the Revolution, the Historical Museum, Novodevichii Cemetery, and the Moscow-Volga canal. Each student went on at least one excursion and some attended as many as three trips.<sup>58</sup> For students interested in the arts this was a way for them to expand their educations. For other students, it was a much needed respite from the routine and surroundings of the house, and it brought them into the normal routine of Soviet school children.

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<sup>56</sup> In an unpublished paper, Larry Holmes recounts an interview with Viktor Putintsev, who played against the children of House No. 10 when evacuated to Kirov oblast'. Putintsev noted that the Spaniards won because they had shoes, unlike the Soviets, and had been playing together for a long time.

<sup>57</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 2, d. 94, ll. 13-14.

<sup>58</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 2, d. 94, l. 15.

## Conclusion

The Spanish students, particularly in their political activities and history courses, but also in their daily lives, were being taught to be disciplined, orderly, and Soviet. Any poor role models, be they students or staff, were reviewed and whisked off to work elsewhere. Defense training, farming, and physical fitness regimes often consumed students' time after coursework. Meanwhile, in-class education during the war continued much of the standard Soviet curriculum, minus most of the arts, but the focus centered on war and heroism, and teachers continued the trend of the late-1930s toward reviving pre-Soviet military heroes. During the war, however, students' lessons began to focus on the long history of invasions of Russia, German barbarity through the ages, and the power of the masses to fight for independence. Some teachers taught about parallel events from the history of Hispania in order to personalize the war for their young Spanish charges.

Although the motives for the changes noted above are unclear, we can make some preliminary assumptions. The timing of changes coming after the start of the Second World War and end of the Spanish Civil War suggests that Soviet authorities were taking a longer view of the Spaniards as immigrants rather than exiles. With the children looking more and more like permanent wards of the state, the houses began a process of transforming Spanish children into Soviets. Spanish houses began to resemble those of other Soviet children. Russian increasingly became the lingua franca. Soviet coursework in history, politics, and the Stalin Constitution became mandatory. Even Russian games like *gorodki* became more common. More and more students were consuming Russian/Soviet books, films, newspapers, and periodicals. With repatriation from communist USSR to "fascist" Spain now seeming impossible, House No. 1 began the *niños'* preparation to become long-term residents of the Soviet Union. In order to facilitate the transformation, contact with Spanish

adults had to be minimized so that classroom lessons and after school training could establish roots in the new hybrid children.